

Notes Towards a Brief History of Portuguese Cinema in the 21st Century

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Two decades after the start of the 21st century, Portuguese cinema is seen as greatly sought after internationally, with a regular production rhythm akin to a small industry in a country of small socio-economic dimensions. In recent years – following the ebbs and flows of a world economy cycling up and down – Portuguese cinema has strengthened a series of trends in production models and aesthetic and artistic aspects. Essentially, it remains an auteur cinema, with projects that favour an artistic, distinguishing understanding of contemporary filmmaking. However, this authorial dimension has not limited Portuguese film within the international transit routes of cinema; rather, it has reinforced its position as a cinema of personal, recognisable identity (even if the films are self-evidently diverse, both aesthetically and thematically), with a personal trademark that sets “film made in Portugal” apart from other countries. In itself, this also derives from a political and organisational culture strategy of Portuguese cinema that has led to a so-called handcrafted, authorial vision. As a starting point, it could be said that 21st century Portuguese cinema has followed a matrix while diversifying its production modes and its audiovisual industry typology.

If, in fact, this authorial vision has been crystallized since the *new Portuguese cinema* of the 1960s broke free of the *old* cinema’s traditional structures (cf. Cunha, 2018), two other occurrences have rewritten the history of contemporary Portuguese cinema precisely two decades ago, in the transition between centuries: the recognition

of the “Geração Curtas” [“Shorts Generation”], and the premiere of *In Vanda’s Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, Pedro Costa, 2000). The coincidence between them, and the way both branched out into everything that followed (both in Portuguese cinema *and* in contemporary cinema as an idea), have changed some of the productive prerequisites of Portuguese film, and led to a new paradigm.

One can never underrate Pedro Costa’s masterpiece – because of its artistic gesture, its use of digital technology, its rejection of traditional film devices, and its return to a certain sensitive type of exchange between who films and who is filmed. These *motifs* have given *In Vanda’s Room* an aura combining ethical and artistic dimensions, allowing it to become one of the key objects in contemporary cinema, above all because it braves a new path on the use of digital media to deal with communal and subjective life experiences. Vanda’s famous phrase, as she invites the director to shoot a film, is in itself an entire programme for what was to come: “Come and make a film in my room, I’m a girl, you’re a boy, you obviously like me and my sister. We’ll both be there, you’ll spend some time with us and you can make a film like you always like so much to do.” (in Neyrat, 2012, p. 47) Costa opened up digital to new practices, and opened up cinema to a “home-made,” minimalist exploration that showed, though, how powerful a fair and complex portrait of the world could be (cf. Ribas, 2020, pp. 2–8).

As to the other occurrence – the “Short Film Generation” – we’ve already mentioned it ten years ago, when Agência da Curta Metragem published *Agência, Uma Década em Curtas* (Ribas & Dias, 2010), a book mapping routes and reflecting on the transformations in Portuguese cinema after the short film boom that happened between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century. We demonstrated how the coming together of an institutional wish (a specific new public-funding policy) and the emergence of a new group of still very young directors revealed a new paradigm, as proposed in the celebrated words of film critic Augusto M. Seabra (1999) in the newspaper *Público*: “There are differences between these authors, and they should be emphasized, but what prevails is a cosmopolitanism

with clear signs of a new cinephile paradigm.” As we finished the study of those first ten years, we wrote:

There is an emerging movement, ready to explode, ready to become the centre of attention. We have seen it, in passing, in the international success of auteurs such as João Pedro Rodrigues or Miguel Gomes (...). At the same time, Portuguese short film continues to be acknowledged as a nursery of singular visions, unique works that manage to resemble nothing we’ve seen so far (...). We don’t know what will follow, but the next decade will certainly establish that these different generations have come to stay. And that proof is in the recent work, in the successes acknowledged, in the films that are already promised to arrive soon. In ten years, we will necessarily have other things to say. (Ribas, 2010, p. 105)

In fact, as we’ll see throughout this brief history, these two decades have yielded a series of productive and aesthetic events, and a new group of young directors that have transformed the unique landscape of Portuguese cinema.

Certain trends in Portuguese cinema

The one constant issue throughout these two decades has been the concept of crisis. We have been at least through two great recessions since the beginning of the century: 2002/2003 (when the country, as then prime-minister Durão Barroso put it, went “stark bollocks naked”), and the great 2008 crisis, requiring an adjustment programme imposed on Portugal with heavy economic and social repercussions. As such, Portugal lived through schizophrenic economic cycles: after a late-1990s euphoria, the 2002 crisis; a moment of expansion between 2004 and 2006, followed by the great crisis of 2008 that continued for a number of years. Their impacts are made evident in Portuguese cinema (cf. Ribas & Cunha, 2015) both in the way it

limited its production capabilities (and its adaptive capacity), and in the changes in the types of stories told by filmmakers.

The financial restraints may have led to a search for ingenious filmmaking solutions. On one hand, documentary became very obviously a much sought-after model, due to its lightweight production requirements and its quick take on contemporary realities (highly politicised and engaged). This documentary vigour, however, quickly met a need to create hybrid objects that required a different handling of the narrative and aesthetic structures of some films.

This is self-evidently clear in Pedro Costa's cinema, as we have pointed out at the beginning of this piece. Since *In Vanda's Room* – still close to a conventional documentary –, the director has followed a hybrid strain, its production model and aesthetic proposals combining fiction and documentary. Such “confusion” was propelled by a new wave of cinema, where digital media allowed for new ways to “be” and “live” inside a film. Pedro Costa's films – *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, 2006), *Horse Money* (*Cavalo Dinheiro*, 2014) or *Vitalina Varela* (2019) – enter that transitory domain with an eminently political reason: reality is much more complex and performative than what the visual domain imposes on us (cf. Elsaesser, 2009).

Miguel Gomes appeared in Portuguese cinema in a very different way, though very close to this borderline state. His late-1990s/early-2000s short films already showed an idiosyncratic personality, compounding the best of a certain tradition of Portuguese cinema with international references: *31 Means Trouble* (*Trinta e Um*, 2002) or *Christmas Inventory* (*Inventário de Natal*, 2000) are early symptoms of his desire to explore the boundaries between fiction and documentary. Gomes would make that device much more enticing in his second feature, *Our Beloved Month of August* (*Aquele Querido Mês de Agosto*, 2008), sabotaging any possibility of cataloguing by working an actual making-of of the film itself alongside its documentary and fiction (in its most conventional terms) aspects. The tenderness and fairness with which Gomes filmed the residents of central Portugal make for an unlikely connection with the poor communities of the Fontainhas slum that Costa inhabited from *Bones* (*Ossos*, 1997)

onwards. Gomes' method would be refined in the 2015 triptych *Arabian Nights (As Mil e Uma Noites)*, where the filmmaker looks at reality through a fable-like mosaic of short tales straddling the unexpected and the humdrum. His ability to transgress the film device – and its tendency to indexicality – was already visible in his finest work to date, *Tabu* (2012), a “two-speed film” reinventing cinematic storytelling through an ingenious de-synchronisation of sound and image. In it, Gomes showed an uncanny ability to affect and entertain, quoting from Fernando Lopes, F. W. Murnau and *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) in a palimpsest shifting constantly between high culture and pop culture. João Nicolau, his creative “half-brother,” has followed a similar path from his first short film *Rapace* (2006) up to his third feature *Technoboss* (2019), showing the same ability to transgress both narrative tropes and film genres.

In a different register, João Canijo has developed his own approach to reality by “infecting” with it his actors, his story and the location where it takes place. *Blood of My Blood (Sangue do Meu Sangue)*, (2011) is possibly the epitome of his approach, creating a fictional family living in the Lisbon suburb of Bairro Padre Cruz, and combining long-take cinematography with precise dramaturgical staging. A superb director of actresses, Canijo continues to be one of the best analysts of our social environments and of the permanent conflict between a patriarchal past and a still-developing present, emphasizing its constant struggle with reality.

This hybrid register has also come up in a number of singular productions. In Pedro Pinho's *The Nothing Factory (A Fábrica de Nada)*, (2017), the closing of an elevator factory is the scaffolding of a fable about capitalism and precariousness in our days of economic crisis. The film manufactures a complex narrative web including philosophical arguments about the current state of Marxism and the proletariat, or a surreal musical production number performed by the factory's actual workers.

Another one of this period's most remarkable and tender hybrid films is Joaquim Pinto's *What Now? Remind Me (E Agora? Lembra-me)*, (2013), a film of small daily details, part quotidian documentary, part visual essay on the meaning of life. In this same mood, halfway

between the intimate and the public, we should mention *The Wolf's Lair* (*A Toca do Lobo*, 2015) and *The Hissing of Summer Sands* (*O Mar Enrola na Areia*, 2019), both directed by Catarina Mourão, and *Ordinary Time* (*Tempo Comum*, 2018), directed by Susana Nobre, where processes of personal or family catharsis are worked out through a dramatization of daily life.

This desire to dramatize reality through documentary mechanisms can also be seen in animated film. The clearest follower of this strand is probably José Miguel Ribeiro, whose *Journey to Cape Verde* (*Viagem a Cabo Verde*, 2010) takes off from drawings and notebooks of a solo trip to create a visually enchanting, documentarily fascinating work. Ribeiro would return to this method in *Fragments* (*Estilhaços*, 2016), where the present day is affected by a traumatic past. Other animated works would follow in a similar register, such as *Augur* (*Agouro*, 2018) by David Doutel and Vasco Sá, and *Drop by Drop* (*Água Mole*, 2017) by Alexandra Ramires and Laura Gonçalves. These pairs of directors have renewed Portuguese animation by embracing more realistic traits, the memory of the real laid over the inventive trait of the drawings. The live-action stop motion developed by Mónica Santos and Alice Eça Guimarães – in *Amélia & Duarte* (2014) and *Between the Shadows* (*Entre as Sombras*, 2018) – is also a sign that animation can take on live-action to reinvent traditional narrative form, exploring film genres through its graphic potential.

Also from the animation side, Regina Pessoa is a unique case in contemporary Portuguese film. Throughout the years she has maintained an impressive career of great care and graphic invention, telling stories of trauma and resilience, mostly connected to childhood, in films such as *Tragic Story with Happy Ending* (*História Trágica com Final Feliz*, 2005), *Kali, the Little Vampire* (*Kali, o Pequeno Vampiro*, 2012) or *Uncle Thomas, Accounting for the Days* (*Tio Tomás, a Contabilidade dos Dias*, 2019), greatly acclaimed in the international animation circuit.

As regards a creative observation of reality, Edgar Pêra remains a particularly experimental director in the Portuguese context. Exploring every single technological avenue opened by digital film, in a wild, punk way, Pêra has been, since the mid-1980s, revisiting and

rewriting reality by crossing it with less obvious references, in personal, unique works such as *Magnetyk Pathways* (*Caminhos Magnéticos*, 2017), *Delírio em Las Vedras* (2016) or *Lisbon Revisited* (2014).

The hybridization we've been discussing also has a strong component of subversion of film genres, often in dialogue with classic or mainstream cinema. Rodrigo Areias has been one of the most persistent directors in this revisitation of classical narrative tropes through other suggestively subversive texts and references, whether *road movie* (*Tebas*, 2007), *western* (*Hay Road* [*Estrada de Palha*], 2012) or *film noir* (*Ornament and Crime* [*Ornamento e Crime*], 2015),

Both solo or with João Rui Guerra da Mata, João Pedro Rodrigues, has been one of the names that has used film as a vehicle for social and political transformation, cloaking his films in melodrama (like in *To Die Like a Man* [*Morrer Como um Homem*], 2009) or contemporary *noir thriller* (*The Last Time I Saw Macao* [*A Última Vez Que Vi Macau*], 2012). These films are also important due to their queer gesture of bringing to the forefront characters of transgendered identities or generally disenfranchised affective relations. Since *Happy Birthday!* (*Parabéns!*, 1997) or *Phantom* (*O Fantasma*, 2000), João Pedro Rodrigues has followed an idiosyncratic muse both in his subversive themes and in his films' story-telling, reaching in *The Ornithologist* (*O Ornitólogo*, 2016) a de-structuring of classical narrative that gives way to an almost surreal wandering of its protagonist. João Rui Guerra da Mata follows a similar path, whether in his films co-directed with Rodrigues or in his own short *As the Flames Rose* (*O Que Arde Cura*, 2012) – a classic example of narrative concision, melodramatic construction and creative manipulation of film devices.

These hybrid strains haven't stood in the way of a continuing realist trend in Portuguese cinema, attempting to deal with the social difficulties of an economically schizophrenic Portugal. It was in this strain that João Salaviza became known, namely through his three "prison films" – *Arena* (2009), *Cerro Negro* (2012) and *Rafa* (2012) –, character studies about children, teenagers or young adults lost in an unstable adult life. Salaviza's debut feature *Mountain* (*Montanha*, 2015) follows in this same realist trend, close to a style mostly projected by Teresa Villaverde, whose *The Mutants* (*Os Mutantes*, 1998)

remains one of the key Portuguese coming of age films, set in social classes with serious financial and emotional issues. It is a setting she would further investigate, with variations, in *Trance* (*Transe*, 2006), *Swan* (*Cisne*, 2011), *Sara and Her Mother* (*Sara e a Sua Mãe*, 2014) or *Colo* (2017).

This realist strand has also as reference Marco Martins, a filmmaker who has managed to affiliate himself strongly with reality since *Alice* (2005), even if filtered through his practice as a director of commercials. He has made one of the most important films about the economic crisis, *Saint George* (*São Jorge*, 2016), following the struggles of a man who seems to fight the world just to lead an honest life. Another of the possible “heirs” to Villaverde is Cláudia Varejão, whose first three shorts – *Weekend* (*Fim-de-Semana*, 2007), *Cold Day* (*Um Dia Frio*, 2009) and *Morning Light* (*Luz da Manhã*, 2011) – were visually crafted, attentive looks at characters and their families. Her best-known work is *Ama-San* (2016), transposing her cinematic philosophy to a testimonial, by shooting the traditional female skin divers of Japan.

Another of the most interesting trends of the new century has been a renewed desire to look at and think about the past through image, going against the grain of a history with one of the longest dictatorships of Western Europe (the Salazar regime lasted for 48 years). The most relevant body of work in this strand belongs to Susana de Sousa Dias, whose *Still Life* (*Natureza Morta*, 2005), *48* (2010) and *Obscure Light* (*Luz Obscura*, 2017) have reinvented how to use archival footage to look at a past of institutional violence and repression. By digitally manipulating the archive – especially images produced in many different contexts – and juxtaposing it with first-person accounts of former political prisoners, Sousa Dias manages to draw out a memory that has not yet been confronted and exposed. The use of archive as a material to rediscover and rebuild the past – both dictatorial and colonial – was decisive for Portuguese cinema to start thinking of the past from a post-colonial, contemporary perspective. Several narrative filmmakers have also attempted this format, in films such as *Lusitania Illusion* (*Fantasia Lusitana*, João Canijo, 2010) or *Redemption* (Miguel Gomes, 2012).

Rethinking the past and looking at the present had already begun in the 1990s with the regeneration of Portuguese documentary, with three key names in Catarina Mourão, Catarina Alves Costa and Sérgio Tréfaut. Mourão, with *The Lady from Chandor* (*A Dama de Chandor*, 1999) or *The Wolf's Lair* (*A Toca do Lobo*, 2015), shows us the umbilical cord between the histories of families and countries. Alves Costa, and later Tréfaut, would show how the most traditional observational documentary can rethink a place and the identities at stake within it. *Swagatam* (1998) or *Pedra e Cal* (2016), by Alves Costa, and *Lisboners* (*Lisboetas*, 2004) or *Treblinka* (2016), by Tréfaut, are diverse films about a contemporary world being reinvented through the camera eye, and through the way ghosts of the past and of the present can come together to draw a fairer picture of our time.

On the other hand, one of the most important strands of this new century has been the two-way road between film and contemporary art. In a recurring approach, as it also happened in other national cinemas of smaller dimensions, the search for alternative ways to produce and show films has “diverted” filmmakers to spaces other than the cinema screen. In Portugal, there are several established filmmakers who have explored other ways to express themselves artistically: Marco Martins has staged theatre, such as *Estaleiros* (2012), *Great Yarmouth* (2017), *Actores* (2017) or *Provisional Figures* (2018); and João Botelho has directed opera at the São Carlos Lisbon opera house, with *Banksters* (2011). Other filmmakers have taken their films into other possibilities of public presentation: João Pedro Rodrigues and João Rui Guerra da Mata designed the exhibition “Do Rio das Pérolas ao Ave” (2016) for Vila do Conde’s Solar – Cinematic Art Gallery, and Cláudia Varejão extended *Ama-San* with a show at the Museu do Oriente in 2015.

This work is representative of an inter-media and inter-textual vitality characteristic of contemporary Portuguese cinema, leading to fruitful dialogues between film and contemporary art languages, the film screen and the art gallery. Artists from other areas have worked recurrently in film: photographer Daniel Blaufuks has a directorial film career (*Under Strange Skies* [*Sob Céus Estranhos*], 2002; *Slightly Smaller than Indiana* [*Um Pouco Mais Pequeno Que o Indiana*], 2006;

Éden, 2011); fine artist Pedro Bastos has an interesting film career (*To the Wolf of Madragoa* [*Ao Lobo da Madragoa*], 2012, or *Donkey's Head* [*Cabeça de Asno*], 2016), always in an effervescent dialog between diverse artistic forms. Veteran indie rocker Paulo Furtado aka The Legendary Tigerman has directed, solo or with Rodrigo Areias, a few of his music videos, and experimented with fiction short film (*Quantic Love* [*Amor Quântico*], 2019) and performance art (*Paleface*, at Solar). Photographer João Tabarra has adopted video as a privileged medium in his work (*Mute Control*, 2000, at Oporto's Serralves museum; *Barricades improvisés*, 2001), as have visual artists João Onofre and João Maria Gusmão & Pedro Paiva, whose works in video and film have been presented in solo and collective shows.

The filmmaking generations that came of age during the 21st century have been challenging and breaking, in a more or less deliberate way, the matrix of the Portuguese cinema of the last two decades of the 20th century, and especially the so-called "Portuguese School" with its self-referential obsession of the collective history, memory and culture of the Portuguese nation. Expanded cinema has contributed to this international movement of looking at the world and debating questions common to other civilizational contexts.

Three of the most important creators who have moved from contemporary art to film – a movement often called "artist film" – are Filipa César, Salomé Lamas and Gabriel Abrantes (cf. Cunha, 2019). In different ways, all three have in common a distancing from the identity matrix of Portuguese cinema in the late 20th century. Gabriel Abrantes is mostly interested in the polyphonies of world geopolitics, by exploring globalization, new cultural identities, migratory movements or the global economy (filming in the Amazon, Haiti, Angola...). Filipa César has worked intensely with the film archive of Guinea-Bissau, one of Portugal's former African colonies and protagonist of one of the most violent anti-colonial armed struggles of the 1960s and 70s, precisely against the Portuguese colonizer, leading to traumas in both societies that have been unaddressed during the intervening decades (*Spell Reel*, 2017). Salomé Lamas has also travelled towards historically repressed, marginalized or ignored regions, in order to develop art projects that work, in a concentric way, on

the idea of the border as a human mutation imposed on territories, whether in the complex geopolitical map of Eastern Europe after the Soviet collapse (*Extinction*, 2018) or in the mining explorations in the Andean mountains of La Rinconada and Cerro Lunar (*Eldorado XXI*, 2016).

Another common aspect to these three filmmakers is their academic education. Beyond the art gallery, academia has been a fundamental axis in the “expansion” of Portuguese cinema, with several filmmakers having graduated in scientific areas that work with the image but with processes and methods very different from classic film practices, marking as well a breaking point with a didactic tradition heavily dependent on film language.

These “expansion” movement that add shapes and territories to the most traditional canon are exemplar of a strong tendency of 21st century Portuguese cinema, an expressive form surviving with constraints and difficulties in a country with limited resources for the public policies towards cinema in particular and arts in general. Funding issues have led to a search of new ways to capture financing and alternative ways of production and release, allowing for a gradual transformation of the modes of production of Portuguese cinema and the appearance of multi-disciplinary venues outside traditional cinemas, such as museums, art galleries, cultural centres or academic events. From a casual practice of some more inventive artists, expanded cinema has consolidated its own space of existence in the last two decades, opening its horizons to new productive and creative practices.

One final note for a group of new filmmakers that prove the constant renewal of our country’s unique perspectives (cf. Ribas, 2019). Leonor Teles (*Ballad of a Batrachian* [*Balada de Um Batráquio*], 2015, and *Ashore* [*Terra Franca*], 2018) or Diogo Costa Amarante (*Small Town* [*Cidade Pequena*], 2017) won important international awards (Berlinale Short Film Golden Bear, respectively in 2016 and 2017) and present highly personal views of our world. This new movement has led to many other new films, such as Pedro Cabeleira’s *Damned Summer* (*Verão Danado*, 2017), showing the Lisbon nights of a new generation through a quasi-home-movie production and a whole team

of new creatives like Leonor Teles in the cinematography. The film would win a special mention at the Cineasti del Presente competition in Locarno.

Portuguese cinema has, in fact, continued to be highly rewarded in film festivals: Locarno's Golden Leopard for Pedro Costa (*Vitalina Varela*) and Best Director awards for both João Pedro Rodrigues (*The Ornithologist*) and Costa (*Horse Money*); Cannes' Critics' Week Grand Prix for Gabriel Abrantes (*Diamantino*, 2018); Berlin's Alfred Bauer award for Miguel Gomes (*Tabu*); Annecy's Cristal for Regina Pessoa (*Tragic Story with Happy Ending*); or, recently, Venice's Golden Lion of the Future for Ana Rocha de Sousa (*Listen*, 2020), among many others.

21st century Portuguese cinema includes obviously many of the transformations we already felt during the 1990s, but has also sought, as we have said, different themes and protagonists, conjuring a myriad of considerably diverse propositions. As Tiago Baptista wrote (2009, p. 320), speaking of the transformations of the 1990s, "these films managed, for the first time, to react almost immediately to what was, or seemed to be, of its time; to what seemed to be happening in front of the director's eyes, instead of what was, or seemed to be, specific of the national culture." As we have pointed out, this transformation was achieved through a variety of spaces, methodologies or production models that were clearly new to Portuguese cinema, allowing for its reinvention. The actual film practices are, therefore, much more diverse and can be mapped in more complexity and variety than two decades ago.

A paradigm shift

The 21st century has also promoted a significant paradigm shift in the film culture in Portugal. During most of the 20th century, the "barometer" measured mostly the film productions, following a model of "national cinema" defined by Georges Sadoul (1990) and studied by Andrew Higson (2002, 2005); but this quickly proved to be insufficient to understand the new cinephilia habits of the new century. The shift to digital allowed a break with the more conventional

distribution channels of the 20th century, letting the viewer access, in a more active way, an endless series of film databases, multiplying and diversifying film availabilities.

As stated by Thomas Elsaesser (2005, p. 40), national cinema becomes a “doubly displaced category” by no longer working in traditional terms, that is, as a “brand” that establishes a “national heritage.” For him, national cinema mostly becomes “the context of these place-shifts and time-shifts, the cultural palimpsests that connect the ever-expanding, constantly self-differentiating field of media representations which is the contemporary everyday of movies, television, advertising.” More than film production, it’s the audience that helps characterise the film culture of a certain territory, be it national, regional or local: “national cinema has to be conferred on films by others, either by other national or ‘international’ audiences, or by national audiences, but at another point in time.” (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 40) Starting from the example of the television audience, the German theorist demonstrates how it can be more viable to measure the film culture of a certain territory not through the director’s references but through the audience’s – which would be, strategically speaking, the relevant indicator:

Yet paradoxically, a national cinema is precisely something which relies for its existence on a national exhibition sector at least as much as it does on a national production sector; without Hollywood, no national exhibition sector; without a national exhibition sector, i.e., cinemas, whether privately run or state-subsidized prepared to show independent releases, you cannot have a national cinema. (Elsaesser, 2005, pp. 38–39)

In a significant way, the bankruptcy of the structurally “national” model is mostly reflected in two trends developed in the last two decades and that must be understood in this context: the growing internationalization of the production sector, with its exponential increase in trans-national co-production; and the strengthening of a

non-commercial exhibition circuit, especially through film festivals and local film societies, also benefitting from a shift in the strategy of the cultural sector's public policies.

Throughout the second decade of the 21st century, according to official data from the Portuguese Film Institute (ICA), film festivals in Portugal have grown exponentially in terms of attendance, with an average attendance of 285k people a year between 2010 and 2019. The data concern only the 30 film festivals that reported data, but as much as 50 may have taken place during 2019, most of them regional festivals set up with local support only. Even if their attendance numbers are modest, they are already contributing in a significant way to the diversification of film on offer (cf. Leão, 2019). Even if the majority of the festivals, including the more popular ones, take place in the districts of Lisbon (13) and Oporto (9), there is an interesting regional diversity with relevant events in Aveiro (Avanca, Fest, Festival de Cinema Luso-Brasileiro), Coimbra (Caminhos do Cinema Português, Figueira Art Fest), Faro (Farcume), Guarda (CineEco), Viana do Castelo (Encontros de Viana, MD OC) or Viseu (Vista Curta), as well as in the Azores.

If the “festivalisation” phenomenon happened internationally mostly during the 1980s, the effects of their “institutionalisation” in Portugal have only been felt in the past two decades. Curtas Vila do Conde first took place in 1993, Queer Lisboa in 1997, Fantasporto in 1981 or Cinanima in 1976, but it was in the current century that film festivals became a social and cultural event with a significant impact in the media and in the population. One of the most perverse effects of this “trivialization” of festivals was the disappearance of historical events that were pioneers of Portuguese film culture, such as the Figueira da Foz International Film Festival (1972-2002) or Festróia (1985-2014).

Historically, most of the current film festivals have started out within the film society movement, which was somewhat invisible for a few decades (especially in the 1980s and 1990s) but has returned to the forefront, with a newfound vigour, in the last two decades. According to ICA's official data, the approximately 50 film societies active in Portugal have recorded an average yearly attendance of 85k

between 2016 and 2019. It might not seem much, but given that most of them are located outside the greater Lisbon and Oporto regions, film societies have shown themselves to be an effective – and often the only – means of promoting film in many parts of the country.

Over the past two decades, festivals and film societies have changed the landscape of film exhibition in Portugal by ensuring a democratic access to work other than Hollywood cinema, which has hegemonically taken over the commercial market since the mid-20th century. At this point, it must be emphasized that this non-commercial circuit is the key promoter of Portuguese film, standing ever more apart from the shopping mall multiplexes that represent most of the exhibition revenue. This non-commercial exhibition circuit, anchored mostly in one-off screenings, has strengthened cinephile communities through which many cinephiles meet, using the cinema screen as a space of contact and exchange.

Some of the leading festivals, and certainly the ones that most promote Portuguese cinema internationally, have also been trying to find a way into the national and international distribution markets, namely through the Agência da Curta Metragem (formed in 2000 by Curtas Vila do Conde) and Portugal Film (set up in 2016 by IndieLisboa), but also through direct support to production. Curtas Vila do Conde created the *Estaleiro* and *Campus* projects, producing films by Thom Andersen, Lois Patiño, João Pedro Rodrigues/João Rui Guerra da Mata, João Canijo or Gonçalo Tocha, among others; IndieLisboa produced *Here, in Lisbon*, a collection of short films directed in the city by Denis Côté, Dominga Sotomayor, Gabriel Abrantes and Marie Losier. And many festivals have already started setting up project development labs and workshops, by promoting industry meetings where professional delegates can share experiences and screen the latest Portuguese productions.

More recently, digital streaming platforms like Netflix or HBO have certainly taken people away from the cinemas, but a number of video-on-demand platforms such as Filmin (a Spanish streamer that opened in Portugal in 2016), MUBI (since 2010) or DocAlliance (from 2008), presenting catalogues mostly comprised of independent and auteur film, have also tried to articulate partnerships and

events with festivals, recognizing their efforts in the formation and maintenance of audiences.

In an ongoing way, film societies and festivals have contributed to a significant change in the film culture in Portugal, allowing a significant group of Portuguese viewers outside urban centres to go to the cinema, and, mostly, showing minority, independent and auteur cinema as well as historically commercially marginalized formats such as the documentary and the short film.

Finally, on the subject of film culture, it must be pointed out that the generations that have developed a productive activity, especially since 2001, have had formal academic studies in many different schools and colleges, in artistic areas close to yet fundamentally different from the conventional film language. During many decades, film teaching took mainly place at Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, a central film school opened in 1973 where the reference filmmakers of the 1990s and 2000s studied, such as Pedro Costa, João Pedro Rodrigues, Manuel Mozos, Miguel Gomes or João Salaviza. In a visible, unequivocal way, the recent blossoming of university-level film and audiovisual, fine arts, visual arts, architecture, photography or digital art degrees has contributed to a significant renewal of the way film is thought and made in Portugal.

We must also refer the structural changes in the Portuguese production map. In these last two decades, local production houses have consolidated their international strategies with highly professionalized practices. This applies both to historical companies (such as Paulo Branco's multiple outfits, Tino Navarro's MGN, Maria João Mayer's Filmes do Tejo/Maria & Mayer or Joaquim Sapinho's Rosa Filmes) and to many smaller firms, such as O Som e a Fúria, Terratrema, C.R.I.M., Kintop, Ukbar Filmes or Vende-se Filmes. In distinct ways, these companies have been behind some of the greatest international successes of Portuguese cinema in the last two decades, beyond creating important networks that have allowed them to associate with highly relevant international co-productions. Though there still exists a centralisation in Portuguese cinema, as most companies are set in Lisbon, other new places exist, as shows Bando à Parte, a production company from Guimarães that has managed to carve out

its own space the North of Portugal. International co-productions are not mere lifelines for Portuguese production; instead, they are strategies that have managed to attract international productions by filmmakers as relevant as Ira Sachs (*Frankie*, 2019), Albert Serra (*Liberté*, 2019), Marcelo Gomes (*Joaquim*, 2018), Lucrecia Martel (*Zama*, 2017), Eduardo Williams (*The Human Surge*, 2016), Wim Wenders (*The Beautiful Days of Aranjuez*, 2016) or David Cronenberg (*Cosmopolis*, 2012).

This internationalization process is also visible in the individual paths of specific creatives, such as cinematographer Rui Poças (director of photography for *Zama*, *Frankie*, or Marco Dutra and Juliana Rojas' *The Good Manners*, 2017), sound designer Vasco Pimentel (*Zama*; *Vazante*, Daniela Thomas, 2017; *9 doigts*, F.J. Ossang, 2017) or sound designer Branko Neskov (*Joaquim*; *Budapeste*, Walter Carvalho, 2009).

As far as representation goes, it must be pointed out that the 21st century has given some timid signs of correcting historic wrongs. The presence of women in technical crews has grown exponentially, as well as the number of women directors; another clear example is the growing visibility, on their own merits, attained by filmmakers from the African diaspora, such as Silas Tiny, Pocas Pascoal, Filipe Henriques or Welket Bungué, even if more with critics and media than in the exhibition circuit.

As we have tried to show, there is a clear paradigm shift for film culture and production practices in Portugal, that has already self-evident implications in Portuguese cinema and will continue to change the film consumption and production dynamics over the next decades – a shift accompanied by the sector's support policies that, in our opinion, has revolutionized contemporary Portuguese cinema.

A book to think 21st century Portuguese cinema

Both this text and this book address the transformations we have been speaking of. It does not want to be a definitive record of the past two decades; rather a focused look on the time we live in, from

a diverse group of writers coming from film criticism, academia or festival programming. As we organized the book, we considered how to deal with the most relevant trends, and we chose the writers we thought could best approach them. But this book is only a conversation starter, especially in the English-language field, where Portuguese film is widely respected despite the severe lack of publications. (Fernández & Álvarez, 2014; Jorge, 2020; Liz, 2017). We hope to contribute to that conversation and, as such, we'd like to thank the commitment of every author who has contributed a piece, for their generosity in giving us an original perspective on two decades of film and on a select group of filmmakers. We are also thankful to our translators, who made possible the transposition of the authors' perspectives into both English and Portuguese. We believe the geographic and linguistic diversity of these texts and of their authors (Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, USA) can also give its own perspective on the way Portuguese cinema is seen in the international film community and on its popularity.

Two final notes. First: the choice of the filmmakers we have singled out in part three comes out of a choice from a greater list. We know not every relevant filmmaker is here represented, yet we also know we are presenting only a sample of that long list. It is our intention that this book will become a "volume 1," to be later continued in a "volume 2" with enough room to single out other filmmakers we did not have the space to emphasize here. Finally: this book was created during a worldwide pandemic that will certainly change our outlook of the world and lead to a predictable crisis (both economic and cultural) whose consequences we can't yet predict. A crisis that will certainly mould any future look on what 21st century Portuguese cinema is and will be.

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