

# **POLITICS IN THE PORTUGUESE FUTURIST TEXTS: (NATIONAL) REFOUNDATION AND THE RETURN TO ORIGIN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay analyses Portuguese futurist manifestos, and other texts produced by the Portuguese Futurism protagonists, highlighting the primitivist tropes they use, namely the idea of a “return to origin,” and associating those tropes with the specificity of the Portuguese political situation during the first Republican period (1910-1918), focusing specially on the context of the Portuguese participation in the First World War. The essay discusses firstly the problematic concept of ‘primitivism’ and how nevertheless it can be paradoxically useful to study Futurism. Manifestos, pamphlets and poems by Raul Leal, António Ferro, Álvaro de Campos and Almada Negreiros are analysed considering the concept of “origin” they entail and by considering their “context and performativity” (Foster), that is, their historicity and scope of impact. Consequently, their primitivist tropes are proved to be tied to Portuguese politics, specifically its imperialism which was in danger of collapsing since the nineteenth century and in particular in the context of the First World War, and the consequent contradictory positions regarding the stance either destructive or encomiastic of civilisation, either pro-war or against the war. Finally, this essay emphasises that the interpretation of the Portuguese futurist manifestos must acknowledge the parody of their Italian counterparts and elaborates, on the one hand, on the primitivist trope of childhood, seen as the matrix of fun and mockery and, on the other, the revolutionary power that humour entails.

## 1. WORKING WITH THE CONCEPT OF 'PRIMITIVISM': FUTURISM AND THE TROPE OF 'RETURN TO ORIGINS'

It may seem paradoxical to consider the concept of 'primitivism' as having anything to do with Futurism, but, as I will argue, it is a unvaluable lens to analyse a structural aspect of modernity that can also be found in Futurism, namely the colonial, identity-building elements in the trope of "return to origins".

A superficial approach to the term still prevails, which recognizes 'primitivism' as the mere aesthetic formal absorption of African or Oceanic art, failing to consider the complexity and multiple derivations of the significance of 'primitive' and 'primitivism'. In the 1996 volume edited by R. S. Nelson and R. Shiff about critical terms in art history, 'Primitive' was considered one of them. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten approached the concept of the 'primitive' "as the product of the historical experience of the West and more specifically as an ideological construct of colonial conquest and exploitation" and considered that "the ideological import of the 'primitive' and of primitivism [could] be best grasped from the standpoint of a related set of oppositions mapped out in terms of time/space, gender, race, and class" (Antliff and Leighten, 1996: 217 and ff). Asian, African and Oceania art, children's art, folk art, the art from the mentally disordered, were seen as artistic sources that provided alternatives supposedly freed from western civilisation. Learning from those sources was a path for new formal experiments in art and a means to express and claim artistic modernity, as well as a return to origins and new beginnings.

Philippe Dagen has also emphasised the plurality of the term, claiming that it should be considered in the plural form (and in italics), *primitivismes*, because it is related with what he identifies as five instances of the primitive: the savage, the insane, the child, the pre-historic and the rustic (Dagen, 2019: 16). Dagen also considers that the *primitive* was a construction of western modernity embedded on colonialism and racism, not only to allow it to affirm itself as modern, opposing civilisation and barbarism, but also to function as a tool to criticise civilisation itself. Despite this critical approach, the five "modes" of the *primitive* that Dagen identifies somehow constrict the understanding of the term to categories that are too neatly delimited. In fact, the author emphasises that primitive and exotic are not synonyms, dismissing Western interest in China, Japan, India — the Orient in general — as distinct from primitivism, as well as dismissing the term when used to designate early renaissance painters, as

Italian, Dutch or French *Primitives* (Dagen, 2019: 15, 16).<sup>1</sup> However, as Edward Said showed in *Orientalism*, the exoticized view on Eastern cultures, most of them colonised, or formerly colonised, was a way to produce and control knowledge about the “Orient” and consequently to dominate it, to structure the way it could be imagined and represented, and to maintain a Western upper hand towards the “Orient” (Said, 1978: 7). In that way, considering primitivism as a constant production of the Other (and Said expresses how the Orient has been the most recurring image of the Other to the West), where a duality of identification and des-identification occurs and the “modern Western” subject always has the upper hand, the experience of the exotic, which also produces subalternity, should not be entirely dismissed as one of the instances of primitivism.<sup>2</sup> In a different way, the relation modern subjects constructed with the “self”-primitive they often found in their own national medieval and early renaissance cultures (for instance, artists from *Der Blaue Reiter* finding inspiration in medieval German imagery for their engravings and paintings) should also be considered when studying primitivist tropes.<sup>3</sup>

Postcolonial and decolonial theory have criticised, and sometimes questioned, the continuing of the use of the term. In the 2016 book *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*, the concept of ‘Alienation’ was proposed as an alternative by Christopher Reed, who states that being alien, estranged or foreign, is embedded in definitions of modernism and modernity. ‘Alienation’ refers to the Marxist critique of capitalism, to the experience of exile as much as to an avant-garde convention. It also encompasses dynamics of ‘alienation-identification’ avoiding relegating those cast as ‘exotic’ or ‘primitive’ to passiveness and a fixed place in the social hierarchy or in an undetermined past (Reed,

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<sup>1</sup> By leaving exoticism towards the idea of the “Orient” outside primitivism, Dagen therefore incurs in a hierarchisation himself, one between African and Asian cultures.

<sup>2</sup> “Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.” (Said, 1978: 7-8).

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of primitivism in Iberian and Latin-American case-studies, as well as several theoretical discussions of the term, see Cunha Leal & Pinto dos Santos (eds.), 2024.

2016: 11-28). Therefore, *alienation* is a concept meant to recognise mobility and a non-binary interplay between subjects and it is useful to add it to a critical approach to the term 'primitivism', but to jettison the latter could risk the loss of perspective of the imperialist and colonialist contexts which allowed it to emerge. However, one of the insights *alienation* allows to bring forward in relation to *primitivism* is how it has implications with identity building, for it encompasses a process of differentiation and identification which is not resolved. Rather, it is a movement of wanting to be an-other without really stop being the privileged western, urban, sane, adult, civilised self. This movement, from identification to differentiation and back again, is part of what Homi Bhabha described as an "ethics of self-construction" that is the "essential gesture of Western modernity". The permanent reconstruction and reinvention of the *self* that also produces the *other-self* is, as Bhabha writes, ethnocentric. It does not really allow otherness, and it establishes cultural difference inasmuch as it remains the 'same', that is, within the strict boundaries of what can be called modernity, which excludes and subalternates extra-western subjects (Bhabha, 1994: 344 and ff).<sup>4</sup>

On another side, primitivism has to do with the urge to begin from scratch which amounts to an avant-garde trope, including in Futurism. If Peter Bürger established the avant-garde as an absolute origin, an event of immediate effect recognised as origin in itself, Hal Foster, in his critique of Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, demonstrated that the status of the avant-garde as origin is "a retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings" (Foster, 1996: 8). Nevertheless, being mindful of that "deferred temporality of artistic signification" does not mean to neglect the narrative of 'absolute origin' or 'beginning' that can be found in many avant-garde manifestos and practices. On the contrary, it means acknowledging modernity (of which avant-garde is part and parcel) as an "ideology of beginnings", "of the new" (Bhabha, 1994: 352), and therefore to recognise the paradoxical repetition and variants of the quest for the return to origins in the avant-garde practices. Bhabha further refers to the *terra incognita* or *terra nullius* which is represented by the colonial space and the part it plays in that ideology. This

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<sup>4</sup> Bhabha addresses modernity as an epistemological structure and discusses how it was established as such by post-structuralist authors who associated spatialization and synchronicity to modernity, therefore excluding everything that did not belong to the "now" of modernity, that is, the colonial space. He proposes a post-colonial translation of modernity: a contra-modernity, that encompasses subaltern agency.

*terra nullius* image may as well be applied to the art objects that were systematically appropriated and used by twentieth century artists to *renovate* modern art. The *terra incognita* could also be the distant past, something that could be regarded both as mysterious, ultimately unreachable, but a place of a shared origin and source for present renewal.

The obsession with the idea of 'origin' in western thought is therefore connected with the colonial enterprise, which goes hand in hand with the "invention" of a distant pre-historic time in the nineteenth century (Gerolanous, 2024). Living human beings from conquered land where often deemed as "primitive" in the sense that they were seen as closer to less developed versions of mankind. In other words, they were seen as closer to humanity's "childhood", or humanity's origin, leading to enquiries into geological deep time (Gerolanous, 2024: 21 and ff). And therefore, they were also easily de-humanised in order to justify the image of *terra nullius*, de-occupied land that could be conquered by a "developed" version of humanity. Consequently, a relation with the pre-history of art, seen in the artifacts of indigenous people (or folk art), developed.

The art historian Maria Stavrinaki has dismissed the term "primitivism" as inadequate to explain the role played by pre-history in modern art since the 1920s (Stavrinaki 2018, 2022). According to Stavrinaki, modernity, by "forever reinventing pre-history, constantly reinvented itself" and "the conceptual and artistic uses of geological, paleontological, and artistic prehistory by moderns" have been misconstrued by historians "whether by overlooking them, or by confusing them with primitivism and archaism" (Stavrinaki, 2022: 17).<sup>5</sup> The main difference,

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<sup>5</sup> Stavrinaki also points out the need to "to counteract the neutralizing effect of dualist symmetries" while studying modernity, that is "action and reaction, avant-garde and rear guard, modern and antimodern, revolutionaries and reactionaries. Such dualism has found a paradoxical, yet all the more striking expression in the disappearance pure and simple of the word 'moderns': 'we have never been modern.'" By criticizing this Bruno Latour's predicament as monolithic, she proposes instead to "reshape somewhat the identity of moderns" (Stavrinaki, 2022: 18). In that way, Stavrinaki is implying that the relation of modernity with pre-history somewhat contradicts the great divide between nature and culture that Latour diagnosed as a modern (unfulfilled) goal (Latour, 1991). However, this only confirms the idea that modern art's connection with pre-history is part of a wider scope of primitivism, since a "return to origin" or to a closer way of primordial (and natural) artistic expression is one of its manifestations. Moreover, Stavrinaki presents an idea of modernity also based in "dualist symmetries": "Modernity is composed of regression as much as progress, doubt as much as certainty, deceleration as much as acceleration, the *longue durée* as much as change. It is this contradictory historicity that I wish to explore" (18) or "Modernity is both belated and premature, hypermnesiac and forgetful." (23).

the author argues, is that pre-history allowed for a “temporalization, a surplus of historicity” and the idea of an “autochthonous universal”, because the finding of Paleolithic art in European soil meant that pre-history was part of European past, whether “similar finds in colonised territories could not have been attributed to such a remote past: the winds of history had never blown through these regions, considered to be timeless, if not in a state of degeneration.” (Stavriniaki, 2022: 28). It is not within the scope of this essay to address the timeframe that Stavriniaki considers as the moment pre-history becomes more important than primitivism (after the 1920s). Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that Stavriniaki seems to perform a redemption of modernity by shifting the conceptual frame from primitivism to pre-history, claiming that “primitivism has always bore the mark of alterity” whether pre-history means a positive identification with humans from other era.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the implications on the concept of historical time brought about by the invention of pre-history, the term primitivism cannot simply be relegated to an idea of formal appropriation and fetishisation of otherness.

Firstly, the search for renewal and the simplification or reduction of pictorial or sculptural forms found different inspirational sources regional, national and extra-european, and including ethnographic subjects (Clifford, 1981) or the nebulous of pre-history.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the production of otherness is directly implicated in the construction of the self (Torgovnick, 1990), and primitivism played a role in negotiating the construction of regional and national identities.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the allure for the enigma of the “origin” or “beginning” is an expression of the previously mentioned Western “ethics of self-construction” (Bhabha, 1994: 344), and in the image of *terra incognita* or *terra nullius* there is both a geographical and a temporal dimension, an external and internal factor, which enables the possibility of starting from scratch by reenacting a different space-time that nevertheless becomes an

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<sup>6</sup> “[...] history lay between prehistory and modernity, and this gap was necessary for the modern dialectization of prehistory, that is, its historicization. At the same time, and this is hardly a contradiction, the awareness of moderns that they walked the same earth as the men and women of prehistory brought a sense of continuity that guaranteed their own identity.” (Stavriniaki, 2022: 28).

<sup>7</sup> This search for formal simplification is not unrelated to the changes in mass production brought about by the industrial revolution, and the optimisation of design and functionality.

<sup>8</sup> Several chapters in the book *The Primitivist Imaginary in Iberian and Transatlantic Modernisms* (2024) deal with this, for instance Antliff & Leighten, “Cosmopolitan cubism, provincial Paris”.

expression of Western modernity. That is, the “template for the non-place of beginnings” (Bhabha, 1994: 352), becomes an emulation of the colonial space, combining *self* and *other-self*, in the sense that it provides the image of conquer, occupation, expansion and renewal that is precisely what can be found, as I intend to demonstrate, in some of the Portuguese futurist manifestos.

Joyce Cheng has emphasised how Western bourgeois modernity is material and symbolically dependent on its ‘other’ and the (self-) critique of Western bourgeois modernity is “inextricable from reflections and practices” (artistic but not only) that implicated European contact with non-European cultures, and which amount to the definition of ‘primitivism’. Therefore, the author argues, the term may be seen as operating as “a critical machine aiming to aggravate the *crise de l’esprit* (Paul Valéry) within modern civilisation” (Cheng, 2018: 185) despite embedded in imperialism and colonialism. Thus, although the limitations and prejudices of the term ‘primitivism’ must be acknowledged, dismissing it completely may lead to overlook a structural aspect of modernity, one that can also be found in Futurism.

As already put forward by authors such as Marjorie Perloff and Rosalind Krauss, the trope of the ‘return to origins’ can be identified in Futurism. Marinetti’s 1909 *Manifesto del Futurismo* narrates how he crashed into the “maternal ditch” of industrial waste where he tastes the “factory drain” as the milk he tasted from the “black breast of his Sudanese nurse” (Marinetti, 1973 [1909]). Perloff and Krauss have underlined how this is a metaphor for the return to the womb, a rebirth from an amniotic liquid made of industrial waste from which a new futurist, self-created, man emerged (Perloff, 1986: 87; Krauss, 1986: 157). Krauss’ reading of Marinetti’s manifesto deconstructs the myth of originality of the avant-garde by demonstrating that originality was not about producing the original and unique artwork (in fact, embracing technology meant embracing reproduction and repetition), but it was conceived as a return to origin, a restart from scratch, a “beginning from ground zero” freed from tradition: “The self as origin is safe from contamination by tradition because it possesses a kind of originary naiveté. [...] The self as origin has the potential for continual acts of regeneration, a perpetuation of self-birth.” (Krauss, 1986: 157).

Therefore, “the futurist moment” established a temporal rupture which became the paradigm of avant-garde, in which the possibility of the future was actually frozen in an eternal beginning. Going back to Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial analysis, the “ethics of self-construction” of modernity meant being stuck in

the “now” of modernity that excluded “non-modern” subjects. “Now” was the motto for rupture and beginning again, aiming at a fantasised promised future never to be reached. However, the mythical pure origin implicated going back to a pre-modern status. Marinetti’s mention of his Sudanese nurse’s breast illustrates better than anything else the belief in the need of regression in order to progress, the need of going back to a primitive realm in order to reimagine the future — while expressing in a nutshell the colonialist mindset in which avant-garde emerges.

## 2. THE PORTUGUESE FUTURIST MANIFESTOS AND THE ‘RETURN TO ORIGIN’ TROPE

It is usually considered that the Portuguese Futurist Manifestos include four texts written by Almada Negreiros (1893-1970), and the *Ultimatum* signed by one of Fernando Pessoa’s (1888-1935) heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos. Other two texts are sometimes referred, *Nós* by António Ferro (1895-1956) and *O Bando Sinistro* by Raul Leal (1888-1964). In the southern region of Portugal, in the city of Faro, the newspaper *Heraldo de Faro* inaugurated a section on Futurism that would run from February 4<sup>th</sup> to August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1917 (Parreira da Silva, 2023: 222), but no manifestos were published there. In Coimbra, there was a reaction to Lisbon Futurism that sought to turn it against itself. The texts used the syntax and structure of some of the futurist writings of the Lisboners to criticise them and denounce their authors as false futurists (Marnoto, 1994).<sup>9</sup> I shall comment on the politics, and the trope of ‘return to origin’ in Leal’s, Campos’, Ferro’s and Almada’s writings, leaving aside the Coimbra’s manifestations for they do not share some of the characteristics found in the other texts.

The texts associated with Futurism must be considered eclectic and they emerged by combining different aesthetic sources and different interpretations of what Futurism could be. Futurism was agitating Europe, especially Paris, where several Portuguese writers and artists had travelled (Mário de Sá-Carneiro [1890-1916]), Guilherme de Santa-Rita [1889-1918], Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso [1887-1918], José Pacheco [1885-1934], among others), giving notice of what was happening there to the ones remaining in Portugal (as Almada Negreiros and Fernando Pessoa). The

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<sup>9</sup> This was protagonised mainly by Francisco Levita, starting in 1916 with a response to Almada’s *Manifesto Anti-Dantas*. See Marnoto, 1994.

reception of Futurism and other isms happened in the context of the falling of the Portuguese monarchy, with the assassination of the king, and the establishment of a republican regime (1910).

Most of these authors and artists were part or close to the *Orpheu* project, the literary magazine founded by poets Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro in 1915 that inaugurated the Portuguese avant-garde. That meant it was often associated with Futurism, although it never claimed to be a futurist magazine. *Orpheu* n. 2 was nevertheless marked by futurist echoes, and featured poems that play with language and onomatopoeias, as well as the use of typography, but it reinterpreted, transformed and used Futurism as a tool for disruption. It only had two published issues and a third one planned, but never printed, of which there are surviving typographical proofs. The magazine stirred the established intellectual Portuguese elite with provocative language and inaugurating a new poetic aesthetics. *Orpheu* published some of the most important poems by Pessoa/Campos and Mário de Sá-Carneiro, while also including painting, featuring in the second issue four reproductions of Santa-Rita's collages. Their collaborators and directors were extremely critical of the Republic, which had quickly amounted to a succession of crisis, authoritarian regimes and persecutions, and some of them, as Raul Leal or Guilherme de Santa-Rita, openly embraced monarchy.

The authors of manifestos and texts inspired by Futurism that will be commented in the next pages were mainly collaborators of *Orpheu*: Pessoa/Campos, Raul Leal and Almada Negreiros. And António Ferro was part of the tertulia that gathered around them.

## **2.1 THE MANIFESTO *O BANDO SINISTRO*, BY RAUL LEAL AND THE POEM *A CENA DO ÓDIO* BY ALMADA NEGREIROS**

*O Bando Sinistro* [The Sinister Gang] is a pamphlet written by Raul Leal, who signed it as a "*Orpheu* collaborator". It was supposedly printed in Barcelona (Almeida, 2015: 583-584)<sup>10</sup> and distributed on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1915. It was only rediscovered in 2015 and

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<sup>10</sup> António Almeida puts forward the hypothesis that it was secretly printed in a press in Lisbon but announced as printed in Barcelona. Guilherme de Santa Rita was very much involved in the printing of the pamphlet (Almeida, 2015). They probably circulated the idea of it being printed in Barcelona in order not put the Lisbon typography at risk.

published in a catalogue organised by Richard Zenith celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Orpheu* (Zenith, 2015: 184-185).<sup>11</sup>

Raul Leal was a poet and writer that signed some of his texts as "Henoch", a name from esoteric Judaism. He participated in the *Orpheu* n. 2 magazine with a short story titled "Atelier" in which he proclaimed a Nietzschean aesthetic existence, using repeatedly the term "vertigo", at times with some sexual innuendo (Leal, 1915). Although Raul Leal signs *O Bando Sinistro* deliberately associating himself with the symbol of the Portuguese aesthetic modernity, *Orpheu*, his manifesto has a direct political focus. In fact, Raul Leal attacks the "sinister gang" of Afonso Costa, a prominent figure since the establishment of the Republican regime in Portugal and associated with the regicide that ended monarchy in Portugal in 1910.<sup>12</sup> He assumed different political responsibilities and was President of the Ministry of Portugal (equivalent to Prime Minister) four times between 1913 and 1917, at a time when governments fell constantly due to succeeding crisis. Raul Leal probably plays with the triple meaning of the word "Sinistro" in Portuguese: it means terrifying, but it can also refer to an accident or disaster, and to being left-handed or with a left political orientation.<sup>13</sup>

Costa, who led what was considered a left-wing party — the Democratic Party<sup>14</sup> —, had just instigated a military coup on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1915, that resulted in more than two hundred dead and one thousand wounded, and ended the government of Pimenta de Castro (Serra, 2021: 93-128). This coup, fighting a supposed danger of the restoration of monarchy, was also meant to force the participation of Portugal in the First World War, and indeed in March 1916 Germany and Austria would declare war to Portugal.<sup>15</sup> Curiously, on the day the pamphlet was distributed Afonso Costa jumped out of an electric bus because he heard an explosion (caused by a short circuit) and thought it was an attempt on his life. It was a coincidence, since the pamphlet was printed before.

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<sup>11</sup> The original pamphlet reproduced in the catalogue is at Yale University.

<sup>12</sup> See Manuela Alves, "Regicídio: 'Lembro-me,' recorda filha de Manuel Buiça", *Diário de Lisboa*, 1 February 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Many thanks to Noemí De Haro who pointed out this reading to me. "Sinistro" as "Left" is an old meaning, no longer in use.

<sup>14</sup> Afonso Costa tried to absorb other left-wing currents in order to command a single Democratic party, and he often persecuting labourers and unions (Serra, 2021: 93-128).

<sup>15</sup> Germany declared war to Portugal after the apprehension of German ships that were stationed in Portuguese ports, following the request made by Great Britain (Oliveira Marques, 1991: 711-713).

Although strongly insulting, the pamphlet's vocabulary is much more symbolist than futurist and lacks the precision (it doesn't have any theses) and clarity needed for a mass audience. Therefore, it falls short of "*de la violence et de la précision*" Marinetti claimed necessary for the new artistic genre of the manifesto (Perloff, 1986: 81). Its violence, aimed at Afonso Costa, is conveyed in an over-expressive symbolist language that seeks to portrait a muddy, plebeian, and hateful atmosphere associated with Costa's rule, while defending monarchy.<sup>16</sup> The symbolic language is close to other manifestations associated with the deflagration of the war in 1914. Although this manifesto should be considered when discussing the politics of the *Orpheu* project, I believe it gravitates around a generic idea of Futurism as provocation and intervention without really using futurist language. Furthermore, by attacking so directly a single character of national politics and excluding aesthetic considerations, its scope is exclusively political.

The controversy that arose from the distribution of Leal's manifesto, as well as Pessoa's public statements against Afonso Costa (Almeida, 2015: 594-598),<sup>17</sup> made the publishing of *Orpheu* n. 3 more difficult because there was a serious risk of publishing a magazine that could be related with previous attacks on Afonso Costa, who was known for persecuting and even murdering his political opponents. The third issue would indeed have escalated

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<sup>16</sup> An example: "Costa sente bem a sua propria inferioridade, incapaz se sente de se elevar ao Espirito, de se elevar até Deus, é n'um charco imundo que elle se debate por entre chammas purulentas de peste, e, cheio de raiva, de rancores sinistros, a sua fétida baba derrama na Vida para que a Vida, descendo até elle, se cubra de podridão e de ignominia" [Costa feels his own inferiority well, he feels incapable of rising to the Spirit, of rising to God, he struggles in a filthy quagmire amidst the purulent flames of plague, and, full of rage, of sinister grudges, his fetid drool spills onto Life so that Life, descending to him, is covered in rot and ignominy]. Transcribed in Almeida, 2015: 572.

<sup>17</sup> Leal's pamphlet was followed by a letter by Pessoa (signed Álvaro de Campos) to the newspaper *A Capital* (5 July 1915) of which only an excerpt appeared stating: "It would be in bad taste to repudiate links with futurism at such a deliciously mechanical time when Divine Providence itself is using electric cars for its high teachings". Names such as Alfredo Guisado and António Ferro publicly repudiated the *Orpheu* authors political attacks on Afonso Costa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro also wrote to the newspaper stating Campos' and Leal's writings did not represent *Orpheu* (7 July 1915) and Armando Côrtes-Rodrigues also stated his discordance towards those opinions (9 July 1915). Afonso Costa's political militia, A Formiga Branca [The White Ant] attempted to attack Pessoa at the restaurant Irmãos Unidos (which belonged to Alfredo Guisado), supposedly due to Almada Negreiros inadvertently exposing that Pessoa and Campos were the same person (this information is advanced by António Almeida in the cited essay although he does not provide any source for it).

the provocation, namely with Almada Negreiros' poem *A Cena do Ódio* [The Hate Scene].

In fact, the long poem by Almada meant to be included in the never printed *Orpheu* n. 3, must be reread in light of *O Bando Sinistro*. In 1923 a truncated and modified version was published as an appendix of the magazine *Contemporânea* with the dedication "To Álvaro de Campos // excerpts of a derailed poem written in the three days and three nights that lasted the revolution of May 14<sup>th</sup> 1915".<sup>18</sup> In the unpublished proofs of *Orpheu* n. 3,<sup>19</sup> as well as in the manuscript currently at the National Library of Portugal, the poem is dated May 14<sup>th</sup> 1915. This means that *A Cena do Ódio* was written specifically in the context of Afonso Costa's coup and in response to it. Even if Almada's description of writing the poem during the three days and three nights of the revolution is a mythicised narrative, the fact remains that by describing it so and by dating it from May 14<sup>th</sup>, Almada is undoubtedly stating that the poem is a response to the coup. The "hate" mentioned in the title and in the poem has a specific political target, and it is worth noting that "hate" is probably the most frequent word in Raul Leal's pamphlet. Leal's hate was directed against Costa, and we can infer, despite Almada being much more ambiguous and never naming him, that his hate had the same target.

What does his hate do? He writes "My Hate is the Lantern of Diogenes, / the blindness of Diogenes" from which we can infer that he is proposing his poem as a cynical exercise. He will do like Diogenes and use a lantern to find a man during daylight, that is, he too will express how there are no worthy men. Like Diogenes, he too will scorn civilisation and its hypocrisies. The poem goes on, mainly with exclamations and a violent language against all the comfortable bourgeois conquests of the so-called civilisation or so-called culture. At one point, the attacks include those who laugh at *Orpheu*. But then, in the middle of the torrent, some verses are quite explicit: "Disrobe yourself of your uniform / disrobe yourself of the Imposture, stand naked and raw / and you will be unemployed! [...] there's more to life than starting revolutions!"<sup>20</sup> These verses are quite frontal in stating that those who "take off their uniform" will be exposed and lose their work, and the negative reference to "revolutions" couldn't be clearer in its association with the May 14<sup>th</sup> events. He also dismisses war,

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<sup>18</sup> *Contemporânea* 7, January 1923.

<sup>19</sup> These proofs were published in a facsimile edition only in 1983. *Orpheu* 3, fac-símile. Porto: Nova Renascença.

<sup>20</sup> Translation by Jethro Soutar, included in *Nós os de Orpheu/ We, The Orpheu Lot*, 57-72.

by being cynical about those who want to make it: "Get to work making a bomb / a bomb so big / it will be ten times the radius of the Earth. / Stuff it with all of Europe, / both poles and the Americas, / Palestine, Greece, the entire globe / and please don't forget Portugal! / Have done with planet, / become God of the World just to end it! (My God, there are so many things to do in life, / and these people distract themselves with wars!)" He attacks multiple manifestations of the installed culture, of the established society, the traditional family, acquired knowledge, etc. He exhorts the 'unlearning' ("Uninstruct yourself, uncultivate yourself, unpolish yourself"), the forsaken of civilisation, and even proclaims: "Become reborn!". The self-regeneration and the return to a primordial state is even more underlined in the verses: "Let horns grow instead of civilisation! / I loved you as a cannibal because you ate your own: / maybe the World was a world then / and not the lavatory it is now!"

The primitivist tropes of returning to origin, escaping civilisation, and reemerging with Nature ("start living in Nature!") are present, as much as the prejudice of colonial rule: "I shall rebuild black slavery in you!" is a verse that mirrors the perverse metaphorical association between the idea of returning to the origin and the idea of renewing the dominating powers of colonisation.<sup>21</sup> The predication of unlearning, in turn, is also to be found in another of Pessoa's heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, namely in his set of poems *O Guardador de Rebanhos* [The Keeper of Sheep] (first published in 1925, but dated 1915) and later in the praise for naivety by Almada himself, in his 1921 book *A Invenção do Dia Claro* [The Invention of the Bright Day] (Pinto dos Santos, 2025).

## 2.2 NÓS AND A IDADE DO JAZZ-BAND BY ANTÓNIO FERRO

António Ferro played with the avant-garde vocabulary, using it as a sign of modernity, but he was not really a collaborator of

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<sup>21</sup> In a recent book, Ignacio Infante inquires about this poem being a response and stance made by Almada in relation to his father's ethnographic writings and his traditionalist colonialist views, which is an interesting but highly speculative hypothesis that misses the connection to what was happening in national politics. It also skips commenting that Almada had been estranged from his father since the age of three. Infante analyses manifestos by Almada with a postcolonial perspective, but he largely ignores recent and less recent works on Almada and other Portuguese authors such as Pessoa. He engages mostly with a 1966 book on Portuguese Futurism (João Alves das Neves' *O Movimento Futurista em Portugal*) which has been long outdated (Infante, 2023: 24-55).

*Orpheu*.<sup>22</sup> The *Nós* [We] manifesto was self-published in 1921 and republished in Brazil in 1922 in the magazine *Klaxon* n. 2 — a publication inaugurated in the aftermath of the Modern Art Week of S. Paulo that same year. Ferro was in Brazil at the time, making several conferences, most notably the conference *A Idade do Jazz-Band* [The Age of Jazz-Band]. In this conference, all the primitivist imagery and prejudice towards African Art and black bodies is in action, by seeing in them a truth only found in infancy: “The influence of black art on modern art is indisputable. Modern art is synthesis. Black people have always had the instinct for synthesis. Black people stayed in childhood — to stay in truth. The child is the abbreviation for Nature. Children, crazy people, and black people are the drafts of Humanity, the theses that God developed and complicated. There is no Rodin sculpture that has the truth of a manipanso [African fetish].” (Ferro, 1987 (1922): 216). Ferro referred to the *jazz-band* as the “restlessness of a woman’s body”, associating the velocity of modern age with the age of dancing female (black) bodies, while rejecting the past, romanticism and the moonlight (in a reference to Marinetti’s second manifesto, “Kill the Moonlight!”), and praising futility, nightlife and joyfulness. The jazz-band, he writes, is the age of rebirth, and implicitly, he is referring to a rebirth after the war, that he considers having transformed humans in “drafts of race” to be remoulded.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, the manifesto *Nós*, presented in a short theatrical structure, has no echo of the primitivist tropes in the *jazz-band* conference, which, although not a manifesto, refers to topics that were found in the Futurist manifestos and adopts some of its provocative language (Ferro 1987 (1921): 147-152). It is structured in a dialogue between “I” and a “Crowd”, in which the “I” prevails as the only one that understands the “present Hour”, that is, the only one that is at pace with progress and modernity. Ferro praises the machines (trains, aeroplanes) and the “Great War, the Great War of Art!”, but this is a short emulation of previous futurist manifestos, Portuguese or Italian. The “I” prevails isolated, and in fact, there is hardly any “We” involved, despite the title. Therefore, *A Idade do*

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<sup>22</sup> António Ferro was not a collaborator of *Orpheu* — Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro made him the editor of *Orpheu* because he was underaged and therefore could not be arrested if there were to be any trouble. (Pessoa, 2015: 151). Also, his republican politics in favour of Afonso Costa estranged him from the *Orpheu* members.

<sup>23</sup> “The Great War gave such insignificancy to human life that it transformed it in drafts of race, in which the skin, the bones, the flesh, all lost value as if they were money, and instead silk, cashmere, velvet, organdies, crêpe gained importance...” (Ferro, 1987 (1922): 205).

*Jazz-Band* stands much closer to the tone and quality of a manifesto, despite Ferro's intentions. The fact that it was presented as a conference in a Brazilian context, escalates its implications and significance, since the text celebrates black dancing bodies and music in a former Portuguese colonised territory, where the configuration of race had been determined by the slave trade perpetuated by Portugal for centuries. Moreover, the Brazilian independence proclaimed in 1822 had not been propelled by indigenous or enslaved people revolts, but by white European and Portuguese settlers<sup>24</sup> that kept the discriminatory policies intact even after slavery was abolished on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1888. Therefore, Ferro's conference/manifesto in 1922 gave a modern dressing to old prejudices, attributing exotic and fetishised value to them.

### 2.3 ULTIMATUM BY ÁLVARO DE CAMPOS

Pessoa wrote derogatorily about futurism in literature, considering it nothing more than a "typographical phenomenon" (Pessoa, 2015: 54). Probably in 1922, he wrote a (never published) fake interview as if revisiting *Orpheu* and its derivations,<sup>25</sup> in which he mentioned that "I never accepted Futurism, never sympathised with Futurism, or ever — not even as *blague* — wrote anything similar to Futurism" (Pessoa, 2015: 152-153). This may be true for Pessoa, but not for his heteronym Álvaro de Campos. In the same 'interview' Pessoa tells how he simulated having received from Galicia the poem by Álvaro de Campos "Ode Triunfal" [Triumphal Ode] for *Orpheu 1*, which is a poem that recurs to onomatopoeias and punctuation akin to futurist poetry, besides praising factories, trains, electricity, music-halls, etc., and how others received it not knowing yet Álvaro de Campos and Fernando Pessoa were the same person: "I remember Almada Negreiros, after reading enthusiastically 'Ode Triunfal' strongly shaking my arm because of my lack of enthusiasm, and saying to me, outraged: 'This may not be how you write, but it is life itself!' I felt only his friendship saved me from hearing him say that Álvaro de Campos was much better than me."<sup>26</sup> Almada was a strong

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<sup>24</sup> The independence of Brazil was proclaimed by Pedro, the son of the Portuguese king, João VI. He became Pedro I of Brazil from 1822 to 1831, but in 1826 became also king of Portugal as Pedro IV, and fought his brother Miguel in what became known as the liberal civil war, and accumulating both reigns.

<sup>25</sup> The text was written in letterhead paper from an office created by Pessoa in 1922 and was published for the first time in 1968.

<sup>26</sup> Almada, in turn, would later recall a different version. In 1965, in an homage to the fiftieth anniversary of *Orpheu* he wrote: "One day at the 'Irmãos

enthusiast of the Futurism he recognized in Campos' poem. In his various unpublished notes on *Orpheu*, Pessoa himself states that Campos' was a better Futurism than the Italian original and that he achieved what the international futurists were trying to do without fully accomplish it, and exceeded them (Pessoa, 2015: 33 and 118). It is no surprise, then, to find the heteronym Campos, an experimental futurist, signing a futurist manifesto that parodies, to a large extent, the futurist manifesto formulas.

That manifesto was *Ultimatum*, published in the only issue of *Portugal Futurista*, the 1917 Portuguese Futurist magazine that had no circulation since it was seized by the police just after it was printed. The text is reminiscent of Émile Zola's *J'Accuse* by recurring to the strategy of repeating "Fora tu!" [Off with you!] in several paragraphs, followed by naming literary authors such as Anatole France, Kipling, Yeats, H.G. Wells, Chesterton, Annunzio, and others (all of them, then or later, part of Pessoa's personal library). It also shows a strong political charge, with allusions to the national and international situation. Therefore, the *Ultimatum*, the title being a reference to the trauma of the British Ultimatum of 1890 in which Britain demanded immediate withdrawal of Portuguese forces from African territories in the radar of British interests, was both a literary and a political manifesto, mixing aesthetic and politics in its demands. It associates the decadence and failure of the political situation, including the ongoing war, to a diagnosis of decadence and failure of the cultural situation and appeals to the foundation of a "New World": "I, a descendant of the race of the Discoverers, despise anything less than discovering a New World!" (Campos, 1917: 32). Referencing Nietzsche, he writes that the Christian civilisation established after the Middle Ages has to be extinct and he ends his text explicitly referring to the new man, the "Super-man" who shall be the most complete, the most complex and the most harmonic. The foundation of humanity, the rebirth trope, is clear in Campos manifesto. But it is also clear the mocking character of it when, knowing that he determined that the heteronymous Álvaro de Campos profession was Engineering, he states that the new humanity will be the "Humanity of the Engineers!"

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Unidos' restaurant Fernando Pessoa had received a poem entitled 'Ode Triunfal'. He didn't know if it was from a Portuguese author or a Galician one that knew well how to write Portuguese. He gave it to me to read. At the first verse I jumped up on the table until the last verse. I went downstairs and said to Fernando Pessoa: 'Álvaro de Campos, please, when you meet Fernando Pessoa, give him a good kick in the arse.'" (Almada Negreiros, 1965: 14).

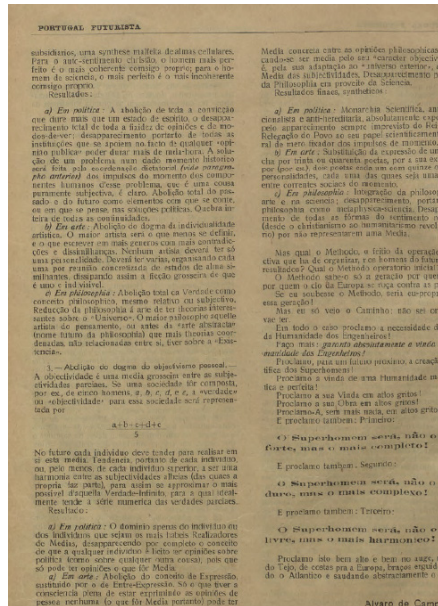
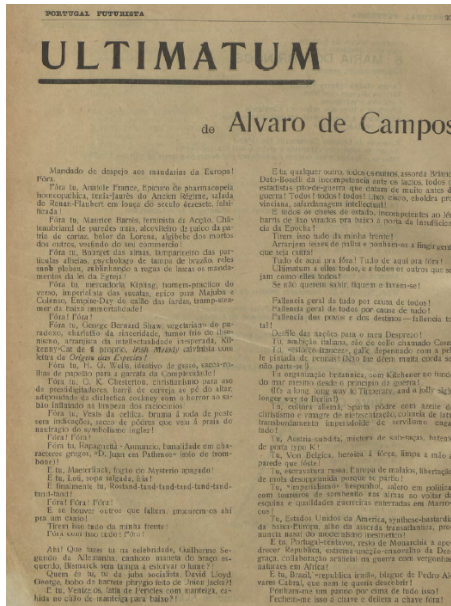


Fig. 1. First and last page of *Ultimatum* by Álvaro de Campos. *Portugal Futurista*, 1917.

Nevertheless, it is significant that he ends by stating “I declare this loud and clear, on the Tagus estuary, with my back to Europe, arms raised, gazing at the Atlantic and abstractly salut- ing Infinity”. He turns his back to European civilisation and looks to the Atlantic as the “one that shares the race of the discover- ers”; but now a discoverer-engineer that must look away from civilisation to be able to regenerate himself. In other words, he must re-discover the *terra nullius* as his predecessors have done, to restart the colonial enterprise.<sup>27</sup> This has, of course, political implications, since the 1914-1918 war was an imperial one and Portugal participated in it to avoid the risk of losing its colonies and even with the prospect of increasing its territory in Africa (Meneses, 2021: 400), as well to affirm its young Republican re- gime in the international scene (Marques, 2021: 317). So, it could be said that what is being proclaimed in Campos’ *Ultimatum* is the restarting of a new empire rather than going to war to fight for the colonies of the past.

As showed by *O Bando Sinistro* and the documented political history of the collaborators of *Orpheu*, Leal, Pessoa, or Almada, they all were fiercely against the Democratic Party led by Afonso

<sup>27</sup> For a thorough analysis on Pessoa and the empire as modern imagery, as well as his ideas on the Portuguese situation in the West see Russo, 2024: 37-66 and 113-130.

Costa, as well as his war policy.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, there is a particularity in the Portuguese avant-garde also expressed in *A Cena do Ódio* by Almada: they are not in favour of the participation in the First World War. Notwithstanding, the metaphor for restarting civilisation is illustrated with the image of a new empire, albeit an aesthetic one — that is: the conquest to be made is through the affirmation of literature and art, and not by occupying territory.

## 2.4 ALMADA NEGREIROS' MANIFESTOS

Almada's manifestos were written and published in a short period of time, between 1916 and 1917, and they are of two kinds. Two of them denounce the obsolete art of the past, as well as the vices and bourgeois tastes of a complacent society — manifestos that could be called "negative"; and two others urge the public to enjoy the exponents of modernity and the avant-garde that could be seen in the country at the time of writing — manifestos that could be called "positive". They all operate in a performative language, common to the avant-garde manifestos of the early twentieth century.

It must be noted that another text by Raul Leal published in French in *Portugal Futurista* is also very performative, and could be considered a manifesto in favour of Futurism, much more than *O Bando Sinistro* previously analysed. The text is about Guilherme Santa-Rita, whom Leal sees as the only single artist that truly expresses Futurism. It is the text "L'abstractionisme Futuriste. Divagation outrephilosophique-Vertige à propos de l'oeuvre géniale de Santa Rita Pintor, 'Abstraction Congénitale Intuitive (Matière-Force); la suprême réalisation du Futurisme". It has a play of words in which "Vertige" is the more often employed, trying to express Santa Rita's paintings as never concrete, always in motion, "Dynamique", and therefore "abstract".

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<sup>28</sup> Alfredo Guisado and António Ferro were republicans in favour of Afonso Costa. Pessoa expressed Republican ideas but he was against Afonso Costa and in favour of the dictator Pimenta de Castro, opponent to Afonso Costa and the target of the May 14th, 1915 coup inflicted by Costa (Parreira da Silva, 2000). Not only did he publish attacks on Afonso Costa but also wrote the unpublished 1915 "Oligarquia das Bestas" [Oligarchy of the beasts] where many of his ideas can be found. The republicans in favour of Afonso Costa were mainly against Orpheu and most of the attacks on the magazine came from the Republican intellectual elite. Afonso Costa's party relied on a militia called Formiga Branca [White Ant] that threatened, beat, or even murdered political adversaries. Pessoa was threatened in 1915 (Almeida, 2015: 596), and Almada Negreiros was beaten in 1917 (Afonso, 1983: 46).

## L'ABSTRACTIONISME FUTURISTE

### Divagation outrephilosophique-Vertige à propos de l'œuvre géniale de Santa Rita Pintor, "Abstraction Congénitale Intuitive (Matière-Force)", la suprême réalisation du Futurisme.

Santa Rita Pintor a conçu en synthèse la réalisation intégrale de toute la théorie futuriste sur la Vie!

Tout se donne relativement et en relativité pure, la Vie n'est que le déroulement de purs rapports-distinctions, de purs contrastes lesquels se donnent les uns dans les autres et par les autres en suspension *en\_soi* — **Vertige**. Il n'y a pas des choses en soi tel qu'on les conçoit vulgairement, il n'y a pas des noms, pas de véritable *concret*, tout se donne purement par rapport, par rapport à tout et alors il n'y a qu'un déroulement de pure relativité toute subjectiviste. Relativité en soi, *en\_soi* — **Vertige**! Or par le fait même d'être en soi, à travers son subjectivisme pur il y a comme l'esprit de *réalité*, d'*objectivité*, de *concret* et la propre conception de relativité nous révèle ça. Si tout se donne seulement par rapport à tout il semble qu'il n'y a rien au fond mais puisqu'il se donne un déroulement de *véritables* rapports-distinctions, de *véritables*

qu'un esprit de réalité indécise, de *réalité* — **Vertige** dans cette activité contrastique, dans ce *processus* contrastique qui est alors un processus de *concret-en-abstrait* — **Vertige** il y a comme un vide, *vide-inexpression*, dans cet esprit de réalité relativiste. Or la relativité est pure, est donc en soi et le fait d'être en soi porte la relativité à s'impregner d'objectivisme pur, de pur concretisme à travers son esprit de pure subjectivité. Ce qui est en soi se fléchit si purement sur soi-même qu'il arrive à se vivre soi-même d'où résulte un véritable *animisme*; et ce qui est en soi se vit soi-même si purement qu'il surgit même comme un véritable *se vivre* tout pur, un *se vivre* en soi, *en\_soi* — **Vertige** ce qui nous porte à tourner dans un véritable cercle — **Vertige** qui ne fait que montrer le vertigisme de l'*en\_soi*. Si le processus du *se vivre* soi-même, processus d'Animique, est en soi, *en\_soi* — **Vertige** il ne s'agit pas proprement d'un être à se vivre soi-même et pourtant

Fig. 2 Raul Leal's "L'abstractionisme Futuriste. Divagation outrephilosophique-Vertige à propos de l'oeuvre géniale de Santa Rita Pintor, 'Abstraction Congénitale Intuitive (Matière-Force)', la suprême réalisation du Futurisme" published in *Portugal Futurista*, 1917.

The first of Almada's 'negative' manifestos, the *Manifesto Anti-Dantas*, was published in 1916 and was, legend has it, bought almost in its entirety by its target, Júlio Dantas (1876-1962). Dantas, a writer and a doctor, was the symbol of institutionalised culture. At the time, he disqualified the *Orpheu* magazine, and his medical studies on madness were evoked in the newspapers to diagnose the group as lunatic.<sup>29</sup> The pretext for the manifesto had been his play *Soror Mariana*, performed on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1915, to which Almada immediately reacted by writing the manifesto and reading it aloud to a group of friends, even if the pamphlet was only published after June 1916.<sup>30</sup>

The manifesto was written entirely in capital letters, there is a recurrent use of throughout the text and a typographic hand

<sup>29</sup> "Litteratura de Manicomio – Os poetas do 'Orpheu' foram já scientíficamente estudados por Júlio Dantas, há 15 annos, ao occupar-se dos 'artistas' de Rilhafolles – Casos de paranoia – Tem a palavra o sr. Julio de Mattos", in *A Capital – Diário Republicano da Noite*, 30 March 1915, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Almada promised Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979), at the time living with her husband Robert Delaunay in Vila do Conde in the north of Portugal, the first copy of the printed manifesto in a letter dated 30 May 1916 (Ferreira, 1972: 176).

with an index finger raised that works visually like a mock revolver. The typeface and the 'shots' fired by the onomatopoeias next to the index pointing hand ("PIM!") amplify the invective of the text through the graphic appearance, carrying out the literary assassination of Júlio Dantas. The onomatopoeia "PUM!"; more associated to the firing of a gun, appears only in the beginning of the text, and then it changes to "PIM!"; which works in fact like a comic and childish version of the first one. The medium undoubtedly intensifies the message, and each page functions not only as a vehicle for the text, but also as an image. This also happens in the cover, made of grey paper with dark red lettering with a graphic composition typical of a poster, with a mixture of different fonts.



Fig 3. Cover and first page of Almada's *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso*, 1916

As for the text, it was a direct critique of Júlio Dantas' play with a detailed humorous description. This drama was chosen as an example of the sentimental, romantic, mellow, linear narrative production that the protagonists of the avant-garde aimed to attack, destroy, and replace with their own artistic proposals. Moreover, the manifesto contained deliberately personal attacks, to Dantas and others, including the painter Alberto Sousa ("the Dantas of drawing"), José de Figueiredo, then director of the National Museum of Art, and even Alfredo Guisado — the Orpheu companion who by then had distanced himself from the project on account of his support for the Republican Afonso Costa.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Sara Afonso Ferreira has identified every name mentioned in the manifesto (Ferreira, 2013: 19-90).

The *Manifesto Anti-Dantas* is a personalised attack on the old culture, on the academy and on bourgeois taste, but it does not express directly the rebirth and regeneration topic that can be found in other futurist manifestos. On the other hand, it expresses the rejection of national backwardness in the face of European civilisational models by classifying the country as “MOST BACKWARD COUNTRY IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD! THE MOST SAVAGE COUNTRY OF ALL THE AFRICAS! THE COUNTRY OF CONVICTS AND INDENTURED LABOURERS! THE RECLUSIVE AFRICA OF THE EUROPEANS!”. This kind of self-deprecatory national appreciation has antecedents that go back to the eighteenth-century. The concept of belatedness, associated with being ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’, was not only applied to colonised countries, but it is part of a certain kind Portuguese intellectual discourse nostalgic of past original glories that criticised the country by describing it as ‘African’, that is, out of Europe. ‘Primitive’ here has a negative sense, and the prejudice implied in the comparison shows the colonialist desire of being at pace with European empires. It therefore associates the criticism of lack of modernity with the desire of recovering imperial influence amongst Europe’s most powerful countries (Pinto dos Santos, 2019: 37-64). In the futurist manifestos, this meant, as found in Campos’ *Ultimatum*, to associate aesthetic renewal with becoming Europe’s peer, but the language used in different occasions balances contradictorily between the refusal of civilisation by going back to a ‘primitive’ origin, and the praise of European modern (imperial) civilisation.

This was also expressed in a 1916 questionnaire conducted in a Lisbon newspaper with the title “What custome would I like to wear and in which era to live”. It was a Carnival joke, and they asked the opinion of the 23-year-old Almada Negreiros, who answered: “If only I could be born in the year 2000. I hate the banality of contemporary life, with its immutability, its regular clockwork mechanics, which deprives the spirit of being able to fly, of rising to its true ether, which deprives it of Originality, Individuation, Egotism, Unicism, and makes my face, your face, the face of that one look like everyone else’s face. It is horrible. It is the phase of the imposing and commanding Mediocrity... That is why I abhor Civilisation. I wish I could fall like a barbarian upon Byzantium and tear it to pieces, plunder its riches, set fire to it — Nero! Nero! burning Rome, you were a barbarian too, oh, my brother! — and thus begin the victorious cycle of Futurism in the world. What I would give, my friend, to live in the year 2000!”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The interview was found in an unidentified newspaper clip in Almada’s estate at CEDANSA, NOVA FCSH.

In this short frivolous interview, Almada says that civilisation does not acknowledge difference, it makes everyone look the same, and individuality can only be retrieved with barbaric destruction. He is sure that by the year 2000 that destruction has taken place. This is a performative statement which projects, tautologically, in a distant future the concretisation of futurism, thus affirming that its protagonists, including himself, belong to an age to come, and not to 1916. That age is the age of a new empire, as the reference to the burning of Rome makes clear, but it is also a projected unattainable — or unverifiable — future.

The second of Almada's manifestos was a 'positive' one in praise of the painter Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso (1887-1918), written and distributed on occasion of his polemic Lisbon's exhibition in December 1916 where he showed avant-garde post-cubist paintings. It was later included inside the edition of Almada's futurist short story *K4 O Quadrado Azul*, for which Amadeo supervised the printing in Porto. This manifesto disdained the traditionalists, naming, again, José de Figueiredo, while seeking to inaugurate a new taste by force, represented by Amadeo's painting, which embodied the rejection of naturalism and symbolism that the avant-garde artists proclaimed.

Almada urges the public not to miss the exhibition with his lapidary formulations and an enthusiastic affirmation that Amadeo was indispensable for the twentieth century to happen. A stimulus for the formation of an audience for Amadeo's exhibition, this document also aimed to prepare for the avant-garde proposals of Almada himself, who wrote in the first-person plural, declaring that art for the twentieth century must be an "Experience" of modernity: "We futurists don't know History, we only know the Life that passes through Us."

This too is a Nietzschean echo, that can be traced to the *Second Untimely Consideration - On the use and abuse of history for life* (1874) and its attack on History that the philosopher considered completely separated from the experience of life. Celebrating experience instead of history is another way of rejecting the past, while embracing the present, by focusing on the "here and now" of direct experience, on the constant stimulus of senses freed from rational, historical, civilised reflection. However, this too is put into perspective by, again, a reference to the so-called "discoveries" age. Almada affirms that the Exhibition of Amadeo is "the concise document of the Portuguese Race in the Twentieth Century". Furthermore, he states that: "The Portuguese Race does not need rehabilitation as unprepared traditionalists pretend to think; it needs to be born to the century

Earth lives on. The Maritime Discovery of the Route to Índia does not belong to us because we did not participate in that deed physically and that event belongs much more to the Fifteenth Century than to Portugal."

In Almada's text, the regeneration that 'rebirth' provides is as much for the individual as for, or even more, the nation. According to the manifesto, there is nothing more to expect from history: what is from the fifteenth century must remain in the fifteenth century and it is necessary to experience the twentieth century. That is why Almada refers to Amadeo, in bold letters, as "the first Discovery of Portugal in Europe in the Twentieth century"<sup>33</sup>.

Almada materialises in an artist and his work what it means to aesthetically re-found Portugal and declares plainly "the Discovery of the Maritime Route to India is less important than Amadeo". This manifesto confirms that the Portuguese futurist project intertwines aesthetics and politics: political regeneration goes hand in hand with, and depends on, aesthetic regeneration. The futurist gesture of propagandising the erasure of the culture of the past is expressed, in the Portuguese case, in the proclamation that the historical past glorified in nationalist discourses like the "discovery of India" (and that Salazar's dictatorship would come to exacerbate) must be replaced by what makes sense in the present and that is to live intensely and aesthetically. Moreover, Amadeo is a discovery "in Europe", not outside of it — that is, Almada is keen to affirm that Portugal is aesthetically fully 'at pace' with modern present (Eurocentric) time.

This exhortation and appeal to the public to "educate itself", and to participate in this "rebirth" is what is also at stake in the manifesto for the Ballets Russes that Almada writes, prints and distributes in November 1917, when Diaghilev's company arrives in Portugal and stays for four months, due to the ongoing war.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> These words have affinity with an unpublished note by Fernando Pessoa meant for advertising *Orpheu* n. 3: "Today, this magazine is the only bridge between Portugal and Europe, and even the only major reason Portugal has for existing as an independent nation. / Reading ORPHEU is the only civilised act that can be practised in Portugal today, except for suicide with an incineration order in one's will. / To buy ORPHEU is to return from Africa. To understand ORPHEU is to have returned from Africa a long time ago." (Pessoa, 1993: 126).

<sup>34</sup> The manifesto was included, as a separate sheet of paper, in the magazine *Portugal Futurista* that came out in November 1917. Although that version was signed also by composer Ruy Coelho and architect José Pacheco, it is documented that Almada was the only author. There is a previous version of the document in Almada Negreiros' estate that shows only his signature, which confirms his affirmation that he was the single author of the manifesto, as he told a newspaper in 1925. "Almada responde à carta de Ruy Coelho" in *Diário de Lisboa*, 4 May 1925, 2.

Almada exhorts the public to “give itself to European Civilisation”, to self-regenerate by embracing the Ballets Russes, that dispense with any kind of previous education to be understood. “The Russian ballets have a happy understanding of modern Art”, he states and when he lists its characteristics, he chooses among other words the terms “spontaneous”, “infantile”, and “naïve”. In fact, in the Ballets Russes there was a combination of sophistication and the search for a primeval language in folk art: “As soon as it premiered in Paris, Diaghilev’s company immediately conquered the Western elite’s affection, mainly because it conciliated the radically innovative nature of its artistic project with a primitivist evocation of the motifs present in Russian folk art.” (Alves, 2024: 167).

It is relevant to notice that some of the poetic experimentations of Almada in the context of Futurism at that same period were incorporating folk rhymes from the oral tradition, such as in the erotic poem “Mima-Fataxa Sinfonia Cosmopolita e Apologia do Triângulo Feminino” [Mima-Fataxa Cosmopolitan Synphony and Apology for the Female Triangle] published in *Portugal Futurista*. One of its verses reads “5: MARIA DOS BRINCOS” which is a nursery rhyme for children to learn how to count. The poem “Litoral”, dedicated to Amadeo and printed as a pamphlet too, to be distributed in 1916 the year of both his exhibitions, in Porto and Lisbon, has several references to pottery, “chita” (a traditional Portuguese fabric), religious folk prayers (“Sinhora do Livramento”), or exotic references such as “restos de sarracenos” [saracen traces] and “Astrakan maltês de misticismo bárbaro” [Maltese Astrakan of barbaric mysticism]. And one of its verses is also a folk proverb: “a chover e a fazer Sol estão-se as bruxas a pentear” [rain and sunshine, the witches are combing their hair]. Thus, the idea of regeneration within futurism expresses itself also in this childish or naïve trope of primitivism, in the sense that there is a primeval way of learning, as if for the first time.<sup>35</sup>

The point is that the Portuguese futurists needed to re-found their own national historical discourse and that is why the idea of “discovery” is strong: according to these texts, the world must be rediscovered as if for the first time in order to reconfigure the supposed glory of past times in an aesthetic intervention in modern Europe.

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<sup>35</sup> “Far from requiring a colonial other, modernists could as easily accommodate rural and urban peasants to primitivist categories of authenticity and outsiderhood, looking to folk art of the rural peasantry or popular art of the urban working class to lend greater authenticity to their own expressions of artistic and social criticism.” (Antliff and Leighton, 2003: 230).

Finally, the other 'negative' futurist manifesto by Almada was actually the third to be written and it was presented in a Futurist Conference that took place on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1917 at Theatro Republica in Lisbon (after 1918 it took the name of its patron, Teatro São Luiz).<sup>36</sup> In that conference there were readings of other futurist manifestos, namely *Tuons le Clair de la Lune* (1911) and *Le Music-Hall* (1913) by Marinetti and the *Futurist Manifesto of Lust* (1913) by Valentine Saint Point which was read right after Almada's *Ultimatum Futurista às Gerações Portuguesas do Século XX* [Futurist Ultimatum to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Portuguese Generations]. Again, the word "Ultimatum" in the title is relevant as a reprise of the trauma of the British 1890 Ultimatum that threatened the Portuguese colonial possessions in Africa. It is a deliberate provocation as if to trigger yet another trauma, one that would allowed to surpass the political trauma with aesthetic rupture and innovation. This manifesto was also published in the magazine *Portugal Futurista*, meaning that two texts in it had "Ultimatum" in their title: Campos' and Almada's. This means that they were actually impersonating the role of the British by presenting two Ultimatums in order to Portugal renew itself according to the demands of European modernity and not its past idea of empire.

The publication in *Portugal Futurista* is preceded by a description signed by Almada, next to his famous photograph in overalls, a comic Chaplinesque costume<sup>37</sup> in which he acknowledges his "inspiration in Marinetti" and affirms the "genius optimism of his youth". The self-regeneration topic is evident: Almada presents himself as the "conscient result of his own experience" exhibiting his youth "I am 22 years of health and intelligence". He wants to transform his country in order Portugal can be worthy of himself. That means the nation had to be at pace with the futurist artist, and that's when politics enter the scene. Immediately in the first paragraphs of the manifesto a direct reference to the

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<sup>36</sup> Günter Berghaus has mentioned how this conference was inspired in the Italian futurist serate, which often took place in theatres and had a strong political charge that led Marinetti to call them *comizio artistico*. The Futurism scholar tries to demonstrate how the Portuguese conference fell short of the ones made by the Italian futurists, by failing to attract large audiences and media reception, and showing a weak programme and planning which Berghaus speculates being largely circumstantial and improvised, implying the lack of proper understanding usually attributed to the periphery, seeing it as limited to the emulation of an exemplary centre (Berghaus, 2017: 23-37).

<sup>37</sup> Sascha Bru has, I believe correctly, described Almada's costume as a reference to Charles Chaplin's baggy pants in *The Tramp* (1915) contradicting the usual reading of it as an aviator or factory worker outfit (Bru, 2018: 72). Almada was a huge admirer of Chaplin, as testified by several mentions in his writings, namely the 1921 article called "Charlie Chaplin" (*Diário de Lisboa*, 11 May 1921, 3).

republican regime comes about — and we must take into account the Ultimatum was read in a theatre called Republica after the end of the monarchy in 1910 (before that, the theatre was named after Queen Amélia).



Fig. 4. Almada in the costume he wore for the Futurist Conference at Teatro Republica in Lisbon, and the description of the Conference next to it. *Portugal Futurista*, 1917.

Almada says that the republic only proves the decadence of “the race” and that it has no creative power. A new nation must be created with no consideration for the preceding; “We need to create the Portuguese homeland for the Twentieth Century!”<sup>38</sup> is the motto repeated throughout the manifesto. And that can only be achieved by creating one’s own experience namely, in war. Almada dedicates more than a dozen paragraphs praising war, including saying that all Europe is concentrated in the front, and therefore, all civilisation is fighting the war. His praise of war as something that can renew humanity and “wake up the creative and constructive spirit”, in which men can reawaken their primordial instinct, is a direct emulation of Marinetti’s idea of war as “hygiene”. However, it is relevant to notice that in Almada the praise of war comes right after the criticism of the republicans, who were the ones defending the participation of Portugal in the Great War. The way he puts it could be read as taking advantage

<sup>38</sup> Pessoa’s theoretical endeavour also aims at reimagining the Portuguese homeland for the twentieth century (Russo, 2024: 37).

of the war promoted by Afonso Costa to instead annihilate the traditional historical values, the values of sentimentalism and “saudade” (an untranslatable Portuguese word which significance is close to nostalgia) that he associates with the republican regime and to replace them by “modern heroism”.

By then Portugal had been sending soldiers to France since the beginning of January but they only got to the front in early April. However, the defence of the colonies in Africa, Angola and Mozambique, which were contiguous to Germany’s colonies, had military contingents since September 1914 comprising Portuguese and indigenous soldiers. The death toll of Portuguese soldiers in Africa ascended to over 5500 men, much higher than in Europe (Afonso, 2021: 297).<sup>39</sup> One of the soldiers sent to the French front in January 1917 was Almada’s brother, António Almada Negreiros, who had a military career. In a brief letter to Amadeo dated from January 4<sup>th</sup> 1917 Almada writes about the costs of having printed his poem “Litoral”, about his short story *K4 O Quadrado Azul* that was being printed up north, and he mentions that, despite recovering from recent surgery his “pain, now, has a different direction. My brother, whom is who I admire most, is already departing for France.”<sup>40</sup> The literary scholar Manuela Parreira da Silva, analysing war in Portuguese modernisms, has mentioned how this letter shows Almada’s real worries about the war and commented that the praise for war in Almada’s *Ultimatum* was a metaphor for the praise for revolution (Parreira da Silva, 2023: 210-211).<sup>41</sup>

This reading complies with what Renato Poggioli wrote about Futurism in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*: “The futurist manifestation represents, so to speak, a prophetic and utopian phase, the arena of agitation and preparation for the announced revolution, if not the revolution itself.” (Poggioli apud Perloff, 1986: xvii). And indeed, the futurist praise for technology and industry associated with the urge for new forms of art, philosophy and language was seen by Antonio Gramsci as Marxist at heart.<sup>42</sup> The idea of a libertarian technology that allows to refound aesthetics has in fact Marxist resonances but, as Gramsci later criticised, Italian Futurism was tainted by the praise of war as the “world’s only hygiene”.

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<sup>39</sup> Afonso: “Portugal e a guerra nas colónias”, 297.

<sup>40</sup> Almada Negreiros, letter to Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso. Estate Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso. Gulbenkian Library and Art Archives, Lisbon.

<sup>41</sup> Eiras has also noted Almada’s contradiction between the criticism of war in *A Cena do Ódio* and the praising of war in the *Ultimatum Futurista às Gerações Portuguesas do Século XX*. (Eiras, 2015: 314).

<sup>42</sup> Gramsci: “Marinetti rivoluzionario?” (1921), apud Perloff, 1986: 2.

The “cleanliness” or “hygiene” metaphor is present in the Portuguese manifestos associated with regeneration and rebirth, but not as much as war. The *Manifesto Anti-Dantas* ends stating “A NECESSIDADE DE PORTUGAL SER QUALQUER COISA DE ASSEADO!” [THE NEED FOR PORTUGAL TO BE SOMETHING CLEAN!] and Álvaro de Campos’ *Ultimatum* expresses a suffocation with the current philosophy, religion, art, literature, politics, the war, and proclaims the need to get rid of them and to “breathe”, shouting to “open all the windows, even more windows than those that exist in the world!”. Moreover, Campos’ further states “Attach a locomotive to that war!”, which indicates not so much a praise for the war but a wish for it to end quickly, to perform all the destruction needed in order to restart all over.

I believe Almada’s statement in his *Ultimatum* is something analogous: although not in favour of the specific war that was taking place, it says that, since it has started, let it destroy the republican regime, as one of the phrases in his *Ultimatum* shows: “It is necessary to explain to our people what democracy is, so they won’t fall in temptation again.” It is, nevertheless, a contradictory manifest: its debt to Marinetti’s futurism forces Almada to praise war as a metaphor to join “European Civilisation”, but he cannot but mention the real war, considering Portugal was participating in it at that precise moment. The decision to participate in the war was enabled by a political coup that the *Orpheu* protagonists had fiercely opposed.<sup>43</sup> This contradiction could only be resolved through parody.

### **3. FINAL REMARKS — PANDEMONIUM AND REVOLUTION: PORTUGUESE FUTURISM STUCK IN AN ETERNAL BEGINNING**

The Portuguese futurist manifestos are very much involved with national and international politics, as their Italian counterparts. They deliberately promoted aesthetic revolution interconnected with political revolution, paradoxically rejecting democracy and encouraging what may be described as an aesthetic aristocracy, but in a vague, undetermined way.

It is worth noting that the rejection of democracy had to do with the constant political, economic, and social instability of the early stages of the republican regime in Portugal (between 1910 and 1918 there were dozens of governments, some of them

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<sup>43</sup> In Almada’s short story *A Engomadeira*, published in 1917, the narrator is presented as quite indifferent regarding the ongoing war, not pro-Allies and in fact much more pro-German (I analyse this matter in a forthcoming essay, “Interseccionismo e política em A Engomadeira de Almada Negreiros”).

lasting only a few days). It encompassed several attempts of dictatorial coups, some of them successful, even if brief, and a political militia, that imprisoned, beat up and murdered opponents. Nevertheless, there was a substantial difference towards Italian futurists regarding their position on war. The Portuguese manifestos have "violence and precision", and a literary performativity that has characteristics of its own, by dealing with the nationalist uses of the past by the republican regime that they contested and wanted to see annihilated. And they are "contextual and performative", meaning they operate within a historical context and a horizon of expected impact and reaction (Foster, 1996: 15-16). The primitivist trope of returning to a primordial origin is expressed in most of them and is also present in poetic texts produced side by side the manifestos.

In his criticism of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Hal Foster notes that "he misses its mimetic dimension, whereby the avant-garde mimes the degraded world of capitalist modernity in order not to embrace it but to mock it. [...] He also misses its utopian dimension, whereby the avant-garde proposes not what it can be so much as what cannot be." (Foster, 1996: 16). Besides this utopian, undefined future, it is the mocking character that I believe is very much present in the Portuguese manifestos, most notably in the two *Ultimatums* by Campos and Almada, which curiously are the ones that emulate more closely the futurist manifesto formulas. Namely, those manifestos are the only ones presenting enumeration, one of the most recognizable characteristics of the manifesto artistic genre. Therefore, when the manifestos look more like the Italian ones and use their formulas, they are so because they work as parody.

The possibility of directing humour towards Futurism itself is in a way more relaxed by the peripheral distance of Portuguese avant-garde from its international counterparts and it signals how interpretations of Futurism depended on local contexts and necessarily diversified its ways of meaning. In the case of Almada's futurist conference, this is confirmed by an advertisement for a second conference that Almada publishes in the newspaper shortly after his performance at Teatro Republica. After ironically thanking the public and the press for the "extraordinary success" of his first conference, he announces he will present the second part of it as a "comdia futurista" [futurist comedy] which will help "our urgent mission to make our Portugal young and joyful"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Almada Negreiros "A nova ideia: Futurismo. Vae realizar-se brevemente em Lisboa um espectáculo futurista", *A Capital*, 20 April 1917.

Hence, there is a mocking character in the Portuguese manifestos, especially vivid in the *Ultimatums*, that must be taken into consideration when interpreting Almada's praise for war in his *Ultimatum Futurista*.<sup>45</sup> The rudeness and humour in texts like *A Cena do Ódio*, *Manifesto Anti-Dantas* and both *Ultimatums* is sometimes expressed with racial prejudice against black and Romani people. Although racism and the subalternisation of other people was structural and not questioned, recurring to such biased jargon guaranteed easy laughs.

Almada's manifestos insolence have a particular and deliberate childish expression — what is the typographic hand in the *Manifesto Anti-Dantas* if not a toy revolver, like the ones children make up with their hands when they play cowboys? The return to infancy, also a primitivist trope, means to have no filters and a free playfulness regarding serious topics, like war. Crossing it with Diogenes' cynicism and his rejection of civilised society, or, yet, with the Nietzschean return to childhood in his Zarathustra<sup>46</sup> (also mentioned by Almada in *A Cena do Ódio*), which means to philosophize from ground zero, to discover the world as if for the first time, this results in an explosive mixture to comment aesthetically on present politics.

The libertarian notion of "Revolution" implicated in Futurism, should regard the word's etymology. As Enzo Traverso recalls, it comes from the Latin "*revolutio, revolvere*: returning to the origins. It means a kind of rotation by which something goes back to its starting point." (Traverso, 2021). It is to interrupt the course of time, and to irrupt in it the Nietzschean *untimely*. That means that even though Futurism is based on the belief in history as evolutionary progress, its revolutionary character means to insert a rupture in that timeline. Despite its final aim being to accelerate into a utopian future, it gets stuck in a constant now. This now can be seen as the now of infancy, of playing.

In his text "In Playland. Reflections on history and play", Giorgio Agamben evokes the story written by Carlo Collodi in 1881 about Pinocchio, who arrives in Playland where nothing is

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Although Günter Berghaus quotes this letter, it is only to mark the lack of continuity of Portuguese Futurism, and he does not acknowledge the "comedy" element mentioned in it (Berghaus, 2017: 31).

<sup>45</sup> The way he presented it, with staged interruptions by Santa Rita and showing the backstage to the audience is well documented (Almada Negreiros, 2016b: 71-78); and about Almada, futurism and humour, see Pinto dos Santos, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Pedro Eiras and Manuela Parreira da Silva have also referred to the Nietzschean return to childhood and its importance to Almada (Eiras, 2017: 300; Parreira da Silva, 2023: 213). See also Pinto dos Santos, 2025.

done other than play. Agamben writes about how the permanent state of holiday that is lived there corresponds to a destruction of the calendar. Stopping the calendar is simultaneously an acceleration of time, since every day becomes a holiday. A “pandemonium” is installed in Playland in which no conventional rules work and the children’s play tears history to pieces (Agamben, 2007 (1987): 74-96). The regeneration brought by rebirth, and the return to a timeless realm where childish behaviour is possible — where they can be like brats shaking the established political and aesthetic order — that is the primitivist trope most present in Portuguese futurist texts.

**Note:** All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. In order not to overload the text with footnotes, only a few of the Portuguese originals are cited.

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