

MODERNISM AND THE PORTUGUESE *TEATRO DE REVISTA*¹

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Introduction

The avant-garde movements of the beginning of the 20th century had a defining influence upon several artistic and non-artistic areas of life. No longer did art restrict itself to artistic areas, but it tried to influence and have an impact on all areas of living and let itself be influenced by all human endeavours and works. Its foremost pioneers came from the visual arts, at the time feeling the competition and impact of mechanical reproductions in their own work and, at the time, also trying to deal with the shock of Romantic sensibilities facing the rapid industrialization of Europe.

It can be said that Modernism started with an enthusiastic embrace of progress and the rapid transformations that society, culture and technology were facing. Modernist artists were trying to express a new sensibility that included the Romantic tradition, but did not reject all the advances they were discovering in science, engineering and social organization, or the ideas of thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and many others.

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The arrival of Modernist ideas in Portugal was surprisingly fast for a small minority of artists, but much slower for the majority of the population and of the artistic landscape of the country, and namely for the artists who depended more on public support or state financing. In fact, the naturalistic taste in arts in Portugal would last until the middle of the 20th century. This was more evident in arts more heavily dependent on audience applause or government support as was the case with the performing arts. In fact, the principles of Modernist theatre would take a long time to be well-received in Portugal. There were a few attempts at Modernist theatre in Portugal in the beginning of the 20th century. For instance, França notes that the future of the magazine *Orpheu*, the first Modernist magazine in Portugal, also entailed an ambitious programme of conferences and a theatre festival² that never took place. One of the protagonists of Portuguese Modernism, José Almada Negreiros (1893-1970), had a deep interest in theatre and was writing, directing and designing for theatre in the 1920s, but the lack of opportunities and interest among audience and artists, at that time, ultimately discouraged him and led him to move abroad for a while. Therefore, for the first 30 years of the 20th century, Modernism did not take hold in Portuguese theatre, except in one area: the stage and costume design of one of the most popular and traditional Portuguese theatre forms – *Teatro de Revista*. In fact, several of the most important early Portuguese Modernist artists, like Jorge Barradas, Milly Possoz, José Barbosa, Sarah Affonso, Stuart Carvalhais and even Almada Negreiros, had an important role redefining the stage and costume design of Portuguese *Teatro de Revista* around the 1920s, and, in this paper I will try to document the origins, reasons, evolution and influence of this change.

Teatro de Revista

Teatro de Revista, also called *Revista à Portuguesa*, is a very popular Portuguese form of satirical sociopolitical theatre, which strives to reenact and satirize some

² José-Augusto França, *A Arte e a Sociedade Portuguesa no Século XX (1910-1990)*, Lisboa 1991, 13-14.

of the most popular, well-known and controversial current affairs and events of society. Its influence was so deep that even at the beginning of the 21st century, its hold on the Portuguese imagination remains strong. Most of the population, however, still conflate theatre with *Teatro de Revista* and see its old celebrities as examples of theatre performers. Its political and financial support still is a relevant issue,³ even if *Teatro de Revista* itself is today a dying theatre genre, with most of its practitioners retired and its stages closed or degraded.

The origin of *Teatro de Revista* can be found in France at the end of the 18th century. Amidst the turmoil of the French economic and social crisis and the subsequent revolution, theatre became a popular tool to inform and reflect about the events then taking place in France. A specific type of theatre started to appear called the *revue de fin d'année*,⁴ that was used to tell, show and comment on the main political and social events of the previous year. Combining popular songs, humor and current affairs, *revue de fin d'année* became a massive popular hit because it satisfied the wider audience's need for entertainment and information and it quickly spread across Europe.

The revue arrived in Portugal in the middle of 19th century, with the first one being, according to Luiz Francisco Rebello,⁵ "Lisboa em 1850" ("Lisbon in 1850"), which premiered on 11 January 1851, in the *Teatro do Ginásio*. This theatre was already popular for staging vaudeville and *opera bufa*. *Revue de fin d'année* was the next logical step, immediately becoming very popular with the audience, the piece being staged for a full month and repeated during the carnival. This success ensured that the *revue de la année* quickly stopped being just an annual event, but became a commercially successful enterprise, that happened

³ In 2001, the mayor of Lisbon, Pedro Santana Lopes, created a casino in the city ostensibly with the sole purpose of supporting the recovery of the degraded area of *Teatro de Revista's* theatres, Parque Mayer. These areas should have been recovered with a project by the architect Frank Gehry, but, although the casino was created and opened, the rebuilding of the theatres never actually took place.

⁴ V. Pavão dos Santos, *A revista modernista*, Lisbon 2000, 2.

⁵ Luiz Francisco Rebello, *História do Teatro de Revista em Portugal*. Vol. I *Da Regeneração à República*. Lisbon 1984, 55.

multiple times a year, through several productions. Virgílio Ribalta⁶ describes Portuguese *Teatro de Revista* as being full of colorful set designs exchanged in quick succession, and a choir of scantily-clad women wearing gaudy costumes, all with a sense of dynamic movement and constant change, which would satisfy the appetite of a popular audience for magnificence and sexual innuendo.

Its popularity also ensured that it was one of the few theatre genres in Portugal that could thrive without government backing, even if the number of performers, set designs and costumes made it an expensive production to stage. When successful, these productions had long runs that demanded a constant search for novelty that could keep the audience's interest and make them return to see a show more than once. Usually, this interest was sustained through popular songs, guest stars, new sketches, etc. Obviously, its satirical addressing of current affairs – for example during the First Portuguese Republic, with its numerous political crises, rebellions and uprisings – also added to the public interest in *Teatro de Revista*.

Dramaturgically, *Teatro de Revista* had a very specific and stable structure. Usually, each piece was divided into two parts, each one with a specific, although broad, theme. The first part would open with an orchestral piece followed by the first song. Then, several different scenes would take place, mixing songs, dance and theatrical scenes inspired by political, social or theatrical events, or scenes combining all these. These scenes could be connected by the character of the *compère* or *comère* – an actor or actress who, in between scenes, would walk to the front of the stage and, while the set was being changed behind the curtain, would have a humorous dialogue with the audience or with another actor, thus creating a thematic bridge between scenes. One of the scenes would include a guest star, usually a well-known *fado* singer. Then, there would be some 'street scenes' about daily life in Lisbon which would end with a festive parade. After that, there would be a second part, with a very similar structure to the first

⁶ In José Carlos Álvarez, *A República Foi ao Teatro*, Lisboa 2010, 25.

part, which would end also with a sort of festive parade, although shorter than the one at the end of the first part, where all the cast would be on stage, in a very hierarchical order, with the choir girls on the side and at the back, and the *compère* and *comère*, and guest stars being on centre stage in the front line.⁷

It was, therefore, a highly festive theatre, involving several dozen performers, and a very detailed, multiple and complex set design, meant to impress the audience with the magnificent and surprising visuals, but also easily changed to allow the quick succession of different musical, dancing and theatrical scenes.

Its popular impact in the beginning of the 20th century was undeniable: between 1910 and 1926 about half of all theatre production in Lisbon and Oporto was composed of pieces of *Teatro de Revista*.⁸ Many of its performers were celebrities and several of its songs became popular hits or were inscribed in cultural memory. *Teatro de Revista* even became the model and inspiration for Portuguese comedy films that would be made in the 1940s. It even helped turn *fado* - at the time a despised popular music genre in Portugal and usually connected with sailors, prostitutes and criminals - into a music genre closely related to national identity. It began being used in *Teatro de Revista* from the 1870s onwards to help to illustrate the bohemian side of life in Lisbon at that time. Despite its popularity, and despite the fact that Portuguese audiences mostly rejected Modernist performing arts, as we will see, *Teatro de Revista* was also the first theatrical art form to welcome, search and popularize the first modernist artists in theatre in Portugal.

Modernism in Portugal

Modernism, in Portugal, was at first welcomed by a small clique of artists, usually connected to the magazine *Orpheu*, like Fernando Pessoa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Santa-Rita Pintor, and Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, among others.

⁷ Alvarez, *A República Foi ao Teatro*, 26.

⁸ Alvarez, *A República Foi ao Teatro*, 34.



Figure 1. A caricature in the *De Teatro* magazine, showing how the playwright should show gratitude for the applause after the première. On the lower right, the futurist or modernist author is showed bravely enduring the rain of tomatoes and other vegetables thrown by the enraged audience

Most of them had lived in Paris, and knew and were influenced by the new Modernist ideas coming from there. However, their ideas and works were mostly rejected – or even made fun of - namely in the theatre. It is well-known that the first number of *Orpheu* was regarded as an ‘insanity’ at the time and even became a minor success mostly for scandalous reasons, not for any real appreciation by the audience of the aesthetics it promoted. It is worth noting that the presence of theatre in *Orpheu* was also ambiguous because it included only a theatre play, *O Marinheiro* (The Sailor) by Fernando Pessoa, which was clearly more influenced by the symbolism of Maeterlinck, than any Modernist aesthetics.

In theatre, such rejection also happened among audience and critics. In *Figure 1* we have a caricature published in one of the foremost theatre magazines of the time, joking about the reception of futurist authors in Portugal by hostile audiences.

Such hostility could be felt even against foreign productions, as it happened with the *Ballets Russes*, as I will try to describe.

The *Ballets Russes* was a Russian dance company founded in 1909 and managed by Sergei Diaghilev. It was the foremost and more influential dance company of the time, having distilled classical ballet into a more widely-appealing form, working according to Modernist principles. It partnered some of the most important modernist artists of the time, like Léon Bakst, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, who all created the costumes and scenery for *Parade* (1917) and *Le Tricorne* (1919) for that company. André Derain, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, Jean Cocteau, Robert and Sonia Delaunay were also associated with the *Ballets Russes*, as were several of the most important composers and choreographers of the time, like Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Eric Satie, and Nijinsky, even having costumes designed by Coco Chanel. It was a fortunate mix of clever commercial success, the ability to court the support of rich and powerful sponsors, and attracting a wide audience through acclaim and scandal. Modernist art was fascinated and inspired by dance, namely through the use of movement of the human body. Dance also created art through the use of existing elements, like the human body, like in a collage, its sensual elements, the use of different artistic materials, its mass appeal, the idea of a collective. The absence of spoken language as well gave it a more irrational, subconscious appeal. All of these were, of course, defining traits of modernist aesthetics.

The *Ballets Russes* was able to find a wide audience from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and plenty of funding for its extravagant and exotic productions. Through its innovative dance and openness to collaboration with the most avant-garde artists, and its willingness to shock and provoke, *Ballets Russes* became the most acclaimed performing troupe of the time working under modernist principles and it was a magnet for Modernist artists.

Sasportes⁹ notes that Portuguese artists living in Paris at the time, like the poet

⁹ José Sasportes, *Trajectória da Dança Teatral em Portugal*, Lisbon 1979, 57.

Mário de Sá Carneiro, the architect and painter José Pacheco, the architect Raul Lino and the painter Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, were fascinated by the performances of the company. And therefore, the Modernist artists were enthusiastic when the *Ballet Russes* came to Portugal at the end of 1917. While the First World War was taking place in Central Europe, the *Ballets Russes* found themselves in a difficult situation, having a hard time finding sponsors and places to perform. Diaghilev tried to resolve the problem by making the company tour South America and then Portugal and Spain.

When the *Ballets* were coming to Portugal, on 14 October 1917, Almada wrote a long article for the first and only edition of *Portugal Futurista*, the new Modernist magazine he directed, where he described the company as one of the “most beautiful landmarks in the civilization of modern Europe”¹⁰ and then, in a very emotional and impressionistic text, described the work of the company, even if he – not having had the opportunity to be in Paris - had never actually seen it in person, but knew it only through the photos published in newspapers and magazines.¹¹

However, the presence of *Ballets Russes* in Portugal, despite all the hopes and enthusiasm of the Portuguese modernist artists, was for the most part a fiasco. The company arrived on December 2 to premiere at the *Coliseu dos Recreios* on December 6. However, on December 5, the rebellion of *Junta Militar Revolucionária* began, led by Sidónio Pais against the government of Afonso Costa. It paralyzed Lisbon for three days and forced the company to stay indoors at their hotel, supposedly in the company of some Portuguese modernist artists like Almada Negreiros, the composer Ruy Coelho and the architect Carlos Ramos.

Therefore, the premier could not take place until December 13 in a severely damaged *Coliseu de Lisboa*. The company was unhappy with the working

¹⁰ My translation.

¹¹ V. Pavão dos Santos, *O Escaparate de Todas as Artes ou Gil Vicente visto por Almada Negreiros*, Lisbon 1993, 14.

conditions, but nevertheless presented *Les Sylphides* - usually considered to be the first abstract ballet - *Schéhérazade*, a sensuous and exotic piece, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Warrior Dances of Prince Igor*, *Le Soleil de Nuit*, based on Russian folk themes. Among other pieces, Ballets also performed *Le Carnaval* with costumes by Bakst, and based on characters from *Commedia Dell Arte*, which would have a deep impact on Almada Negreiros and become the best received piece of the troupe in Portugal. Other performances were *Thamar*, based on a legend of Georgia and *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, which daringly combined erudite dance, folk dance and conventional gestures of daily life.

There would be eight presentations at the *Coliseu de Lisboa* between December 13-27, 1917, and two more in the equally damaged *Teatro São Carlos* on the January 2 and 3, 1918. Despite the intense promotion and access to the prestigious *Teatro São Carlos*, at the time attended by the cultural and social elites of Lisbon, these performances seemed to have been a failure. Most presentations had half-empty auditoriums, almost no profits, indifferent audiences and hostile reviews. One reviewer, Álvaro de Lima, compared the set design to the “ridiculous blots of ‘futurist’ paintings”¹². Another reviewer, F. Rodrigues Alves, described *Le Soleil de Nuit* as being “a madhouse fantasy, obviously cartoonish. A sort of futurist ode, created by fakes and danced by crazy people. Worthless set design.”¹³ Obviously, the main defenders of the show were Portuguese modernist artists, like the writer and journalist António Ferro and, especially, Almada Negreiros.

The writer and artist Almada Negreiros was already an admirer of *Ballets Russes*, which he knew from the French magazines to which he subscribed and through an intense correspondence with Robert and Sonia Delaunay. These two artists had moved to Portugal, to the northern town of Vila do Conde, in 1915, to escape the First World War. Robert Delaunay was already a famous Modernist

¹² Santos, *A revista modernista*, 4. (My translation)

¹³ Santos, *O Escaparate de Todas as Artes*, 19. (My translation)

painter, and his wife, Sonia Delaunay, was also a painter and costume designer. Both of them would be later involved in the set design of the *Ballets Russes*. It can be said that the Russian artist Sonia Delaunay had a strong influence on Negreiros. Not only did Sonia work for *Ballets Russes*, directly and indirectly inspiring Almada's interest in stage design under modernist principles, but her style can also be seen in later stage designs by Almada and also of the modernist *Revista*, as we will see later.

Almada Negreiros and Sonia Delaunay even developed a dance project, influenced by the *simultané* principles proposed by Robert and Sonia, called *Ballet Veronese et Bleu*, which was never actually performed.¹⁴ But Almada, who was well connected to the Portuguese aristocratic and bourgeois elites, was already directing a series of small dance pieces with young girls of aristocratic families. Obviously, these had been small, intimate affairs, with very restricted audiences, performed during aristocratic parties, later described by one participant as a "little entertainment".¹⁵ However, in 1919, Almada, with the financial support of his patroness Helena Castelo-Melhor, actually staged a dance performance in *Teatro São Carlos*. It was composed of two dance pieces called *Bailado do Encantamento* (*Dance of Enchantment*) and *A Princesa dos Sapatos de Ferro* (*The Princess of the Iron Shoes*), with music composed by Ruy Coelho and set design by Raul Lino with the participation onstage of the always daring Negreiros. These presentations were a minor success, with three repeat performances in the presence of most of the elite of Lisbon and even of the then President of the Republic, Sidónio Pais.

Later, Almada would give up choreography and dance, but would never lose his interest in theatre. He started designing posters for some theatre troupes, like *Companhia Lucília Simões*, and later he would go on doing illustrations and covers for the most important theatre magazine of the time, *De Teatro*.

¹⁴ Santos, *O Escaparate de Todas as Artes*, 10.

¹⁵ Santos, *O Escaparate de Todas as Artes*, 12.

He was also writing for drama under modernist principles, with plays like *Os Outros* (*The Others*), *Pierrot e Arlequim* (*Pierrot and Arlechino*) where he displays his obsession with the characters of *Commedia Dell Arte*, *Portugal* or *Deseja-se Mulher* (*Wishing for a Woman*). However, in spite of his own efforts and the efforts of others, most of his plays seemed not to have been staged throughout most of his life, and were staged only from the 1960s onwards, therefore beyond the scope of this essay, which is mostly focused on the first three decades of the 20th century.

As an aside, let me state that António Ferro, who was a theatre critic and later, during Salazar's dictatorship, would be responsible for the *Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional*, the ministry that promoted arts and culture under that dictatorship, was also an admirer of the *Ballets Russes*. When he created the Portuguese dance troupe *Grupo de Bailados Portugueses Verde Gaio* in 1940, he was obviously inspired by *Ballets Russes*, and even called them the Portuguese 'Ballet Russes', according to Castro.¹⁶ As another aside, but of greater significance, the show at the *Coliseu* had a brochure with illustrations by Jorge Barradas, who would become one of the most important set designers of *Teatro de Revista* in Portugal, as we will see later.

Modernist set design and *Teatro de Revista*

According to França¹⁷, *Teatro de Revista* had an important presence in Lisbon. There were at least ten theatres that were devoted solely to *Teatro de Revista*, and most of them were run by the same entrepreneur: António de Macedo. This means that *Teatro de Revista* was a commercial enterprise that demanded large audiences regularly attending the performances. This required employing celebrities, using famous tunes, addressing current affairs and novelties that

¹⁶ Maria João Castro, (2009) "A influência dos Ballets Russes na criação do Verde Gaio," in http://www.fundacaoantonioquadros.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=65&Itemid=34&limit=1&limitstart=17 (accessed 24 December 2014).

¹⁷ José Augusto França, *Os anos vinte em Portugal*, Lisboa 1992, 103.

could spark the curiosity of the audiences. One of the most revealing examples of the use of these novelties that could attract the attention of the audience is the *Revista Ó da Guarda*, which, in 1907, used the new technology of cinema in one of its scenes to stage a fictional drama of one of its most famous actresses being kidnapped, and using the moving image to show things happening outside the theatre, supposedly simultaneously and in real time. It is likely that one of the reasons for *Teatro de Revista* being the first theatre genre in Portugal to employ modernist artists for its costumes and scenography is, likewise, the need for novelty that would awe the crowds.

According to Pavão dos Santos,¹⁸ until the 1920s most set designs of *Teatro de Revista* were made by Eduardo Machado and Augusto Pina as well as Luís Salvador, and most of the costumes were made by Manuel Francisco dos Santos. Machado and Pina kept to the style of Portuguese cartoonist and satirist Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro (1846-1905). Francisco dos Santos owed his success largely to the fact that he had a huge wardrobe that he rented, combining the materials he had and were needed, without giving particular thought to artistic styles or aesthetic considerations. However, shortly after the visit of the *Ballets Russes* to Portugal, and even in spite of the bad reception the dance company had received, something new took place.

This change seems in a way to have been promoted by António Ferro. In 1925, Ferro, who at the time was writing theatre reviews, started openly criticizing the conventional set design of most plays in the theatre reviews he wrote for *Diário de Notícias*, clearly promoting a new Modernist aesthetic. This caused great controversy, specially among the set designers of the time who protested in newspapers and even threatened to refuse to help or collaborate with Modernist artists. That same year, Almada Negreiros made the set design for the *Revista Chic-chic*, in what is usually considered to be the first truly modernist set design in Portugal. Change was clearly in the air, as in the same year, Eduardo Malta,

¹⁸ Santos, *A revista modernista*, 2.

then considered a modernist painter, made the set design for the *Revista Tiroliro*, which was lauded by Ferro.

Almada Negreiros would create several other set designs for theatre, but in 1927 he left for Madrid where he hoped to promote his career as a visual artist and a playwright. Therefore, most modernist aesthetics that found expression in Portugal, mainly taking hold at *Teatro de Revista*, would be the work of other modernist artists. Among these we find Jorge Barradas (1894-1971), the same painter who had drawn the illustrations for the *Ballets Russes's* brochure at the *Coliseu*, who would collaborate with Negreiros in a *Revista* of 1926, *Pomada Amor*, and who would have some important contributions for the set design of the *revista Sete e Meio* in 1927. In 1929, along with Stuart Carvalhais, Barata Feio e Rui Gameiro, Barradas made the set design for *Ricocó*, which was openly praised by António Ferro.¹⁹ He would go on to work even more during the 1930s, creating other set designs and costumes for *Teatro de Revista*, like *Lua Cheia*.

Barradas was drawn into *Teatro de Revista* by his illustration work in several magazines. His ability for satirical drawings and, later, for decorative drawings, made him a perfect fit for *Teatro de Revista*. He also became very much in demand by the *Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional*, led by António Ferro, for his ability to mix modernist techniques with the portrayal of popular themes of national identity and would become famous for decorating several well-known Portuguese landmarks.

Another artist, José Barbosa (1900-1977), son of another set designer of more conventional style, Barbosa Júnior, became also a prolific and renowned set designer and his drawings for *Água Pé* (1927) drew general praise and, supposedly, even made the audience applaud the sets during the shows. *Água Pé* would be on stage for a full year, which was an enormous success at the time,

¹⁹ França, *Os anos vinte em Portugal*, 104.



Figure 2. Detail of a set design, with actors, by Jorge Barradas, for the play *Lua Cheia* (1934)

and Ferro would commend the modernity of the piece, even if he complained about it being “too Russian”, that is, too clearly inspired by the set design of the *Ballets Russes*²⁰. This clearly marks *Água Pé* as the first triumph of Modernist aesthetics on the Portuguese stage and, in particular, in *Teatro de Revista*. From this moment onwards, the Modernist style would become predominant in *Teatro de Revista* and audiences would expect it.

Such success would make José Barbosa draw other sets and costumes for several other pieces of *Teatro de Revista*, like *O Sete e Meio* (1927), in a partnership with the architect, painter and director Leitão de Barros. On a side note, *O Sete e Meio* was also the debut of a Portuguese actress called Beatriz Costa featuring a Louise Brooks hairstyle, which also signalled the changing times in fashion. José Barbosa would work non-stop in the set design and costume design of *Teatro de*

²⁰ Santos, *A revista modernista*, 6.



Figure 3. Detail of José Barbosa's set and costume design for the play *Chá de Parreira* (1929)

Revista, and, from 1927 until 1950, he worked on 21 pieces of *Teatro de Revista*, including *A Rambóia* (1928), *Chá de Parreira*, *Areias de Portugal* (1932) among many others. His success opened for him the doors of the national theatre, so, from the 1930s onwards he would also work on dramas, tragedies, operas, ballet and classical theatre, and was even called to design the sets and costumes for the *Companhia Portuguesa de Bailado Verde Gaio* that Ferro had just created.

Other artists in the same style working in *Teatro de Revista* were Maria Adelaide Lima Cruz (1908-1985), António Amorim (1898-1964), Jorge Herold (1907-1990), Laierte Neves (1914-1981), Pinto de Campos (1908-1975), just to name some of the most famous and with wider experience, although other modernist artists also occasionally had a hand in some plays. These included Alice Rey Colaço (1893-1978), Raul Lino (1879-1974), António Soares (1894-1978), Milly Possoz (1888-1967), Sarah Afonso (1899-1983) and Frederico George

(1915-1994), most of whom would turn the *Teatro de Revista* into a showcase of Modernist visual arts in the 1930s and 1940s. While a detailed overview of individual style and work of these artists is outside the scope of this article, it is possible to detect a strong inspiration in motifs of Portuguese folk lore or tradition, heavily stylized through the geometrical patterns of Modernism with a strong closeness to the picturesque image of Portugal that was heavily promoted by *Estado Novo*.

There is also a notorious emphasis in representing the multitude, the crowd, and the luxurious and grandiose, with the purpose of making an impression on the audience, through strong contrasts of colors, striking shapes and repetitions of the human body. All this created an art that was instantly appealing to the audience, at the same time looking fresh and familiar, which may explain the growing acceptance this style developed in most plays of *Teatro de Revista* from the end of the 1920s onwards.

Regional appropriations

Although it seems somehow paradoxical that the Modernist style would dominate one of the most commercial genres of theatre in Portugal, several reasons can be given for that. One reason was the ease with which Modernist artists devoted themselves to design and decoration in more industrial settings. This was part of the Modernist ideology of embracing progress and the mechanization of life. Sonia Delaunay was the model for that, employing her technique of *simultané*²¹ not only in her art works, but also in the set design for the *Ballets Russes* and in fashion design, and other types of design, that she worked on later in life. This availability of artists allowed many Modernist artists to work in decoration and set design, too, like Almada Negreiros and Jorge Barradas. As Rodrigues²²

²¹ Kathlees Jamie, "Sonia Delaunay: The avant-garde queen of loud, wearable art," in: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/mar/27/sonia-delaunay-avant-garde-queen-art-fashion-vibrant-tate-modern>. (accessed 27 March 2015).

²² António Rodrigues, *Jorge Barradas*, Lisbon 1995, 30.

notes, most artists of the first Portuguese generation of Modernist artists worked in caricature drawing, illustration, painting, set design, poster design, advertisement, book illustration and even songbooks of popular songs. I would argue that many were drawn to *Teatro de Revista* precisely because they were engaged in this type of work, as was the case with Barradas or António Amorim. Another reason was the constant need of *Teatro de Revista's* entrepreneurs to surprise their audience. This demanded a constant search of novelties that could awe, interest and attract audiences. These novelties could involve celebrities, new scenes, but also new set designs and new costumes, and all could give a new breath to old pieces, and attract new audiences or returning audiences. Modernist art, by embracing the spectacular and the dynamic, and by including new technologies and techniques, was especially able to do that.

A further reason was the predisposition of Modernist Art to present deep contrasts, luxurious settings and awe-inspiring works that could be used to awe the audience of *Teatro de Revista*, most of whom were seeking distraction, entertainment and a break from the monotony of life in Portugal under the Military Dictatorship. In a way, Modernist art served as escapism, a dreamlike art that could seduce and fascinate the audience.

One last reason was the embrace of national motifs that could better beguile an audience looking for a more grandiose reenactment of the traditions and daily life it knew, which the *Teatro de Revista* deftly explored through humorous and musical sketches. One only has to note the example of Jorge Barradas, whose drawings displayed a great interest in presenting the popular types of Lisbon, the same popular types that fuelled so many sketches of *Teatro de Revista*. Barradas created these drawings which would be published in some of the newspapers and magazines of the time, like *ABC*, *Ilustração*, *Diário de Lisboa*, etc.²³

Therefore, it is possible to believe that, following the ideas of its main promoter, António Ferro, and the strong influence of the *Ballets Russes*, *Teatro de Revista*

²³ Rodrigues, *Jorge Barradas*, 42.

became one of the main promoters of Modernist Art in Portugal. This was a more popular art that was embraced by *Teatro de Revista* as a mirror of daily life that could awe and attract crowds.

Conclusions

Although the examples presented obviously display the individual tastes and styles of each artist, it is possible to identify some trends and currents in the Modernist set and costume design of *Teatro de Revista* from the 1920s and into the following decades.

Firstly, the use of contrasts in colors and shapes in a way that is very reminiscent of the style of Sonia Delaunay. Comparing the pictures that remain of those sets, we can see a strong preference for primary and contrasting colors to create dynamics and the illusion of movement.

Secondly, a taste for the exotic and a stylized representation of faraway locales and cultures that could make an impression on the audience, all of it displaying some of the influence of the *Ballets Russes*.

Thirdly, and paradoxically, a taste for the local and traditional. Many of the settings and costumes of *Teatro de Revista* had to represent, in a cartoonish or sentimental style, the familiar neighborhoods or scenes of Lisbon and other typical Portugal places. Displaying a more nationalistic trend that was already part of the first waves of Modernism. The Modernist style of *Teatro de Revista* was also able to accommodate that. In fact, it did this in such a persuasive and efficient way that several of the set designers and costume designers of *Teatro de Revista* would later work on some of the propaganda projects of the nationalist and conservative government of António Salazar. Barradas would work on the Portuguese Stand in the Latin-American Exhibition of Seville, Barbosa would work at the National Theatre, Lima Cruz would work on the decoration of public buildings, and so on.

Fourthly, the influence of António Ferro, who, even if he was mostly a marginal figure of the first and second Portuguese movements of Modernism, became

deeply influential as a theatre reviewer and as a politician, enthusiastically promoting a more nationalistic brand of Modernism that could be used as a propaganda tool for Salazar's dictatorship. Although the ability of *Teatro de Revista* to criticize the political *status quo* was also one of the reasons for its popularity, the existence of theatre censorship²⁴ taking place before the premiere of each show and with the power to cause damage to the financially vulnerable *Teatro de Revista*, ensured that such criticism could only take place through the subtlety of the text and actors and very rarely through set design or costume design.

Fifthly, although Modernist set design and costume design became ubiquitous in *Teatro de Revista*, and although its dance routines were also influenced by the Russian and Modernist dance,²⁵ the dramaturgical structure of the genre did not change. In fact, the texts and authors of Modernist theatre were notoriously absent from the Portuguese stage well into the 1960s.

However, in a way, this also reflects the fact that Modernist aesthetics seem to have found greater audience acceptance in the visual arts and in architecture than in other areas, namely in literature, playwriting, music and others. That is why Almada Negreiros had to endure the fact that his plays were being ignored or passed on by several theatre troupes for several years, and have some of his plays staged only towards the end of his life. Like, in 1963, *Deseja-se Mulher*, which was staged by Casa da Comédia, under very restrictive conditions and for a very limited audience. Yet it is undeniable that he helped bring the

²⁴ There were several layers of theatre censorship in Portugal at that time. The first stage would be the reading and vetting the text for the play. The second stage would be the viewing and vetting of the last dress rehearsal before the première. As the script was already paid for, and the dress rehearsal meant that the production of the play was complete with weeks of rehearsal and all the props, costumes and sets already made, and the play advertised, any play rejected at this stage would be a serious financial blow to the theatre troupe. Finally, it could happen that during the season of the show, censors would come to watch it, and they could close the performance if they felt something went against the moral and political values of the State.

²⁵ This change happened mostly through the choreographer Francis Graça, who was the choreographer of *Água Pe*, and would become the choreographer of the *Companhia Portuguesa de Bailados Verde Gaio*, but the impact of Modernism in Portuguese dance is outside the scope of this paper.

Modernist revolution to the stage of *Teatro de Revista* while still at a young age, and, therefore, helped to popularize, and allow the Portuguese appropriation of, Modernist ideas that were shaping the aesthetics, thinking and life of Europe at that time.

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