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## **BOGART AS BOGART'S DOUBLE: CLUES TO HUMPHREY BOGART'S CINEMATOGRAPHIC PERSONA 1941-1946**

Luís Felipe Sobral. 2015.  
*Bogart Duplo de Bogart: pistas  
da persona cinematográfica de  
Humphrey Bogart, 1941-1946.*  
São Paulo, Terceiro Nome, 152p.

In the book *Bogart duplo de Bogart*, Luis Felipe Sobral centralizes his analysis of the construction of the cinematographic persona of Humphrey Bogart, a Hollywood actor who began his theater career and in supporting characters in the gangster films of the 1930s, but got known for his detective movie main characters in the 1940s.

The author selects three key films to compose his analysis throughout the chapters of the book, they are: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Big Sleep* (1946). In addressing the scenes of the film, Sobral also scrutinizes texts of the time, establishes, publicity materials, relationships between films of the same period, among other materials, to avoid a transposition of his own reading for the films and, in describing the scenes, tries to get closer to the “visual culture” of the film’s production period. This movement of analysis recalls some concerns about the anachronism posed by the historian Lucien Febvre in *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (2009), as Febvre, concerned about the way in which Rabelais was read in the sixteenth century, tries to avoid the maximum anachronism in an exercise of trying to appropriate the perception categories of this period. There is, therefore, between these two authors, an effort in a similar direction.

Sobral tells us that he takes as inspiration the “gender technology’ concept, developed by Teresa Lauretis from Michel Foucault’s works on sexuality” (Sobral 2015, 20). According to this conception, the idea of

gender could be thought of as the product of social technologies such as cinema. However, Sobral marks a difference between the analysis he undertakes in his book and Lauretis' model of analysis, since: while the later emphasizes the internal elements of the productions analyzed, Sobral explicitly states that the focus of his analysis is not so much the internal elements of the movies, but rather the movement between what appears in the films and the context of their production.

In this way, Sobral's analysis follows a double movement: to think of the "visible of the image" and the "invisible of its production" (ibid., 20), that is, what is seen by the spectator in the films starring Bogart (which are inserted in what the author calls a "visual culture")<sup>1</sup> and what is not present in these images, but which are condition of its production. In this sense, we try to understand the trajectory of Bogart and the relations established by the actor in the Hollywood film production context (to insert the actor and his *film persona*, which Sobral is keen to differentiate) within his historical, political, economic and social context (in an analysis marked by the influence of Bourdieusian thought)<sup>2</sup>. In this way, the author articulates (in economic, political and social terms) the images produced and the "relative autonomy" of Bogart in the construction of his own persona.

The preface written by Heloisa Pontes brings, besides a description of Sobral's procedures and analytical methods, a brief but instigating comparison between the figures of Humphrey Bogart and Jon Hamm (actor who played the character Don Drapper in *Mad Men* series), a comparison that would yield promising studies on how these two actors and their characters build masculinity ideals and standards in the cinema. However, Sobral's analysis, despite starting from the concern with the idea of gender, concentrates its efforts in the attempt to understand how the formation of the cinematographic persona serves as mediator between actor and character and that sometimes ends up confusing them, or joining them, as if they were one and the same entity. In the formation of the persona there would be a specificity of the cinema that, for Sobral, unlike the theater, makes inescapable the evidence of physical traits of the actor, and to the extent that the films are reproducible, in several times, they end up establishing a more lasting relation between the actor and his characters. It should be said that these differentiations between cinema and theater are brought by the author at various points in the book and are important for understanding the biography and trajectory of Bogart as he goes through the two expressive forms throughout his life.

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1 Sobral's concept derives from what "Michael Baxandall called the 'cognitive style of the period'" (2015, 54).

2 See Bourdieu (2015).

If the formation of the cinematographic persona is the articulator between the life and body of the actor and the role of the character he plays, it is precisely there that resides the analytical potential of such a category for Sobral, since the concept then puts in relation the actor's body his economic, political and social relations, actor their social, political and economic, the influence (or relative-autonomy) that he has in the film production process, its inclusion in the broader context of production of Hollywood and world cinema and the historical contexts of these productions, as well as the films narratives themselves. All these characteristics would influence the construction of the persona, and, at the same time, appear articulated by it. These elements form and are read, for the author, in the cinematographic images of the period.

Consider the following passage:

A característica mais notável desse material publicitário reside no fato de que as figuras em cena não são apenas personagens nem seus respectivos interpretes, e, sim, as próprias *personas* dos artistas. Tal processo resume-se em retomar um conjunto de atributos associados a um personagem de um filme anterior e vinculá-lo ao personagem do filme promovido; a continuidade é preservada, pois um só artista interpreta ambos; no entanto, não se trata apenas de um ou outro personagem, tampouco do próprio artista, porém de sua *persona*, que só assume uma forma concreta ao inscrever, por meio da performance, o primeiro no corpo do segundo (Ibid., 224).

The most notable feature of this advertising material lies in the fact that the figures on the stage are not just characters nor their respective interpreters, but the artists' *personas* themselves. Such a process boils down to taking back a set of attributes associated with a character from an earlier film and linking it to the character of the promoted film; continuity is preserved, as one artist plays both; however, it is not just one or another character, nor the artist himself, but his *persona*, which only takes a concrete form when signing up, through the performance, the first in the second one's body (Ibid., 224).

This passage shows us, synthetically, the way in which Sobral articulates these problems from the concept of *persona*, which we should not take as a static form defined *a priori*. The way in which the construction of the concept (and of Bogart's own *persona*) is outlined in the book is dynamic, just like the various moments in Bogart's life. At the same time, we can reverse this movement to think how the construction of the *persona* of the actor would have contributed to the Hollywood productions and to the

formation of bodies and ways of being in the world. We can make this last statement to the extent that we note that Sobral articulates the concept of persona to the two formulations worked by Marcel Mauss (2003): the notion of “person” and the “corporal techniques” concept. Sobral makes a point of reminding us that Mauss had already noticed the role of cinema in the education and propagation of different body techniques which, in turn, mediate our relationship with the world.

The characters and images in the film associate, carry vestiges (so to speak) of the trajectory and processes of their formation, and they are somehow inscribed in the body of the actor. The body thus has a very important dimension in the essay and is often in the position of a vertex articulating the relations. In addition, it guarantees, as we saw in the above quotation, a kind of continuity that gives certain expectations to the public in relation to what will be seen on the screen, what, for Sobral, is also part of a kind of *modus operandi* of the Hollywood film industry that, from a certain point, shall be guided by models of films that are successful for the general public and found in the selection of actors (which in turn were associated with characters they had already played) more or less suitable in each of these models.

It is quite interesting to note how Sobral establishes the relationship between the historical-social context of the period, the actions of the American government over Hollywood cinema, and the reverberation of these elements in cinematographic productions, and consequently in the design of Bogart persona as in the relations in which his character establishes with the women he falls in love with (in the movies, evidently) and in how love tensions have resolved within the plot given the situation of the moment. Sobral’s analysis in this essay is very well worked out in terms of the “visible” image (though not the central axis of analysis) and the “invisible” of its production (the focus of concerns). And in this sense, throughout book, the author is more concerned with showing how the construction of images and values through the Hollywood film industry works than with the moment of reception of these cinematographic constructions and to what extent they affect the spectators’ bodies. Even so, the book written by Sobral opens a field of possibilities with multiple possible entrances to think about the role of cinema and the construction of cinematographic persona in the formation and transformation of our ideas about gender and sexuality, such as that pointed out by Heloisa Pontes.

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