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For a Genealogy of End-of-the-World Parties

Por uma genealogia das festas de fim do mundo

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Abstract: Why to think the past only or mostly by trauma and wounds? This essay tries to propose a genealogy at cinema from parties, especially those related to the ends of worlds, particularly from a transcultural and transhistorical constellation, which includes following movies *Marie Antoinette* (2006), by Sofia Coppola, *La règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939), by Jean Renoir, and *Madame de…* (*Earrings of Madame de...*, 1953), by Max Ophüls. We understand moments like the French Revolution and the First and Second World Wars as ends of the world in movies in which there is a sensation of frail or melancholic temporality with joy.
Keywords: parties; genealogy; constellation; end of the world; ways of life.

Resumo: Por que só pensar o passado a partir do trauma e da ferida? Este ensaio tenta propor uma genealogia no cinema por meio de festas, especialmente aquelas relacionadas a fins de mundo, em específico dentro de uma constelação trans-histórica e transcultural, que inclui os filmes *Marie Antoinette* (Maria Antonieta, 2006), de Sofia Coppola, *La règle du jeu* (*A regra do jogo*, 1939), de Jean Renoir, e *Madame de…* (Desejos proibidos, 1953), de Max Ophüls. Entendemos momentos como a Revolução Francesa e as Primeira e Segunda Guerras Mundiais como fins de mundo nos filmes em que há uma sensação de temporalidade frágil e melancólica com a alegria.
Palavras-chave: festas; genealogia; constelação; fim de mundo; modos de vida.

I consider images as means of creating or proposing ways of life, an ambition that was fundamental during the classical avant-gardes, when the desire was to reapproximate art and life in a critique of the supposed autonomy of bourgeois art (BÜRGER, 1987)[2], which should not be limited to the avant-gardes, as can be observed in the counterculture of the 1960s or in various proposals for performances and relational aesthetics (BOURRIAUD, 2002; 2009). If, for some, today is the moment of urgency, of daily struggles for survival, the moment of indignation, of insurgency in the face of the intolerable, of reconstruction, I would like to ask myself which past I can assume in order to perhaps have some present and glimpse some future far from suffocating utopias. This gesture of mine may have arisen from an initial escape from the present, from the proliferation of moralizing political clichés in the work of art, which have been amplified by social networks and are present in both the right and the left, both in fundamentalist religious views, in idealizing views of the past, and in art close to feminist and LGBTQIAPN+ movements, among others. Despite the various possibilities, I feel a sense of discomfort and detachment from the present. Instead of Afro-Amerindian, decolonial pasts, I turn to other spectres that haunt me much more in the globalized modernity, a term that I still find more precise and fruitful due to the dialogue it enables with culture and its heritage than that of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and their variations. In the face of this search, in my writing, one question persisted and I will proceed with it as a horizon in this essay: why think about the past, above all, from the perspective of trauma and wounds, genocides, wars, and dictatorships?

Faced with the past and present catastrophes, with the greatest pain, with the greatest tiredness and failure, with the constant melancholy that constitute me, allow me to also look, in a genealogy parallel to Modernity, in the Foucauldian reading of Nietzsche, which I have problematized elsewhere (LOPES, 2020), at those who dance in the face of the ends of the world, through festivals, which, I hope, will gain new meanings as a result of the Brazilian historical moment.

Something emerges not only as an unexpected desire, a burst of joy, which, in a reading of Nietzsche by Clément Rosset (2000), without a cause, emerges even

[2] I make this cut in order to locate a certain debate, without adhering to a linear and successive history, not being unaware of other possibilities for thinking about art that imply recurrences, simultaneities, and discontinuities. I will mention two formulations that could problematize this temporal designation: that of Rancière, which is presented in several books, in thinking about ethical, representative, and aesthetic regimes (which seems to include both bourgeois art and avant-garde art) of art that I will not discuss here because I have many doubts about its analytical and historical benefit. Another, more recent formulation, which seeks to think of Brazilian Modernism not only as avant-garde, but also as a cultural movement (BOTELHO; HOELZ, 2022).

with and not despite or against the pain. It is something that simply happens upon entering and hearing that song which you do not know or recognise getting louder, which can make your body an unknown place, a highly sensory pleasure even if you are dancing alone. It is a joy that can be thought of by putting this Nietzschean perspective into dialogue with an Afro-Brazilian thinking (SODRÉ, 2006; 2017) under a queer gaze, as in Wlian's (2022) reading, which approximates contemporary Brazilian films and musicals and which needs to be further researched and explored. At least, here, at first, I will not be focusing on LGBTQIAPN+ experiences, dissident bodies, or Afro-Brazilian traditions, but they will certainly be fundamental for thinking later about a 1970s disco party lineage that I intend to investigate.

This essay derives from my current research project. So far, I have revisited the decline of the gold cycle in Minas Gerais in the second half of the 18th century and the decline of the coffee cycle, especially in the Paraíba valley, in the second half of the 19th century, as modern catastrophes, even ends of the world, in the wake of a melancholic Modernism (LOPES, 2020). At first, nothing would seem more opposed to this lineage than writing about parties, but as I watched films and chose what seemed to catch more of my attention, I realized something, which for lack of a better word, I called end-of-the-world parties, not celebratory, foundational parties. I do not know if this implies a strange encounter between joy and melancholy, between the rapture of the present moment and the feeling that the past consisting of ruins never ceases.

Also, in this new journey in progress, I have not yet found any Brazilian films that could dialogue with the ones I am going to mention here. One bet would be to think about whether what Mark Fisher (2022) called Popular Modernism, which was focused on the encounter between the working-class, pop, and modernist cultures in 1970s England, can be put into dialogue with the Brazilian experience of suffocation, during the same period, in the midst of the civilian-military dictatorship, and of the subsequent post-modern transnational disenchantment, of the AIDS pandemic, of gothics, perhaps continued by emos and shoegazers. It also does not seem to me that joy is the litmus test here, in the anthropophagic-tropicalist lineage, at least in its more well-known readings. It concerns reinventing joy in the same way that melancholy was reinvented.

In any case, what I want to revisit here in films are some parties before the onset of media culture, under the horizon of the return of parties after the coronavirus pandemic. My aim is not so much to evoke parties as experiences of encounters associated exclusively with the violence and irrationality of crowds, under the shadow

of disorder and chaos, but to evoke the ecstasy of the encounter of bodies, as well as the expectation of the encounter and what remains when the party is over. I would like to contribute with a few more fragments in this story that has already had a first draft in response to a few contemporary Brazilian films in "Depois da Festa" [After the Party], "O cosmopolitismo nos pequenos gestos" [Cosmopolitanism in Small Gestures], and "O Retorno do Artifício" [The Return of Artifice], which were published in *Afetos, Relações e Encontros com Filmes Brasileiros Contemporâneos* [Affects, Relations, and Encounters with Contemporary Brazilian Films] (2016) and "Por uma história queer das sensações" [For a Queer History of Sensations] (LOPES, 2021). Perhaps these essays will take on another dimension after what follows. I repeat, it concerns parties in films, because I have never been a bohemian, a party-goer, a party monster. When I started going to parties in the Brasília nightlife of the 1980s and 1990s, which were revisited by José Eduardo Belmonte in *A Concepção* (2005), I was one of those who stayed in a corner, only gradually entering. I often enjoyed myself, and was often frustrated by romantic fantasies of encounters that never happened. Curious. Would I only be able to talk about parties now when I am almost no longer there, or am only there for the images? As a recollection, memory, or wish, an anticipation, a fantasy? In the absence of face-to-face meetings during the two years of the coronavirus pandemic, I made this personal journey through parties, especially based on an undergraduate and graduate online seminar. We tried to think about parties not in a strictly anthropological dimension. We did not follow scripts of urban scenes and subcultures, nor did we do ethnographies, but above all I was interested in ways of staging and experiencing the sensations that art can bring, revive, and enable. Now that isolation is no longer desirable – after all, we survived, for better or worse – how can we think of parties not only as a journey through memories and sensations from the past, but as a way of relearning how to be in the world now? Perhaps in this desire to evoke we can relive and prepare ourselves for other moments and ways of being together.

Instead of diving into myself and my physical surroundings, cloistered in my small apartment during the pandemic, I thought of escaping by talking about some of the parties that welcomed me in films, on the computer screen, while reading great modern novels that I had not had the time or energy to read until then. Distancing myself from notions such as style, movements, works, and authors, I think of a genealogy, and also of a constellation, a term inspired by Walter Benjamin's work that perhaps implies more of a network than a line (SOUTO, 2020, p. 161), I would say, a network of affinities, a word for which I have a certain fondness because

it makes it possible to discuss trans-historical relations, ancestries, and heritages. Could Foucauldian genealogy dialogue with Benjaminian constellations to establish connections between films from different moments and different national cultures? Constellations are imaginary groupings of stars. They are constituted by the localized human gaze, from a certain angle of observation, based on their own mental projections and their repertoire of known objects. They are *a matter of perspective*. (SOUTO, 2020, p. 157, my emphasis).

The constellation therefore combines different and independent stars, but how can the films mentioned in the summary be seen in the same constellation, from the same perspective? If through the party, in what way? Instead of Benjamin's broader vision of realizing a constellation assembled from ideas, I am thinking of vague and fragile sensations. Could I think of films as parts of constellations in which something approximates them without their losing their singularities? Or rather, would we have to consider them not in their singularities identified in detailed analyses, nor as representations that are social and historical mediations, but decomposed into scenes, gestures, voices, bodies, and objects, in a fragmentary and unfinished montage based on a question or a problem?

> The constellation is the crystallisation of a path of thinking and carries within it a work. It is not just content, but a way of ordering and displaying – which certainly also involves reflection. When ready, it bears the marks of a journey. The constellation is not exactly a thing, but *an idea of relation*. (SOUTO, 2020, p. 160, my emphasis)

By relating films to each other, what do they reveal to me that they could not in isolation? Perhaps this constellation that I seek, more than of films, of staged parties, may be constituted of frivolity, seen not as mere escapism or alienation but as sensibility (BARBOSA, 2017), through the ornamental that is recovered in the history and theory of cinema (GALT, 2011), which privileges both colours and objects, on the one hand, and plot and dialogue, on the other, by considering characters as plastic elements, and through artifice, an aesthetic category centered on theatricality, without, however, placing the party as a central space, which I have problematized and historicised, in various formulations, from the Baroque to the Neo-Baroque, passing through dandyism, through camp, unless recently as already indicated. What other event could better embody artifice than the party, from the space as a setting to the bodies transformed into costumes and masks? Or rather, not any party.

Let us proceed to *Marie Antoinette* (2006), by Sofia Coppola, *Madame de…* (*Earrings of Madame de…*, 1953), by Max Ophüls, and *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939), by Jean Renoir. In the three films, there is at least one scene or sequence in which the party takes center stage. This journey is not through pasts frozen in time, but is rather for those who have not been going to parties, but would like to go again or to find parties where they feel that they belong, a journey based on parties in the cinema, on a cinema of parties, but beyond the cinema. There is a strong and important tradition of studies on parties that has focused on popular culture, in which, for example, Carnival appears as a central manifestation of Brazilian culture3[3]. Unlike both images of social inversion, in a Bakhtinian tradition (2010) that rethinks the party not as a place of escape and alienation, but of possibilities for social transformation, and a Dionysian, orgiastic, transgressive lineage, the parties in my search were related to a European court life in 18th century palaces that was ruled by etiquette (RIBEIRO, 1983), the ritualization of social life as a space for seduction (BAUDRILLARD, 1991), and intrigue, and that was permeated by libertine thinking, fascination with artifice, decoration, and frivolity, as well as Watteau's open-air *fêtes galantes* and atmospheres. Although, as I have said, I am not interested in highlighting, in this constellation, the topicality of a period style, this dialogue with the Rococo is still curious, which "makes evident the search for everyday comfort and the acquisition of pleasure arising from the perception of the present time" and in which "the Rococo remains on the surface, in the present moment, far removed from the desire to predict the future or dwell on the past" (MENDES, 2011, p. 4). Comfort, pleasure, hedonism, the surface may well be values devalued by means of the desire for transformation, convictions, and certainties of a revolutionary spirit, bourgeois austerity. or a social or minimalist realism that also bore fruit in the cinema from the 1990s onwards.

I will begin with a relatively recent film, which nonetheless returns to the historical moment that interests me in this genealogy, by proposing another origin and another constellation of parties. When I began to rewatch Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006)[4], what caught my attention was the coexistence of a certain

[3] Despite all the documentaries about Carnival in Brazilian cinema, only A *Lira do Delírio* (1978), by Walter Lima Júnior, comes to mind, even though it does not have apotheotic scenes of block parties and parades. Thinking back, I remember the exuberant final carnival scene in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945), which perhaps refers to a celebration of popular theater, especially the *comedia dell'arte*, which is also revisited in Ettore Scola's *Il Viaggio di Capitan Fracassa* (1990).

[4] Sofia Coppola's films as a whole (ROGERS, 2018; FERRISS, 2021) can provide elements to deepen the discussions suggested here.

aristocratic attitude and a view that was not revolutionary, which saw the court only as a world of privilege and social injustice, but bourgeois, which saw hypocrisy, waste, and etiquette as uselessness.

The film neither idealises nostalgia in the molds of great historical cinema, nor critically and socially revisits an era. If the court rituals already appear emptied by the gaze of the young Marie Antoinette, the glimpse of the revolution is also uninteresting, or of little interest[5]. *Marie Antoinette* is a late film, out of sync with the cinemas of the real that were already hegemonic in festivals and in criticism. If there are dead times, they are marked both by boredom and by the frivolity of shopping for dresses, sweets, by games, as analyzed by André Antonio Barbosa (2013).

Between a consumerist bimbo and a person unsuited for the challenges of her time, Marie Antoinette, in the film, is capable of a surprising gesture such as that of bowing to the crowd threatening to invade Versailles (or of offering her head to be guillotined?). This comes almost at the end of the film (1h51min 30s), a gesture as ambiguous as the only comment, the latter absent from the film, made by Louis XVI in his diary, on the eve and the day of the storming of the Bastille, in which he simply wrote the word "nothing," which seemed to say that he had not hunted that day, one of his greatest amusements, or imply a synthesis or metaphor of his vision of what was happening (Nicolardot, 2021). Something similar happens when the host of the party in Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* invites all his guests to sleep so that everything can go back to the way it was, after the "accident" of the murder of André Jurieu, his wife's lover. The party always ends, albeit for different reasons, as in the revisiting of the Viennese fin-de-siècle by Max Ophüls in *Madame de…*, the Berlin of the 1920s and 1930s by Isherwood and Bob Fosse in *Cabaret* (1972), the New York of the 1920s by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Baz Luhrmann in *Great Gatsby* (2013), in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), in the post-orgy of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), the disco nights of the 1970s in Mark Christopher's *Studio 54* (1998) and Whit Stillman's *The Last Days of Disco* (1998).

[5] It is not my intention to study the wealth of critical acclaim of this film. However, it is important to recall that its reception has had, in general, a strong critique of how history was used in the biopic and how it can be remade from different perspectives of history and of the director, in a postmodern context (see, for example, Pam Cook, 2013, and Holthausen, 2012) or in relation to the fashion (Brevik-Zender, 2011). In Brazil, there have been readings of the film's political and historical implications and its topicality, which are distinct from an aforementioned postmodern reading, by, among others, Vladimir Safatle (2011) and Luiz Carlos Oliveira Junior (2007), to which André Antonio Barbosa (2013, p. 99-102) responds in a way that is closer to what I think, but which I will not develop here. In any case, I owe to André Antonio Barbosa's dissertation many suggestions for my reading of the party in this essay.

In the world in which we live, news from the grand Story can constantly invade us, even more so today through social networks and mobile phones than through the mass media of the 20th century. Perhaps at other moments it was easier to separate ourselves from the present, brought above all by newspapers to which a large part of the population did not have access, in which our daily lives were not invaded by a desire for simultaneous communication, information, and connection. By rewatching these films, I also saw other divisions of time, of what it is to be in a place without screens or individual connections with what happens outside the space in which one finds oneself. Perhaps that is why the gesture of closing a door, of retiring to a room, of moving to another place, implied greater discontinuities than the omnipresence of the virtual world, for which it is perhaps more difficult to establish limits, refusals. In other words, being at a party perhaps had an intensity that we do not reach today. Perhaps it was easier to create refuges, escapes, islands…

I do not know if I should have begun with a film. But how to make a collage of party scenes? In the wake of the historical anachronism and eclecticism of postmodern cinema in the 1980s, disbelieving in grand narratives of redemption, without fearing the visual pleasure of the spectacle, colors, and camera movements, if I were to choose a party in this first film, it would be the masquerade party where Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI escape from Versailles to Paris and from each other. The end of the 18th century is revisited by the gothic punk and techno pop of the 1980s, in which Vivianne Westwood's *new romantic* clothes and the Rococo create important temporal connections to be better investigated in the film, which goes from Marie Antoinette's arrival at Versailles in 1770 (no dates are indicated in the film) to marry Louis XVI, at the age of fourteen, until her departure from there, imprisoned by the French Revolution, in 1789, nineteen years after her arrival. Time is compressed by the atmosphere more than a dramatic succession of linearly connected facts. Marie Antoinette's marriage is a contract, a business deal, a state matter, and even her affair with Count Fersen or her farewell to the court at the end has nothing of sentimental romanticism or tragedy. Life, love, politics, and death are not taken so seriously.

But "what positionings and movements of bodies, what functions, visibilities. and dispositions do we see in Coppola's *mise en scène*? […] One can answer that we see bodies in *party* mode" (BARBOSA, 2013, p. 197). By party cinema we do not mean films in which parties happen all the time, but those in which the party is central for understanding the characters and through them we can glimpse a way of life. A party that constitutes

> a community whose sensible values concern the pleasures that can be *enjoyed* in the very fleeting and material flow of the world and the acute awareness that these pleasures are banal, small, brief, and transitory. […] it faces death head on, the essentially fragile, rapid, and accidental condition of our being in the world. It is thus through the *party* that Marie Antoinette melancholically finds her way in the world. The post-punk sound sets the somber and destructive tone […] of these party sequences. We have the gothic sounds of Siouxsie and the Banshees (at the masquerade ball) and The Cure (at the coronation), or New Order's "Ceremony" at Antoinette's 18th birthday party. (BARBOSA, 2013, p. 107-108).

The music presents a melancholic beauty, a fragile moment of joy, in the face of the absence of great meanings and political or existential motivations. Thus, if I had to choose a party scene, it would be the masked ball when, after a dizzying array of pleasures associated with consumption (shoes, fabrics, fans, wigs, sweets, drinks, games) inside Versailles, in the midst of an apparently sexless marriage, Marie Antoinette leaves incognito with Louis, while they were still crown prince and princess, for a masked ball, possibly in a castle in Paris. Unlike the rigid and distant rituals of the court, *Hong Kong Garden*, by Siouxsie and the Banshees, reveals a climax of bodies meeting, of ecstasy, of joy, of seduction games, as in Marie Antoinette's encounter with Count Fersen, with whom she will have an affair, all lasting just over three minutes (58min-61min). The day dawning when the couple returns to Versailles still bears traces of this joy. Later in the film, Louis XV dies and Louis XVI ascends to the throne together with Marie Antoinette, who turns eighteen shortly afterwards. Her birthday party at Versailles, although it evokes the excesses of the masked ball, ends more melancholically, with the day dawning on the shore of the lake and Marie Antoinette drinking amidst the emptiness and vastness of the landscape. Finally, the servants begin to clean the rooms, while Marie Antoinette wakes up and Louis XVI goes hunting, his favourite pastime. Another day of the many to come begins, with its small pleasures and perhaps long boredoms and everyday lives that are not shown, which are interrupted by the French Revolution, as if between the parties of youth and the Revolution there was little of significance, such as the children and the affair with Count Fersen that take up little time in the film and that correspond to almost twenty years. For Europe, it was a world that was changing. For Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette, the end was a farewell to Versailles, her youth, and the parties.

A party is just one more in a succession for those who attend them, like the habits of the nobility, of the haute bourgeoisie, of socialites, but also of a

bohemian life. For them, however good a party may have been, it is only a party, it is fleeting, a moment not to be disregarded, but also not to be overestimated. Neither a transgression of customs nor an orgiastic celebration, the parties over which a sense of finality hangs are what interest me. Could this have been the case with the famous fiscal island ball, the last party of the monarchist elite of the Second Empire in Brazil?[6] Ultimately, these end-of-the world parties do not express celebrations or commemorations of victories, even though these may be their motivations, but a different way of life; they do not erase boredom – the great terror of modernity, this doing nothing (CHARNEY, 1998) – they are not mere forms of survival.

From the 18th century we go to the Belle Époque, which was also for a long time underestimated due to the victorious readings of Modernism and disregarded for its eclecticism and frivolity, but which, in the past few decades, has been recovered beyond a mere pre-modernism, as we can see, for example, by the revaluation of Art Nouveau (PAES, 1985, p. 58-64), in which the taste for the ornamental could even be mixed with a personal political commitment (CARDOSO, 2022, p. 162), but which I prefer in the catchphrase of Afrânio Peixoto that literature would be the smile of society, or in that of Oscar Wilde (2013, p. 325), in his 1891 preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that art is simply useless, this perhaps being its best quality, not so much as a criticism of productivism, of the celebration of work in all of society's activities, but as a contempt for lightness, which is seen as frivolity, irresponsibility, and political noncommitment.

That is how I rewatched Max Ophüls's *Madame de…*[7], which also, despite the absence of dates and historical facts, is clearly part of the Habsburg imaginary (MAGRIS, 1991), which survived the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, an imaginary also found in Lubitsch and Stroheim, as in the adaptation of *La Ronde* (1950) by the popular playwright Arthur Schnitzler[8], which was also directed by Ophüls. While for a world, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that was destined to disappear, it would be best to try to remain immobile, operettas

[6] I thought it was important to find a Brazilian film that could dialogue with the ones that I had chosen, but so far I have not been able to do so. I then remembered *Baile da Ilha Fiscal*, which had repercussions in both painting and literature at the end of the 19th century (EULALIO, 2012, p. 139-182), as well as in Josué Montello's *O Baile da Despedida*, but the lack of time and space in this essay has led me to postpone what could be a rich counterpoint.

[7] For a broad overview of Max Ophüls's films, see Guerin (1988); and for a more detailed reading of *Madame de…*, see Delouche (2017).

[8] Equivalent to what Johann Strauss was for music and perhaps what Stefan Zweig was for literature, from whom Ophüls also adapted *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) and Wes Anderson curiously re-read in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2013).

and waltzes staged the joy of living and the games of seduction centered in Vienna (SCHORSKE, 1988), which the First World War, psychoanalysis and Expressionism would destroy.

In the film, there is also a sense of finality, which is translated here when passion is taken too seriously. The reading that I intend to make stems more from this anachronism, which is not only in the narrative, but in the film itself, beyond its inclusion and that of the author in the transition from classical cinema to modern cinema, a mapping that has already been well done since the Nouvelle Vague (FLORES, 2015).

It concerns the story of an object, the pair of earrings, which, as they exchange hands, at different parties, in different encounters, frame different relations and affects. The settings and objects that are sometimes placed in front of the bodies, such as in Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961) and Wong Kar-Wai's *Faa Yeung nin wa* (*In the Mood for Love*, 2000), are as important as the characters, starting with the protagonist's earrings. The accessories that the Countess received as a wedding gift from her husband and that she sold supposedly to pay off debts will pass through the hands of lovers of both the Countess and her husband, curiously returning to the hands of the protagonist, each time making the affectionate yet convenient marriage more tense.

The lightness of this world made by mirrors, display windows, telescopes, and binoculars, as well as by etiquette and irony, sinks into the vertigo of desire and jealousy, of romantic passion and irreconcilable hatreds. Through an agile camera that goes up and down stairs, the waltz between the countess and her lover, Baron Donati, the Italian ambassador, who is curiously played by Vittorio de Sica, from start to finish, provides a synthesis not only of the relationship between the two, but of a world that will soon persist largely as fantasies that are romantic and escapist, cinematographic and literary. Here, then, I have not chosen a party, but a sequence (35min-40min) that crosses several parties, in an apotheosis of artifice and theatricality, in which time has no thickness or weight, but fleetingness, ever since the Baron leaves the conversation with the general, the Countess' husband, framed by two chandeliers, at a table with mirrors in the background, and begins to dance with the Countess, he being one of several suitors to dance with the her at the ball. From the light and ironic tone, the parties change, with less and less time between them, in the absence of her husband who is travelling. Subjects such as difficulties in Montenegro are perhaps less references to political tensions in the Balkans that would lead to the First World War than the banality of a subject that disguises the increasing intensity

of the relationship between the Baron and the Countess. The camera seems to dance through the halls following the couple. Between columns, curtains, paintings, statues, potted plants, and fountains, other dancing couples pass in front of or behind the couple until they reach a practically empty hall, where the party ends with the Countess announcing her husband's return.

The lightness and charm of the party world recede as their relationship intensifies from then on. Lies about the affects and the earrings that exchange hands replace the ironies. This well-known sequence has been analysed in detail by Daniel Morgan (2011), in order to think about camera movement beyond mere virtuosity, but through its ethical and aesthetic consequences. This sequence synthesizes the passage from flirtation to passion, I would say, from the fall of flirtation to passion. There is no denying the pleasure caused by this sequence for those who are fond of the ebriety and sensuality of movement, unlike the obsessive, demanding, and attentive contemplation of long fixed shots or shots with little movement. Thus, the preference for the end of the century should not be thought of as mere conservative nostalgia: "Against fixed social conventions, fluid camera movements may all too easily be able to articulate the films' ethical alternative" (MORGAN, 2011, p. 156), even if it ends up being frustrated at the end of this film.

The lightness of the games of seduction, which was celebrated in the 18th century, is transformed into the weight of the pains of melodrama. Unable to live in a world of appearances, of simulacra, the characters in *Madame de…* end up falling into the traps of the truth of affects, seeking to anchor themselves in references that are rarefied. Seduction, as Baudrillard (1991, p. 92) reminds us, thrives on deception, which could still be sought in the theater of the Baroque world where we are only actors playing roles from birth to death, and not in a world centered on secrecy, on the truth of signs. If there is any truth in Ophüls, it lies in the inconstancy of affects.

Many parties later, perhaps we can mention one more film. At some point before the Second World War, Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* is reviewed less for its relevance in modern cinema and more as a rediscovery of another moment of frivolity, by recovering the joy and lightness of pictorial Impressionism, which made his father famous and led him to abandon the weight of a Naturalism with which he was associated in part of his films[9]. What are the rules of the game? André Bazin (2018, p. 77), in his classic book on Renoir, suggests that the absurd rule is to

[9] Here it would be interesting to compare Renoir's recovery of pictorial Impressionism with what has been associated with cinematic Impressionism proper (ANDREW, 1995; BORDWELL, 1974).

die for love at the castle feast, and, based on this assertion, he establishes a strange comparison between birds and rabbits killed in the hunt and the death, by chance, of André Jurieu. Establishing a correlation between the two acts seems easy, but the reason given by Bazin seems difficult to understand. If there is pleasure in the hunt, it is not demonstrated by any of the participants – even the Marquise, when asked by the maid if she enjoys it, responds with indifference. The fact that a certain number of animals are running away and are shown dead certainly brings other feelings to contemporary sensibilities educated by the ecology and animal rights movements. If it is entertainment, as it was for Louis XVI, here it also appears to be a way of occupying time, but not love. For his part, André Jurieu is killed for being mistaken for one of the suitors of the Marquise's maid, but the chase that lasts part of the party and culminates in Jurieu's accidental death adds comic layers to what could be considered a result of the violence of jealousy. We are a long way from Othello, here, and closer to the story told in the film itself, at the end of the hunt, of the accidental death of an acquaintance who shot himself in the leg. If there is a rule in the film, in relationships, the party is the escape from boredom or even from suffering, but love seems to multiply in encounters and disencounters throughout the entire film.

We are left with doubts about the rules of the game, but it is not by chance that the word "game" is evoked in the film's title, not so much due to the idea of competition, but due to the playfulness, the fragility, that translates the characters' lives between encounters and disencounters, culminating in a big party, a burlesque version of the final ball in Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*, 1963), only here, in the being between two worlds, it is not so clear what is to come. Renoir himself called the film a dramatic fantasy, a *divertissement*, which translates it much better than the reading the film as a social critique of the French elite. Here the starting point, as in *Madame de…*, is that of a light-hearted love between the Marquise and her husband or between her and her lover, the aviator André Jurieu, or what seems to have been between the Marquis and his mistress. Nothing is taken too seriously, but the stories run parallel to that of the Marquise's maid, her husband, and a suitor of hers. The shots that her husband fires in the direction of the other servant seem like entertainment for the partygoers, but end up mistakenly hitting André, who dies, a fact lamented as an accident to be forgotten. The party is over for now. Perhaps more than individual characters, what matters is the appearance and disappearance of characters, which is amplified by the depth of field, in a multiplication of scenes, between the rooms of the castle where the party is taking place, in which there is even a theater play being staged.

It is common to associate the film with a critique of a decadent civilization (SADOUL apud BAZIN, 2018, p. 73) or of a futile elite that can be compared to a bourgeois critique of the habits of the aristocracy before the French Revolution. A public failure when it was released, perhaps out of tune with the epic and heroic sentiments that the Second World War would accentuate in the beginning, its critical prestige grew due to the way it was staged, its camera movements, its use of depth of field, and its irony.

Again, beyond discussing the transition from classical to modern cinema or the shaping of a realist view, I am interested in focusing on the party, on a weekend perhaps, and not on the world of work, even for those who work to make the party happen. It concerns an ethics of the instant, of hedonism, in which spending can be different from wasting, which escapes the realistic portrayal of the world of relations defined by social classes, which is recurrent in various period films and series. Unproductivity and uselessness, far from being mere social privileges, can be a counterpoint to productivism without limits. Perhaps in this way we can learn even more from failures than from successes, as much or more from the party's end or end-of-the-world-party than from the celebration and moment of ecstasy, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Jean Renoir himself plays the role of a useless, failed artist friend in the film.

By looking at these end-of-the-world parties, moments of joy and futility, of encounters and disencounters, there is more in their fleetingness than the idealizing sensation of the sentence by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord: "whoever has not known life before the Revolution does not know the sweetness of life." There is a disbelief in great transformations, as the Prince of Salinas evokes before the Proustian ball towards the end of *Il Gattopardo* by Visconti, to whom I return once again. Unlike his nephew, the bankrupt nobleman Tancredi who marries the daughter of the bourgeois upstart Calogero Sedara, for whom, in an oft-repeated phrase, "everything must change for everything to remain the same," in a kind of exchange, a dance of the elites in which the excluded are always used and sacrificed, the Prince of Salinas has a slightly different view, which is pessimistic, disenchanted, anti-utopian if you like, and not always remembered, which I summarise more or less like this and end with it as a kind of horizon for these end-of-the-world parties: everything will remain forever the same, forever human, for two hundred, three hundred years. Then everything will change, but for the worse.

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