



Cinema

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Cinema as Community

Since its birth, cinema has been an art of community. Contrary to Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope (a peep-hole viewer), the Lumière brothers built a camera and a projector to delight an audience gathered in one place. We can recall the emotion with which the spectators reacted to a train that seemed to break the screen and run into the room. So, cinema was built as a community, and the dark room in which we learned to see films is a place of gathering, of collective emotions and shared experience. Watching films, talking about them, reading the critics, it all fostered a sense of an agora to discuss the crucial matters of our future. Films could change minds (and they also did it in cruel ways when they were used as propaganda) and influence our imagination. Hollywood studios are, in part, responsible for our ways of knowing the world, of loving, of hating, of doing things. For better or for worse, cinema created an imagined community, or, even better said, imagined communities.

Of course, we are now on the verge of profound changes in the way we watch moving images. It seems Edison's revenge came a century later. Nowadays, we mostly consume films, television and other forms of moving images on private devices, cutting the cord of the shared experience of watching simultaneously in the dark room. Cinema always was a heavy technical art, and during its history it went through several revolutions (silent to sound; black and white to colour; better equipment, more portable, more humane; the use of visual effects; and just right now, AI-generated images). So, these transformations also had impacts on the ever-changing way of thinking about cinema as a community.

The history of cinema was also made by communities of cinephiles – people who have a strong love relationship with cinema. The new waves

of the 1950s and 1960s started like that: on the possibility of a shared discussion about cinema, its political and aesthetic ontology. In Portugal, that also happened, and film-clubs were places in which political dissidence was possible. The dictatorship didn't like and chased this collective experience, closing many of these clubs.

This history didn't finish with the rise of television, streaming services, or even with the scrolling screens. It changed. Now, curated neighbourhood cinemas, but also cinematheques, play an important role in pursuing the construction of communities around cinema. It has been surprising to see how a new generation of viewers is emerging. Even if the experience is necessarily different, the shared ground seems to be important.

Art schools are a type of space in which a community is fostered. Not only in its main events – as film clubs, final project screenings or exhibitions – but, more importantly, inside the classroom. It is in that small space, a simulacrum of the dark room, that a new community of spectators can be born. An artist or filmmaker, a creative or a technician is first and foremost a spectator. It is in that context that we sense the role of the School of Arts of our University. As a space of possibilities, in which students, researchers and professors can discuss cinema, celebrating the shared space of community. It must be, of course, a space of discussion, and sometimes of dissent, but it is in that role that a community – or, for that matter, a school of arts and a university – can teach the citizens of tomorrow.

We know that in the rooms of a school, in that micro-space of our society, it is possible to imagine together, to debate cinema, and consequently, to foster ideas for a shared commons, a life built together, with its beauties and complications.

An artist or a filmmaker is someone with a special responsibility in contemporary societies. It is to them that we entrust the voice of the strange, of the new, of that which was once unthinkable. We trust cinema and its makers to be voices that pursue a more dignified world – that is, a community of humans and other beings, sharing together a space of living.

Cinema as community is, therefore, thinking ahead of a time of climate crisis, of the advancement of political agendas that deny *the other*. Cinema as community is the place of encounter against a world of

precarity, war, and lifeless places. Cinema as community is a possibility of what is yet to come.

At our School, at our University, we foster that space, engaging with our local city communities, to build this public arena. It is in that space that the university opens its doors to be confronted with everyday life, with all forms of life that pulsate in the world. We believe in this so strongly that our network is ever expanding, opening itself to the otherness and alterity of other communities, which, at the end, are one and the same human shared common ground.

Cinema as community is, finally, the space of adventure, of defying ourselves, the space to look at the mirror, or behind the window, concepts so dear to film theory. Let us be able, as the Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul so wonderfully proposes, to live together with the ghosts, the animals, the trees around us, being illuminated by fireflies.