

# MOVEMENT, FRAMEWORK, CUT

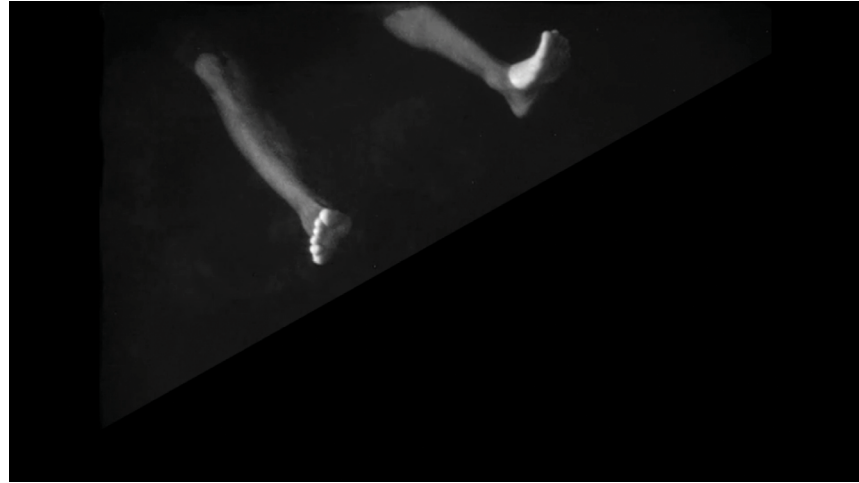
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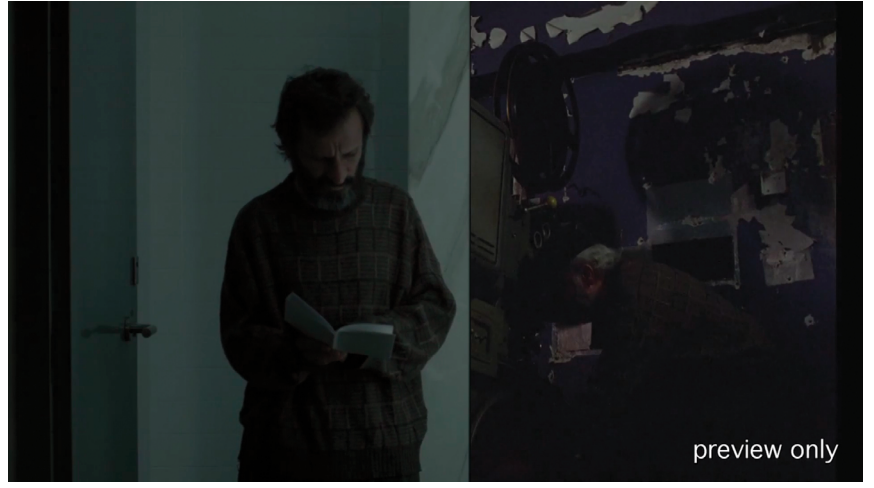
## ABSTRACT

In the three short films *Cinema*, *O Guardador* and *Corrente*, the director Rodrigo Areias uses the cinematographic medium to establish a seamless relation between character and environment. All three regard different themes, but share remarkable similarities in style, concept and visual language, pointing to the concise work of the director. This essay, *Movement, Framework, Cut*, explores some techniques of video editing to analyze exactly how Areias masters the filmic landscape, through the movement of characters and the framework of the shots. Cutting between the three short films, and cutting the shots themselves, allows for a new perspective on how the various elements of the films flow organically together.

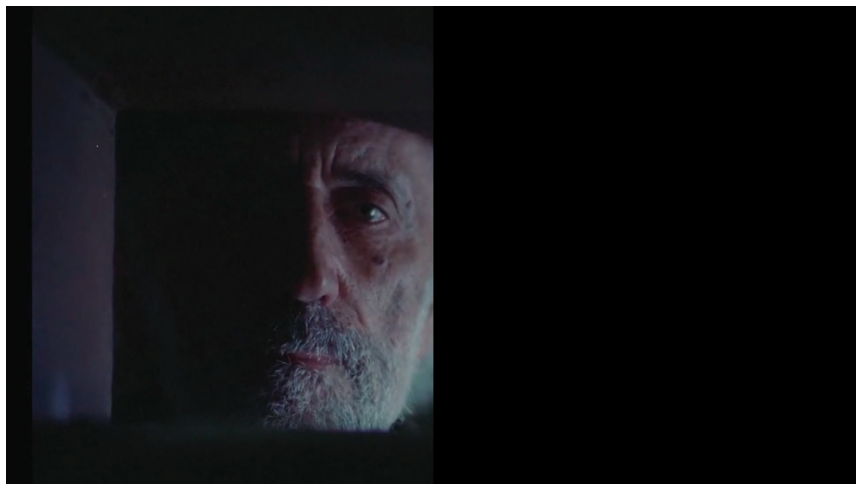
Keywords: Rodrigo Areias; Audiovisual essay; Character; Environment.

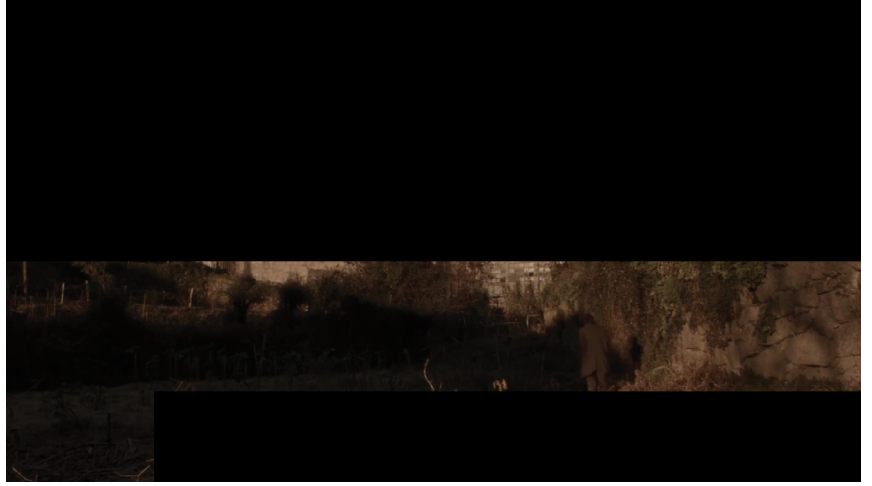
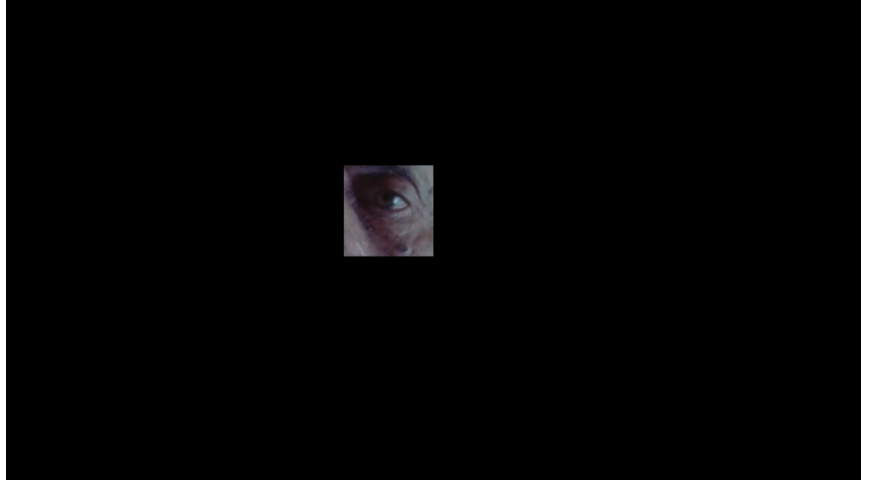


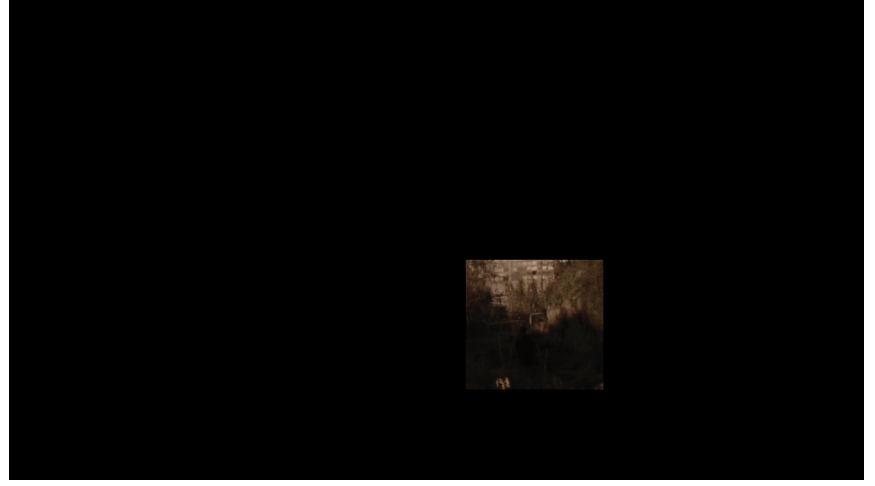
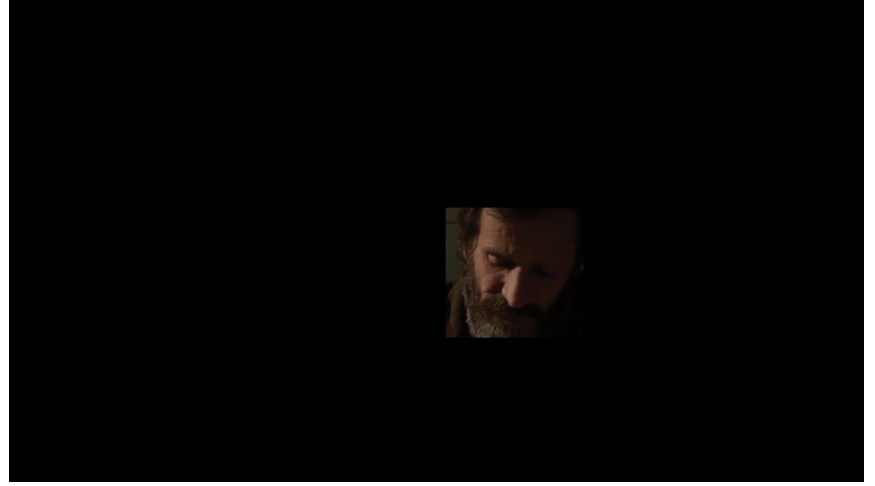




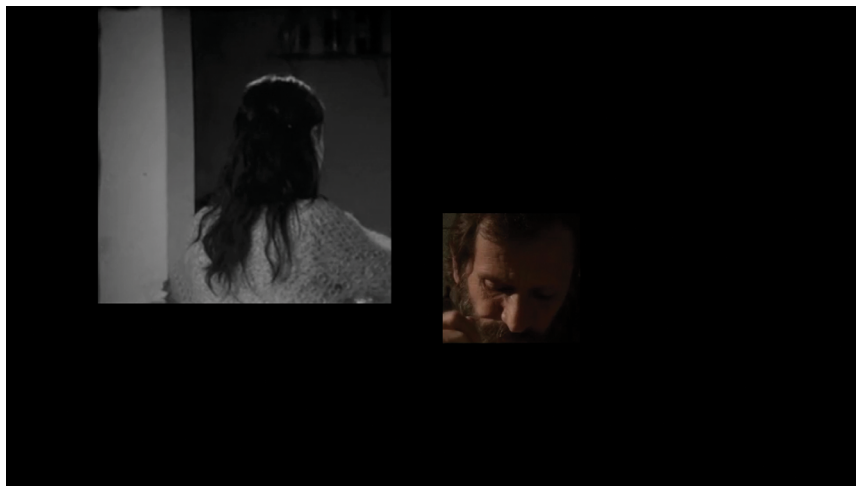
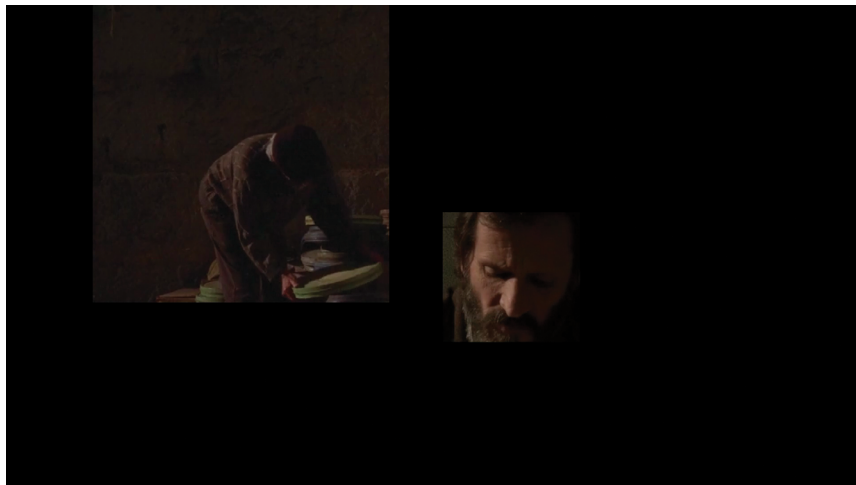












## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

The films addressed here were proposed in a school exercise that sought to teach students how the medium of digital video and video editing can be used to great artistic extent and as a means to dissect and analyze other mediums in this emerging art form. Its purpose was also to introduce us to Portuguese film making and the filmography of the new generation of directors.

I chose director Rodrigo Areias as the subject for my project for two reasons. Firstly, his cinema resonated with me in quite a meaningful way, a way which I only came to understand after further studying his work. Secondly, the similarity between the three short films was, upon first time viewing, striking to me, and seemed a pertinent topic to approach. These are the primary subjects of this audiovisual essay: the movement of characters in the film space, the stillness of camera in the *mise-en-scène* and the framework of the shots.

Areias' films have an almost ethereal quality to them, in which the characters, mainly the protagonists, seem to traverse the space of the film in an organic, seamless movement. Areias often makes them walk from one side or corner of the frame to the other, with the camera far back away from them, taking full use of the space of the frame to allow the spectators to walk the environment along with the character. This distance he often leaves between the camera and the actor allows the scenery to mark its presence in the frame and creates a bigger proximity between the spectator and the character. This aspect seems to extend beyond the three films here analyzed and can be noticed in other films by Areias too. In a collection about the new generation of Portuguese filmmakers, Eduardo Paz Barroso wrote a paper about Areias' 2012 long-film *Estrada de Palha*:

In the film, certain aspects may seem random. After all, what does Lapland, or the shot filmed at the beginning of the Arctic sea in Norway, have to do with the western tradition and the Portuguese reality of the time? Nothing. Nor does it matter. What really matters is the effect produced by those images, touched by a climate of some strangeness and indecision, suggesting a distance, creating the conditions for the avenger to arrive from afar, enriched by the silence and the meditation. (Barroso, 2013)

This is an aspect of Areias' films that is immensely powerful as a means for letting the poetry of image (and sound) narrate his films, making them all the more appealing. I am speaking, of course, of shots like that of Acácio de Almeida traversing the rubble filled rooms of an abandoned film theatre; Vítor Correia's character gently flowing along the river current with his suitcase; and Valdemar Santos's shepherd character walking through the rural sites of Covilhã. In order to better understand the works of Areias, it was important to have a clearer understanding of what landscape is and how it is integrated and portrayed in cinema.

In his essay, *On Landscape in Narrative Cinema*, Martin Lefebvre (2011) establishes the difference between landscape and setting, in the context of film. While setting refers to the environment in which the narrative elements of the film take place (characters, actions and events) and holds the clear purpose of providing context to the spectator, landscape is a concept that bears depth, occurring when the filmmaker allows the captured environment to gain autonomy from the mentioned narrative elements (Lefebvre, 2011). However, our ability as spectators to “arrest” the landscape from the film and experience it does not limit itself to pictorial contemplation.

There is indeed a “thought-component” that goes under this apprehension, and seems to be related to culture, history and personal experience, thus making each landscape unique to each individual. At a core level, we all attribute our own meanings and symbolisms to landscape at an elementary level - we attribute our own narratives (Lefebvre, 2011). The question then proposed is whether or not film narrative contributes in any way to the thought-supported apprehension of landscape. And the answer seems to be yes, it does. And the key to that answer lies in the concept of “immersion”. While the strictly pictorial experience of landscape present in painting or photography invites the viewer to exercise contemplation, film narrative attempts to immerse the spectator in the landscape, involving them in an experience that is not just visual, but somewhat interactive as well. Several film elements aid this process, such as the shot duration and movement, the sounds and especially the music (Lefebvre, 2011).

I’d like to argue that these feelings, which may grow into the “thought-component” mentioned in the previous section, can help draw us into the landscape, so that our experience of it may not be as distanced – and therefore as purely visual – as we might think. (Lefebvre, 2011)

In applying these notions to Areias’ three short films, the concept of landscape and filmic immersion became apparent to me. There is, however, another technique in these short films that draw us in, in a way also exclusive to cinema, and that is the use of character. As stated before, Areias often makes his characters traverse the landscape, or contemplate it, or simply exist in them, essentially merging the two into one, not unlike shots we can usually find in the films of Tarkovsky or Sokurov. What happens in Areias’s films is that the protagonists almost play the role of the spectator, taking in the landscape as they personally traverse it. Before this idea, I have to consider the possibility that those characters might be, in a way, Areias himself telling us how he felt and what he experienced when he stood in those places.

When making this audiovisual essay, my main goal was to bring out this particular aspect of the short films, through editing. I mostly tried to find similarities in framework and image composition between each film and put them together in a sort of visual montage. In the first part, my

goal was to highlight the movement of characters through the frame. As explained before, this characteristic is what partly creates the introspective quality of the landscapes of the films. It is the movement from right to left, from down to up, through diagonals and in different areas of the frame as well. In cutting the frames, I restrict the eye of the spectator to the movement of the characters.

I was also interested in the frame compositions. The “window” segment of the essay, in which the character is eating at a restaurant, is an example of that. In that segment, several moments of the films’ framework are put together with the character, working on the previously stated idea of “immersion” and suggesting a possible introspective thought process that is implicit in the three films. In the next segments, I mix the two subjects of the essay, cutting between shots to establish comparisons between movement and framework, where one leads to another. The framework of a shot of the shepherd by a tree in *O Guardador* leads to the movement of the character flowing in the river in *Corrente*, for example. My biggest challenge was to find the right comparisons of shots and be able to transmit to the viewer the uniqueness of Areias’ landscapes, but I believe the point gets sufficiently across.

I finish the essay with Acácio de Almeida’s eye staring at us. This is a last nod to the concepts of contemplation, observation and immersion, that were discussed here. Throughout the video essay, I have conducted the eye of the spectator through the invisible lines of Areias’ films, establishing a connection between spectator and screen, so what better way to finish this thought than with the very object that allows for that connection?

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