

The Aesthetics of 'Speaking Objects' in Aniki-Bóbó's Anthropo-cosmo-morphic Material

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ABSTRACT The surface of the things which make up the pro-filmic constitutes the shell/ signifier chosen to shape the soul of the filmic world or its anthropo-cosmomorphic image rendered by the techniques of film language. The result is the creation of a complex and multi-layered "possible world", consisting of discursive parts that speak through the dramaturgy and aesthetics of the film, a socio-semantics which transfigures the matter of bodies and objects through the mechanisms of filmic resignification. Amongst these, the intellectual montage as well as all the graphic and audio signs that appear on the scene can be identified. These signs stand out because of their metaphorical-discursive capacity, as will be analysed in the film Aniki-Bóbó (1942) by Manoel de Oliveira: the written words that serve to give voice to inanimate matter (Carlitos' bag); the modelled forms which reproduce material allegories or doubles of the human body (the doll); the fragile materials that refer to the children's fragility itself; the steel and iron of mechanised infrastructures showing the modernisation of the country; the classical architecture, the nature of the place and the free, open-air spaces of games, as opposed to closed spaces that recall underdeveloped pedagogical institutions; and among the latter, the liminal place par excellence, symbolised by the 'Shop of Temptations'. In the filmic whole, bodies, places and objects are thus configured as interconnected parts of a single compact world, in which the cosmos is reflected in the anthropo, and the anthropo in the cosmos, in order to transfigure, in a metaphorical key, the immaterial culture referring to the changes in national identity. This allegorical fable of Portuguese pedagogical culture ultimately proposes the possibility of a social (and political) change, projected into a 'just' future without dictatorship (victory of good over evil).

KEYWORDS Filmic surfaces; material culture; anthropo-cosmo-morphism; transitional objects; filmic re-signification; intellectual montage.

1. The body and soul of film: matter and immateriality in narrative space

Aniki-Bóbó (1942) is probably one of Manoel de Oliveira's best-known films. The affirmed modernity of its filmic narrative, inspired by the novel Meninos Milionários (1939) by João Rodrigues de Freitas (1908-1976), is based on a scenic and directorial art, aesthetically hinging on the naturalistic-architectural aspects of the real places of Porto and the Ribeira district. They appear in the film seemingly in a "realist" dramaturgical perspective - to the point of suggesting an anticipation of neorealism (Stein 1981). This formal perspective is also stimulated by the rich exposition of the "material culture" imported into the narrative-audiovisual space, carefully framed and documented starting from every expressive and material element that composes the miseen-scène and the correlated direction. In this type of regime expressive of cinematic modernity, objects and landscape (filmic world) speak with no voice and are vivified in anthropo-cosmo-morphic terms (Morin 2020), thanks to editing, photogeny and a series of filmic techniques that load them with "different meanings" (i.e. psycho-socioanthropological ones), making them expressions of the Portuguese culture, historical time period and social world at the time of Salazar and the "Estado Novo" (Lima and Tavares 2016).

The profilmic material, transmuted or re-signified in a symbolicexpressive form – more specifically in the form of "fantastic realism" (Roberti 2012) and not in that of a naturalism as an end in itself – is expressed as an organic set of characters, places and transitional objects in which property becomes a metaphor for the castrated emotions of a group of children facing adolescence (and the adult world), sensations that are still immature or potential since they are in the process of being formed. This inner world, haunted by insecurities, ghosts, desires and passions, is symbolised in a concrete and wellstructured scenographic image: the Shop of Temptations, an allegorical place where the role of the objects is the one of symbolic doubles of the real world. Among these, displayed in the shop window, is the doll the film's co-star, Teresinha (Fernanda Matos), longs for, an object stolen for her by the protagonist Carlitos (Horácio Silva), a docile and altruistic child who in this way intends to win her exclusive love, disputed with his peer Eduardo (António Santos), the neighbourhood bully and fierce suitor (Image 1). The two boys, competing for the conquest of Teresinha and the affirmation of their respective roles in

group games, even come to physical confrontations motivated by mutual jealousy.

According to critic João Lopes (1981), it is precisely the scene in the shop window that expresses the castrated desire produced by looking at the doll, too expensive to be materially possessed by the 'street children' of this story, and leading to evil: theft, lies, fights, spite and guilt.



Image 1: Frame from Aniki-Bóbó. | © Produções António Lopes Ribeiro.

The shop is the place where temptations are embodied (sweets, toys). It's a space full of material objects of various kinds which modify their common and objective function in the symbolic-narrative transmutation to become dramaturgical elements with a narrative value; this happens mainly with the doll, around which the emotional expressiveness (metaphorical and metonymic) revolves, generating the conflict at the heart of the plot: the love temptation driving to the theft of the doll and causing the sense of guilt and injustice that will torment Carlitos until the resolution of the events.

The dramaturgical aspect of the owned objects, which appear in the film as anthropomorphic *reflections* of the potential feelings of the protagonists, transforms the materials, or surfaces (Bruno 2014) contained in the images, into a new *immersive surface*, a complex and articulate *anthropo-cosmo-morphic* expression capable of creating new

meanings for the materials themselves and their filmic function (narrative re-signification). The complex set of signs and aestheticdramaturgical aspects of the filmic material always defines the visual surface of each work, creating a design of the filmic language consubstantial to the narration or vice versa, a narration consubstantial to the filmic language, which in Oliveira's cinema always represents interchanges of meaning between word and image (Lavin 2008), complementing each other. This type of narration is the result of the sense produced by the capacity of the filmic surface to contain, cross and sublimate concrete and abstract matter by defining "not the obvious but the obtuse" (Barthes 1982) - symbolic forms of the narrated which are apparently unclear, but semantically structured as metonyms or metaphors of meanings revealing themselves in their symbolic evidence only when interpreted in relation to a broader discursive apparatus responsible for the filmic sense, just like pieces of a puzzle. According to Roland Barthes through the aesthetics and dramaturgy of the film, this produces an abstract sense which is not understandable in a self-referential way. It is a semantics anchored to the material and objective sphere of the represented, but also linked to an allegorical and narrative sense that can be spiritual, philosophical, political, anthropological, psychological or of another kind; the filmic re-signification hides this sense behind the very matter of the things and represented forms.

Following Barthes, in fact, the forms of filmic material speak and narrate both with the spoken word – and in a direct way (e.g. dialogues) – and through the expressive potentials of the visual (material or graphic) language contained within it; such language can be expressed indirectly and mainly starting from two aspects, both consubstantial parts of the film discourse:

- the *material body* of the film, with its *denotative capacity*, recognisable from the pro-filmic and its concrete form preceding the film (bodies, places, objects, etc.);
- the anthropo-cosmo-morphic soul or the symbolic and connotative sense given to the filmic material itself by the expressive modes of the audiovisual language.

The *filmic body* and the *sense* produced by *Aniki-Bóbó* thus recall, respectively, the corporeality of material forms and the symbolic sense, namely the aesthetic and immaterial perception of the forms themselves:

 the things of the world such as knick-knacks, toys, objects of various kinds, etc. (what is known in cinema as property, and is included in the organisation of everything that has to be present on set in order to compose each individual shot);

- the *filmic world* itself (scenic designs and locations), circumscribed aspects such as the streets and places of Porto; or macroscopic aspects, concerning, for instance, the city as a whole and the landscape surrounding it, which is produced by the city itself with its material forms: in this case, for example, the architectural and engineering infrastructure of the port.

Because of these liminal capacities, the objects and places under issue fully assume the aforementioned function of surfaces; these are spaces of dialogical contact and virtual passage among different dimensions (Bruno 2014), evoked through an aesthetics of realism of the images which aims, thanks to the *anthropo-cosmo-morphic* potentialities typical of filmic language, at the allegorical and fable-like re-signification of the sense of the whole represented world. In this way, it proves, anthropologically and culturally, that objectivity in the sphere of culture does not exist: as a matter of fact, the same "material culture" that appears in the film is the expression of various connotations rooted in practical, spiritual and cultural human needs at the same time.

In filmic narration (audio-visual transmutation), the material is therefore malleable and subjective, metamorphosed in the story and not objective as it appeared in reality before filming and before being integrated in the discursive context of filmic dramaturgy. It is then possible to infer an anthropological potential, at the same time creative and manufacturing, given by the complex and "interlinguistic cultural interpretation" (Geertz 1973) of the director and the authors of the film, and not by a pure ineffective or objective re-proposition of the pro-filmic.

Interpretative anthropology, in fact, teaches that the sense of things originates from the perceptive experience of the things themselves in a given environment and time, and not from the design of the objectual sphere or from pure matter, since the world where the forms are created is itself culture deriving from other culture. In the same way, films are complex cultural products that in turn, and in an equally complex way, reconstruct, narrate and represent, intrinsically: cultural revisitations and recreations. In this perspective, *Aniki-Bóbó* intends to

show some pedagogical aspects which are intrinsic to the changes in Portuguese culture, although these are slowed down in their social growth by the dictatorship, looming over and ghettoising any freedom; in the film, freedom appears as irreducible even under Salazar's regime, as testified by the social discourse implied in the plot, which does not conform to the narration of the typical regime cinema centred on a self-referential discursive unity of the regime itself: "God-State-Family" (Ribeiro 1983). On the contrary, Oliveira shows the limits of this unrealistic 'political framework', repudiating its false moral principles in the construction of a humanist parable narrating the formation (educational processes) of future Portuguese people, who are still budding at the moment (allegorical image of children), but are ideally ready for the transition to a free state - although this can only come about after acquiring awareness of what is right and what is wrong, as symbolised in the rites of passage that the protagonist must perform in order to grow up.

The attack against Salazar's dictatorship is evident in the austerity and inadequacy of pedagogical institutions (family and school) and of the power of the state (the law, represented by the guard) which in the film are represented in an elementary but very clear way and in some cases even parodic (e.g. the teacher), as a chronic deformation of an old, oppressive and useless power, from which to emancipate in order to build 'good'. In the perspective of a correct reading of the human and geopolitical condition represented in the picture, the film shows in an exemplary manner, as Carolin Overhoff Ferreira has stated, that "[the] universal conflict between desires and social constraints is thus intertwined with a specifically national dimension" (2010, 48, author's translation).

2. The filmic-discursive sense and the metonymic role of intellectual montage

In cinema, matter hence produces a sense that emancipates itself from the object as such (material referent), to transform it in an emotional, intellectual and narrative element, like Carlitos' bag and the doll Teresinha longs for.

Film art is always, in itself, the "surface of a narration": the image of the form of audiovisual stories not just in the sense of the construction of the fabula or of the plot (a cognitive art already typical of oral

storytelling and fairy tales), but rather of the material plots, characters, and what their belongings and their world are made of. This audiovisual design of the narration always defines, in a (carefully constructed) "given" way, the image of a materiality of the film that remains the same in time and keeps the same exact form in which the film has created it. For this reason, the materiality of a film can be studied, and also analysed in terms of its original forms, colours and materials, but an objective reading is never possible: the only perception, and consequent possible reading or interpretation, is philosophical, anthropological, sociological, psychological (humanistic discourse), and always starting from the anthropomorphic or cosmomorphic aesthetics each film generates by its ontological and linguistic nature. This produces a permeability both of the film and the props on the part of the spectator, a subjective immersiveness in relation to the objectivity of the material itself, since the resignification of the material which films are made of is inscribed in the story told in images and sounds that attract and transport (through emotions) the spectator on a virtual journey inside the facts and things of the story: what does this mean? It means that the surfaces (screens containing images and sounds in the form of imagery) - which are porous and liminal as Bruno states (2014) - lead the viewers, cognitively, into the matter and the represented forms in order to make them understand the meaning authors intend to infuse, and the related meanings that everyone can give to the subjective experience of the film, and which are usually extremely varied.

Basically, nothing in cinema is objectively what it seems, and even *Aniki-Bóbó*'s apparent realism is a filmic form transfiguring in photogeny an aesthetics of reality which refers to the creation of a humanist sense of the narrated: it is based on a story that intends to bring out intimate, psychic and emotional aspects of the protagonists' inner world. It means that the matter of the filmic world, once "crossed" in the scenic construction and transfigured in the images, in the sound and in the editing, tends to take on and create new meanings. The represented things, such as objects, places, bodies, clothes, environments, light, actions and all the elements composing the scenes and the filmic story (morphology of the film) are thus 're-signified'. In order to understand the function of transfiguration and *anthropocosmo-morphism* produced by filmic language, one thinks of the objective materiality underlying "intellectual montage" (Eisenstein 1924-1946): the intention is to create a deductive discourse that can be

inferred from the relationships among different parts of the filmic world; in this way, they do not dialogue with each other through narrative contiguity but rather through "visual or audiovisual conflict"; the same happens with cross-fades, in which the material represented in each individual shot is transfigured into images that blend together, generating new meanings, including the *anthropo-cosmo-morphic* perception of the contents.

The result of inserting different materials in the films, with their own aesthetics pre-existing the film and capable of converging in a new 'aesthetic morphology' or in a new discursive creation based on the sense of the film (and on the author's thought), confirms the identity of cinema and of the specific film as a complex poetic construction of new symbolic matter (surface made of surfaces) – for Bruno an image of the "poetics of the author", namely of his critical thought (2014). For narrative purposes, it changes objects, bodies, forms of nature and of material culture itself from their original substance into integrated elements of a particular visual culture: a space of enactive meanings where everything becomes an immaterial agent of the gaze. These agents, in the terms of Wittgenstein (1953), can be understood as "perspicuous representations" or "connecting links" of parts of complex narrative forms. Once re-signified, the matter contained in them becomes an essential part of the story and lives a new life: the life of the film. These connections between the parts (intermediate links) motivate the existence, uniqueness and specificity of the entire narrative world (possible world), defining not only the complexity of the produced meanings, but also the comprehension (production of meaning) that is meant to be triggered in the spectator.

Intellectual montage represents the most suitable example to explain the anthropo-cosmo-morphic modes of creative expression, which are capable of transfiguring the materials inserted in the film; it is often placed at the basis of the process of intuition/understanding of the rich set of symbolic and metaphorical meanings, morphologically and diachronically generated by the modes of construction of filmic sense. This is a specificity of cinematographic art which is not replicable in other narrative modes, since it is based on the encounter/clash between two images in a purely cinematographic space-time.

Let us consider, for the sake of debate, the montage sequence at the incipit (or introduction) of the film: thanks to the *intellectual montage* it is constructed as a sort of anticipatory summary of the most

significant emotional aspects of the film, generated by clashes between images from which a series of audiovisual conflicts can be inferred:

- 1. (0-6") fade-in: the semi-dark entrance to a tunnel as a train arrives towards the frame, with its shrill whistle announcing its approach to a town;
- 2. (6-9"): the urban landscape as seen from the train windows;
- 3. (9-10"): a group of children on top of a hill shouting and jumping, on the edge of a slope, with their arms in the air, amused at the sight of the train approaching;
- 4. (10-11"): the train, with its puff of white smoke, arriving on the tracks at the bottom of the hill;
- 5. (11-12"): detail of one of the children's feet sliding down the precipice;
- 6. (12-13"): the child rolling down the slope towards the railway tracks while the off-screen train whistle announces its arrival at that very moment:
- 7. (13-15"): close-up of a little girl clasping her fists over her face and screaming in terror as she watches her companion slide down the slope towards the tracks: the first part of the film title, *Aniki*, appears on this image;
- 8. (15"-1'41"): the train from above traversing the tracks: the full title Aniki-Bóbó appears, while the image of the train smoke is transfigured into clouds in the sky. An upward virtual camera movement (materially created in Moviola) shows the film's opening credits in an 'ideal' journey from earth to sky, with musical accompaniment by Jaime Silva, whose name appears in the titles. Other names which appear are those of the nationally renowned actor Nascimento Fernandes – first name on the list due to his fame, playing the shopkeeper-custodian of the "desires", a fundamental role for the evolution of the plot and the development of the symbolic meanings – and of the film's main authors: producer António Lopes Ribeiro, and screenwriter and director Manoel de Oliveira. Also present is the author of the novel the film is based on, Rodrigues de Freitas, dialogist Alberto de Serpa, cinematographer António Mendes, sound director Sousa Santos, set designer José Porto, editor Vieira de Sousa, the production studios (Tobis Portuguesa-Laboratórios in Lisbon), the film (Kodak) and, finally, the names of all the other main performers.

The juxtaposition of the eight shots causes the discursive-intellectual (and symbolic-metaphorical) sense of the arrival in a mechanised world full of dangers for childhood (cosmomorphism) in the spectator. All this is set up as the incipit of a utopian ascent towards the sky which serves as a background to the titles, thanks to intellectual montage. The film thus shows the use of film language for the cosmomorphic purposes of the sense of the work and the construction of the film itself as the result of a complex set of artistic and manufacturing sectors mentioned at the beginning of the narration (opening credits). A direct and preventive declaration of the productive materiality underlies a tale with a dual soul, realistic and fairy-tale, which produces at the same time:

- 1) the film's *emotional realism*, as evidenced by the conflicting clash between the visual and audio contents of the eight images, emphasised by Teresinha's scream and the train whistle merging with the images to dramatise the realism of the narrative space (foreshadowing Eduardo's accident);
- 2) the fairy-tale aspect of the story, as symbolised by the cosmomorphism of the moving image rising up towards the sky, where the clouds are allegories of the place of dreams and imaginative stories.

This incipit, thanks to intellectual montage, also warns the spectators: they are about to watch a film that blends realism (the naturalistic images of the initial eight shots) and imagery (the clouds and the sky). It also demonstrates the modernity of the film in its aesthetic aspects linked to the use of movement in the scene and camera movements as material modes of filmic narration, but also as symbolic modes which metaphorise the unwinding (or movement) of the characters' lives, children who are adults at the same time, or, as Fausto Cruchinho (2008b, 151) has pointed out, images of omnipresent adults, which forge the moral and reconciliation – the *leitmotiv* of the entire film.

3. Transitional objects and rites of passage in adolescence

Films, as explained earlier, are liminal surfaces, symbolic and narrative permeable places aimed at being explored by the spectator – who benefits from their meaning. As such, they are created to allow the entrance and crossing of imaginary space (projection and

identification), as well as the experience of perceptive-subjective practices of incorporation of the spectator's experience. They are, therefore, attested as virtual and emotional places where the spectators-users carry out (enactive) neuro-cognitive experiences which can make them feel part of the narrated world through various expressive "codes" interrelated in the filmic form. This concept gives an idea of the reasoned and complex structuring of the audiovisual components of a film. Script, production, direction, acting, photography, costumes, scenic designs, property, editing, sound, etc., are supports and forms of an equal number of surfaces that converge into a single material/surface, namely the film work in its expressive uniqueness.

As described above, the audiovisual aesthetics filmic narratives are based on is a symbolic syncretisation of material and immaterial culture reworked and shaped into a single body (film) in order to generate a set of "speaking" surfaces, each using its own language. In fact, understanding cinema as the chosen place of the Barthian obtuse, it can be stated that each filmic practice or craft generates discursive surfaces, each one provided with its own voice (colours, shapes, fabrics, materials, sounds, vibrations, etc.).

Taken overall, filmic material becomes an anthropo-cosmo-morphic mirror-surface, which means it is capable of re-producing aspects of life and of the cosmos that interact and mingle with each other, metamorphising into the imaginary matter of the film. It is thanks to the anthropo-cosmo-morphic transfigurations of the images that the emotional perceptions, philosophical reasoning, poetic vibrations and actual intellectual ways of understanding others as well as very complex aspects of life – that are not visible to the naked eye, since they are subjectively generated in the sphere of human sensibility and in the psychology of each person (spectator) – act and are activated in the filmic space; furthermore, it is actually the materiality which has been metamorphosed in an anthropo-cosmo-morphic way that makes the difference between cinema and other forms of narration such as novels, theatre, etc. Therefore, a film is always a complex surface: a material surface (screen, display, touch-screen, etc.) and an immaterial one (passage, virtual boundary, entrance or border with a liminal zone, narration), which in turn is made up of material and immaterial 'speaking' surfaces forming the body and soul of each work (Bruno 2014).

As Aniki-Bóbó proves, through anthropo-cosmo-morphism, meanings that are 'different' from the pro-filmic are attached to the filmic matter, and once it is transmuted into a symbolic-expressive form it becomes an organic whole of transitional materials and objects, both from an emotional and an intellectual point of view: the Shop of Temptations represents the symbolic place par excellence, full of objects and various kinds of loose materials (e.g. fabrics, sheets of paper), capable of revealing the protagonists' most intimate passions. In the film discourse, these places and materials become other than themselves thanks to the complex process of aesthetic re-signification; this process involves the 'sense of a place' of each individual environment (e.g. shop, school, railway, port) as well as the form and usability of an artefact (e.g. bag and doll), the materiality of the film environments (cement, wood, steel) and of the objects themselves (e.g. jute, celluloid, cotton), which are capable of creating photogenic narratives starting from their morphology and their aesthetics.

A more specific narrative situation produced by the montage and the anthropo-cosmo-morphic mechanisms – able to vivify the objects of the filmic world and transform them into liminal surfaces (of passage between different dimensions) – is given by the first narrative scene of the film: the actual story begins with a fixed camera on a long shot showing the Ribeira district in Porto, nestled between houses and the river, in the early morning light; this image crossfades into the detail of a clock placed on the bell tower, as the chime announces the time: 5.45: an audiovisual cosmos of architecture and landscape, in turn, dissolves into the image of Carlitos. While his mother is helping him to get dressed for school, he is focused on playing with a ceramic statuette that can move its head at his touch. The woman, unnerved by her son's playful distraction, urges him to hurry up by giving him warning taps on the forehead. In order to interrupt the child's waste of time she pushes his toy to the ground: it ends up shattered. With a series of montage attacks assembling fast and alternate images, the director first shows the child looking at the moving statuette, then his mother pushing the object abruptly to the ground, the destruction of the toy into small parts, and again the child, his wide-eyed look revealing sorrow and discomfort, foreshadowing the problems he will have to face in the rest of the film, which focuses on the transition from the age of preadolescence (or childhood play) to a more adult age (adolescence).

The ceramic object, anthropomorphised by the movement of its head recalling a human mimetic trait, thus symbolises its allegorical role referring to the fragility and desire for fun of the little ones. Once shattered, in the form of the intellectual montage and therefore in the visual clash between two shots (the act of breaking it by the mother, who appears pedagogically rigid and unemotional, and Carlitos' sorry look), it elicits, due to the emotionality of the event, the filmic transfiguration that makes it a "transitional object" (Winnicott 1971); on the one hand it signals the break with the past and on the other it announces the imminent passage to adolescence and new adult responsibilities. The material image of its break is thus a metaphor for the forced abandonment of the playful aspects of childhood, Carlitos' first step on a difficult road that will lead him to a hard transitional moment in the growth of every human being, beyond the historical and social context he belongs to. This ability to narrate a very difficult and complex psychic aspect with extreme care still makes the film suitable for its inclusion in current school and pedagogical contexts, as proven by high-profile didactic experiences promoted around this work.¹

From a *psycho-socio-anthropological* perspective, starting from this initial 'rupture event', the film signals – through the *anthropomorphism* of the toy-statue – the beginning of Carlitos' series of transformative events or "rites of passage" (Van Gennep 1964); Oliveira recounts their facts and 'transitive' behaviours (such as the theft of the doll; the dangerous games and challenges among peers; the fear of death and 'involuntary' murder, the defence of the weakest, and more) that will lead him into adolescence and on the threshold of the adult world, but not before having challenged his most intimate values, still in the process of being oriented and trained to 'always be right'. In the narrative, this is represented by being a guard and not a thief, and being able to prove that he is not responsible for Eduardo's accident at the railway, of which he is unjustly accused.

Thus, after an initial phase of 'rupture' from everyday life, symbolised by the image of the double shattering of the toy/knick-knack and childhood – a phase of "separation" or pre-liminary in Van Gennep's

¹ Cf. https://www.ipefdakar.org/IMG/pdf/0 pistes pedagogiques aniki bobo.pdf and https://event.institutfrancais.com/uploads/211f503a4da41ca9f4d8f25057503486.pdf (access 18 December 2020).

terms – the film shows the liminal or "transitional" zone, consisting of 'life' trials and difficulties to overcome (the struggle for the beloved woman, elaboration of the sense of guilt), which will finally lead to the phase of "aggregation" or "reintegration" of the protagonist in the social body. This can only happen after having affirmed the 'right' (return of the stolen doll) (Image 2); the main character is now ideally on his way to the adult world (composition of the couple and future expectations of a family), as will be better explained below.



Image 2: Frame from Aniki-Bóbó. | © Produções António Lopes Ribeiro.

The aesthetics of the 'speaking objects' in the forms of Barthian obtuse, is not only given by the cosmomorphic features of the protagonists (as in the incipit preceding the opening credits) and by the anthropomorphic features of some objects (like the breaking of the statuette with the mobile head that opens the film), but also by direct and explicit modes of 'denotative representation'; these can even be didactic and rhetorical, as in the case of the writing on Carlitos' bag ('Always follow the straight and narrow path'), worn over his shoulder like a 'mayor's sash' to underline the importance of the motto inciting him to always remember the values of justice.

In addition, the 'talking bag', with its warning, immediately expresses the *fil rouge* of the entire film, and in order to remind the viewer of the guiding principle the protagonist (and ideally everyone) must adhere to, the bag appears several times in the shots – just like a garment

inseparable from Carlitos' body, an essential part of the costumes characterising the boy. The writing is especially visible in crucial moments of the film, such as when, together with Teresinha, Carlitos looks with desirous eyes at the doll displayed in the shop window, thinking of stealing it for his beloved. The doll is shown as a narrative element highlighting the stark contrast between the spirit of justice recalled by the motto on the bag and the temptation to break the law by stealing the object of desire.

When Carlitos actually steals the doll and hides it in the bag, once again Oliveira creates two conflicting allegorical meanings: the inclusion of the theft within the motto of justice, which effectively nullifies the words; and the moment the bag is found by the shopkeeper under a boat, as he chases after the group of children, sure that the thief must be among them. In the shopkeeper's eyes, it cannot be Carlitos, as is also proven by the writing on the bag which he carefully observes, but rather Eduardo, whose character is way more determined and transgressive. Finally, and especially, at the end of the film, when Carlitos goes to the shopkeeper to return the doll, carrying it again in the bag, but this time in full view (Image 3): the two interlocked objects help say that he has finally chosen to go the 'right way', in broad daylight and out in the open.



Image 3: Frame from Aniki-Bóbó. | © Produções António Lopes Ribeiro.

In fact, Carlitos had given the "doll of sin" (Costa 2004) to Teresinha in secret, in the dark of the night, amidst fears and dangers projected onto the protagonist, the sets (the filmic environment) and the spectator's emotional sphere through an expressionist use of photography, a visual symbolism "of the forbidden" in stark contrast to the bright, sunny environments of the natural light of Porto, which, on the contrary, illuminates the daily actions of the group of children. Even these places, though, in spite of the photography evoking an apparently comfortable landscape where the children are always immersed in the common spaces of meeting, social and educational life, as in the scenes filmed at the school (a place of punishment eliciting the "dictatorship" of the adult world), are full of dangers, as announced in the film introduction.

The group of children, who are constantly striving to have fun in the ways the place itself allows them to, actually love role-playing and challenging each other in the street or in dangerous places: they dive into the river from the engineering infrastructure close to the river or race near the railway where Eduardo risks his life by falling. But the most amusing playful activity, metaphorising in a different way the development of the sense of justice, already mentioned as fundamental for the filmic sense, is playing guard and thief, as expressed in the singsong "Aniki-Bóbó, Aniki-Bébé". The children intone this to decide the roles of good and bad ones in their raids, and the film title is derived from it. Another rhetoric, in this case not visual but aural, and useful to underline for the purposes of argumentative clarity, is the theme at the centre of the film discourse: choosing good over evil in the processes of growth and in a pedagogical perspective. It is, in fact, an audio semantics using the aesthetics of vocal vibrations and children's bodily mimicry that shows an obtuse sense, also in this way: 'playing' the exercise of good against evil in order to grow according to principles of justice and guarantee to the future of the country men and women who will be able to live in rightness.

The same difficulty of finding the right way for this educational path is underlined in the initial scenic action. Carlitos, with his bag over his shoulder, crosses the street to run towards the school, colliding with a guard he had not seen on his way: a tall man in uniform with an intimidating bearing, who looks down on him. Also in the game of glances, the director recalls the hierarchies of power and shows how justice, understood in its most appropriate form, is clear to the adult

world (point of view from above or of adults) and not always fully understood by children because it is 'not yet within their reach' (point of view from below or of children).

The guard, an image of the law, appears several times in the film, also recalled in the words of the singsong "Aniki-Bóbó, Aniki-Bébé", as a clear sign of the central role of this institutional figure that gives filmic substance to Oliveira's hopes for a future of peace and honesty for the whole country. As the filmmaker himself stated on several occasions (Costa 1981; Oliveira 1983), the film, which speaks through the world of children, is a symbolic parable of the world of adults, a sort of miniature of the Portuguese people struggling with dictatorship. And even though the work is based on a novel, there is an underlying human realism that reflects Oliveira's own experience of love in adolescence, an autobiographical aspect at the basis of the construction of his characters (Pina 2012).

4. A materialist film for the immaterial purposes of the author's poetics

As has been said above, the complex set of surfaces constituting a film (costumes, sets, actors, etc.) in combination with the narrative filmic surface (plot), induce the spectator, in different ways, into the immersive and subjective perception in the created worlds and in the 'shoes' of the characters through the *anthropo-cosmo-morphic* potentials of the filmic world itself: in this virtual space or aesthetic surface, in fact, everything becomes a "transitional object" (Winnicott 1971) and contributes to cause the virtual-mental-emotional journey from reality to imagery. The spectators undertake this journey when they cross the first level of the material surface a film is made of (the screen) to access its immaterial surface (narration), thus understanding its meaning subjectively, but always starting from the symbolic transfiguration of bodies, places and objects/materials/property.

In *Aniki-Bóbó* the filmic surface appears as a liminal area that is only apparently materialist or self-referential to the contents shown and for these apparent reasons, several times this work has been defined as neorealist (Sadoul 1972, 12). At the same time, the aesthetic-functional complexity of the 'verist' and 'naturalist' material typical of neorealism cannot be denied; it is capable of producing a dramaturgical expressiveness which cannot be reduced to mere materialism

(Wagstaff 2007; Carluccio, Morreale and Pierini 2017; Pitassio 2019). *Aniki-Bóbó* attests itself as a carefully constructed work in an elaborate and multifaceted way, for the purposes of an essentially symbolic audiovisual narrative aesthetics, at times expressionist (as already mentioned) or even surrealist. Carlitos' dream scene, for instance, shows a nightmare in which the shop owner and the guard appear as ghosts incorporating the image of law, which punishes and generates the sense of guilt for the theft of the doll.

Some Hitchcockian aesthetic and narrative elements can also be observed, for example in the image of the water vortex superimposed in transparency on the images of the entire dream sequence: Oliveira himself stated that at the time he was greatly influenced by *Rebecca* (1940).

The water vortex is the highest expression of the *anthropo-cosmo-morphism*, which makes the *cosmo-* and the *anthropo-* converge syncretically into a symbolic whole. The images signify the profound dialogic and emotional relationship between the human being (Carlitos) and the world he belongs to (sense of place) in its unity of national identity cultural elements and physical/material place itself (Porto). This is, in turn, an inextricable whole of material culture (doll, train, "Shop of Temptations") and immaterial culture (customs and traditions, behaviours and educational methods, justice, school, etc.). Such symbolic elements all appear in the dream.

As this sequence proves, the symbolic transfigurations of the objects transmute the profilmic matter into transitional spaces/materials, bearing conflicting and opposing narrative forces, harbingers of tensions building the "warp and weft" of the story's dialectic, sources of the emotionality of the work and of the wider filmic sense aimed directly at the spectator's *sensorium*:

- reality (adult world: responsibility, education, justice, work) and imagery (children's world: fantasies, games, fears, desires, dreams, nightmares, hopes, falling in love);
- true and false (Teresinha's authentic body as opposed to the doll; her double is opposed to real life since it is defenceless and an object of play/fiction);
- good and evil (theft of the doll and its restitution, singsong "Aniki-Bóbó, Aniki-Bébé");

 love (eros) and death (thanatos) in the 'game of life' (games and fun, the exercise of couple-love and group-friendship relations, love for the beloved and desire to possess her, fear of death in the railway accident);

- children and adults (childhood struggling with family, social, school and even judicial rules as evidenced by the presence of the guard in several shots; the central role of the shopkeeper as a seller of dreams and sweet temptations for children mostly toys and sweets –, but also an extremely demanding and tough educator with the very young shop assistant, and finally sympathetic to the needs and desires of children, as evidenced by the generous act of giving the doll to Carlitos when he returns it so that he can, in turn, give it to Teresinha);
- love and hate in various forms and declinations (the friendship between Carlitos and Pistarim, an expression of a sincere and mutual bond; Carlitos' and Eduardo's love for Teresinha, jealousy and pranks between Carlitos and Eduardo).

In this context, places take on symbolic forms that go beyond the verist image in which they appear, namely vast aesthetically complex landscapes such as the Ribeira district overlooking the Douro river or, on the other hand, indoor contexts (houses, shops, schools) on the borderline between frustration and freedom, nature and danger, beauty and horror. They are places of growth and death, as shown by the many dangers children expose themselves to when playing outside, as used to happen in all the suburbs and provincial areas of the world at that time. These environments, through the actions that take place there, metaphorise the difficulties to overcome in the age of the rites of passage: challenges and displays of courage at the river; punishments and humiliations at home and at school; pranks and fighting in the street; "the temptations" of the shop; the accident at the railway; the raids in the neighbourhood at night; going up the city roofs Carlitos climbs to carry the doll he had stolen from his beloved, and other actions taking place in a city full of fascinating environments, which are mechanised but at the same time guardians of local culture and traditions. The river, for example, shows a visual clash between the most handcrafted local boats and the railway bridge that seems to be suspended high in the sky, generating a sense of vertigo also in the

viewer's perception and eliciting a conflicting vision of the mechanised transformations of the local naturalistic landscape.

The doll Teresinha longs for, as Hajnal Király (2018) explains, constitutes a fetish in Freudian and psychoanalytic terms. It is mirrored in the aesthetic transformation that, according to the scholar, mutates it into a "transitional object" between life and death, love and the uncanny, body movement and fixity/immobility.

In Oliveira's direction, the doll in fact appears immobile and mute in the rigidity of its celluloid face, but it is indirectly anthropomorphised in the clothes and hairstyle recalling the female protagonist's image. The doll also represents a potential expression of her very young erotic body. Although still pre-adolescent, her body is already the object of love of two young peers.

Teresinha's body reflected in the doll indeed reproduces her perfect 'double', made of plastic material, testifying the objectification of a body for the purposes of a filmic-discursive metaphor that materialises a double desire: Carlitos' wish to win over his beloved, and Teresinha's one, as she wants the doll more than anything else, since this beautiful object reflects her vanity and youthful frivolity.

Both co-protagonists' stops in front of the window of the Shop of Temptations reproduce a glimpse on "Teresinha's double/body of desire" – man's voyeuristic gaze on the female body recurs frequently in Oliveira's cinema (Cruchinho 2008a) – that encourages Carlitos to overcome his feeling of castration and to steal the 'matter/object of their respective dreams' for the girl.

By giving the stolen doll to Teresinha, Carlitos means to replace the objectual desire and become himself the object of the girl's loving gaze. This indeed happens when, having climbed dangerously on the roof of his beloved in the moonlight, he wakes her up to give her the doll, (finally) receiving a new look in return and a kiss that seals their bond of love.

This confirmation of love, however, came as a result of an inappropriate act, that of stealing, which made Carlitos a thief (evil), and not a guard (good) as he has always wanted to be in the group game by playing the good guy; he therefore feels an unbearable sense of guilt, in open conflict with his conscience and the warning printed on his bag.

The theft, however, proves his weakness as much as it shows the strength of his feelings for Teresinha. The latter are stronger than his – still to be developed – sense of justice. His vivid feelings of love are indeed already comparable to those of adults, as Oliveira (1983) said he meant to portray with this film.

Carlitos, who is also unjustly accused of being responsible for Eduardo's accident at the railway, finally reacts positively to the sense of guilt and to the burden of responsibilities (just and unjust) attached to him. In order to make amends for the sin he committed stealing the doll, he returns it to its legitimate owner, who in turn decides to give it back to him as a trophy for having done the right thing, so that the boy can give it once again – this time legally – to Teresinha.

In this new symbolic function, the doll becomes 'the offspring', as the final image of the film shows: Carlitos and Teresinha are reunited thanks to the 'official' gift of the doll, and, now that the three phases of the rite of passage have been overcome, this act sanctions the definitive turning point towards good, tracing the beginning of a new path, albeit it will be an uphill one as shown by their exit from the scene on a staircase (Image 4).



Image 4: Frame from Aniki-Bóbó. | © Produções António Lopes Ribeiro.

The fixed shot shows the two teenagers carrying the doll between them, both holding its hands, just like a child in the midst of a couple, a symbolic image of the adult family with offspring moving towards the future thanks to the good and simpler feelings of love. The union of the couple has always been the basis of the continuity of life, and this is also symbolised by the once again allegorical image of the clouds dissolving over them. This reprises the aesthetics used in the opening with the virtual movement towards the sky indicating that the two kids are on their way to a serene and idyllic perspective: a happy ending that recalls, even in the musical aspects suggesting joyful and soothing feelings, more Hollywood classicism than cinematic modernity, definitively overturning the idea of an art film (or neo-realist film).

The final result gives us a metaphorical image of a people who can free themselves from Salazar's dictatorship: this pacifist idea is put forward by the director starting from the "choice of the right path" that everyone, on a daily basis, faces in different ways, and which he finds mainly in the love for the other. This comes both in the form of friendship, which is repeatedly emphasised in the film in the protagonist's relation with his weaker peer Pistarim (whom he defends against abuse, and who returns his affection by proposing to give the money from his piggy bank to buy the doll) – and in that of family love generated from the new couple, which will develop in the future in the new educational relations of the offspring (Oliveira's humanist ideology).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that, in *Aniki Bóbó*, the dialectic of props, scenic designs, and objects having key meanings to the construction of filmic sense (e.g. the bag) or a 'comeback' function (e.g. the doll) symbolises the condition of life, between repression (adult world) and freedom to express one's passions (desire to live emotions), and refers, between the lines, to the dictatorial oppression of Salazar's regime. Oliveira, with poetic humanity and visual naturalism, and without any intention of directly attacking the political system, exalts the restoring function of peace as opposed to the conflicts that have always existed among men competing for power; it is an atavistic discourse that has its roots in human history, and that 'between the lines' of this film appears in a political form, that is as the regime that rules the country at that precise moment. The director proposes his utopian but hopeful vision of a future that can be improved starting from the ability of everyone, even in their own small way (childhood), to face injustice. All can

practise and train in honesty from a young age to face the difficulties of growing up and loving each other in a country repressed by dictatorship, which is what the final scene intends to demonstrate with the return of the doll and its transfiguration into future offspring.

As the final scene shows, the story told through the children is a parable of the adult world: Carlitos and Teresinha, who leave with their little girl are the image of the adult family founded on sound principles, following educational life experiences that, as the film recounts, are not learned in school (which, in the film is represented as a punitive environment underdeveloped in its pedagogical methods) but by walking the 'road of life'. This is the only place where social confrontation and struggle for one's rights is exercised in freedom, authentically building the identity and character of a person starting from one's inclinations.

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Filmography

Aniki-Bóbó [feature film]. Dir. Manoel de Oliveira. Produções António Lopes Ribeiro. Portugal, 1942. 71 min.

A Estética dos 'Objectos Falantes' no Material Antropocosmo-mórfico de *Aniki-Bóbó*

RESUMO A superfície das coisas que compõem o pró-filme constitui a concha/significativo escolhido para moldar a alma do mundo fílmico ou a sua imagem antropo-cosmo-mórfica dada pelas técnicas da linguagem cinematográfica. O resultado é a criação de um "mundo possível" complexo e com multicamadas, constituído por partes discursivas que falam através da dramaturgia e da estética do filme, numa sócio-semântica que transfigura a matéria de corpos e objectos através dos mecanismos de re-significação fílmica. Entre estes, a montagem intelectual, bem como todos os sinais gráficos e sonoros que aparecem em cena, devem ser identificados. Estes sinais destacam-se pela sua capacidade metafórico-discursiva, tal como será analisado no filme Aniki-Bóbó (1942) de Manoel de Oliveira: as palavras escritas que servem para dar voz à matéria inanimada (saco de Carlitos); as formas modeladas que reproduzem alegorias materiais ou duplas do corpo humano (boneco); os materiais frágeis que se referem à própria fragilidade das crianças; o aço e o ferro das infraestruturas mecanizadas que mostram a modernização do país; a arquitectura clássica, a natureza do lugar e os espaços livres e ao ar livre de jogos, em oposição aos espaços fechados que recordam instituições pedagógicas subdesenvolvidas; e entre estas últimas, o lugar liminar por excelência, simbolizado pela 'Loja das Tentações'. No conjunto fílmico, corpos, lugares e objectos são, assim, configurados como partes interligadas de um único mundo compacto, no qual o cosmos se reflecte no antropo, e o antropo no cosmos, a fim de transfigurar, numa chave metafórica, a cultura imaterial, referindo-se às mudanças na identidade nacional. Esta fábula alegórica da cultura pedagógica portuguesa acaba por propor a possibilidade de uma mudança social (e política), projectada num futuro justo sem ditadura (vitória do bem sobre o mal).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Superfícies fílmicas; cultura material; antropo-cosmo-morfismo; objectos de transição; re-significação fílmica; montagem intelectual.

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