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Cinema and Revolution: Fifty years after the Carnation Revolution

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ABSTRACT This special section of *Aniki* is designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution of 1974-1975. The five articles included in it reflect the need to bring together international research, particularly on a theme with such a wide geographical scope as this one, highlighting the importance of adopting cross perspectives. The analyses proposed in these essays take a variety of approaches – critical film studies, the history of cinema's modes of production, the ontology of the documentary, comparative analysis – and move through different filmic forms and revolutionary territories, namely: France, the Philippines, Spain, Romania and Brazil. Together, these essays allow us to update the links between cinema and revolution and extend them to other historical contexts and case studies, thus contributing to the global history of a cinema that has for a long time been confronting revolution and society in creative and inspiring ways.

KEYWORDS Cinema and revolution; film history; militant cinema; documentary; fiction; political cinema.

Fifty years ago, Portugal entered a new era. Portuguese army captains overthrew the dictatorial regime (1933-1974) of António de Oliveira Salazar and Marcelo Caetano in a matter of hours, seizing strategic positions of power and obtaining the surrender of the governing bodies. At first glance, the *coup d'état* of April 25, 1974, had all the

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characteristics of a "military putsch" led by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA in Portuguese) in response to an inextricable colonial situation. However, the MFA had not included the independence of the colonies in its program, nor even the content of the regime that would follow. From April 25 onwards, marked by the symbolic image of the population handing carnations to the soldiers, the people's irruption into the political process inaugurated a new phase in which the MFA was just one of the players. At the crossroads of the military coup and the popular demonstrations, a particular revolutionary process took shape, expanding in many areas and fronts well into 1978-1979, when the agrarian movement was forcefully brought to an end.

Fifty years on, it is still difficult to talk about several sensitive issues. Firstly, the colonial past and the intertwined memories of the colonial war and its aftermath: on the Portuguese side, the return of the colonial settlers, the *retornados*, and the very precarious conditions in which their "return" to the metropolis took place. In Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Angola, in particular, the horrors of the colonial war gave way to the violence of civil wars waged between independence movements. This is an area where history and collective memory find it difficult to coexist. To describe an event in history, Arlette Farge spoke of a "junction of otherness" which, "in addition to being a piece of time (…) is called upon to assume its future and its meaning in its reception and in the representations we have of it". Farge added the following caution: "the mobility of the event requires infinite flexibility in the historical vision of it" (Farge 2002, 67-68, our translation). The "mobility of the event" seems to invoke the very definition of cinema. Revolution, thought of as a process and a rupture, is also an event that can provoke visible ruptures in the arts, whether these are temporary thematic changes (with politics becoming more important) or, more interestingly, permanent changes, in other words, aesthetic revolutions. For a generation of filmmakers and film technicians in Portugal, for example, the 1960s and 1970s were an important turning point.

Thus, taking the revolutionary event as a starting point for a discussion on cinema is both obvious and problematic. It is obvious, because the radical openness offered by a revolutionary situation can make it possible to relearn democracy, but also to reconfigure the place of artistic practices in the social field; it is problematic, because there have always been misunderstandings, suspicions, and debates about cinema when it is involved in politics or when it deals with the intertwining of

history and memory. Although the so-called revolutionary period is often dealt with in film histories, it also seems to be an aporia of those same histories. For example, the 1970s often pose problems to film periodization, as they sit uncomfortably between the modernity of the 1960s (the new waves) and a post-modernity that saw the emergence of a new model of cinema caught between entertainment and the victory of the mass media.

Militant production has similarly been treated in a random way. The hybridity of forms and the circularity of cinematographic practices during the revolutionary period are only rarely considered. Yet, most revolutions have been extensively filmed and accompanied by images. The visual archives resulting from the encounter between cinema and revolution, which historians may use to (re)construct the paths of history, have also been 'revived' in a variety of creative forms: in so-called compilation documentaries, in films that draw on recovered images found on social networks, or even in fiction films that insert archival images into their narration. Overall, this material is of interest to historians, filmmakers and moving image researchers.

As is often the case in history, but especially in the case of cinematographic forms that are heavily conditioned by the industry, this vast corpus of images is fragile and sometimes disappears, being difficult to reconstitute. The Portuguese case is significant: these reflections come at a time when film research has greatly expanded. Several exploratory works carried out by researchers from various disciplines have helped us to understand that the cinema of the Portuguese Revolution did not emerge *ex nihilo* in April 1974. The writings of Leonor Areal (2011), Maria do Carmo Piçarra (2015) and Patrícia Vieira (2011), among others, allow us to be more attentive to cinematographic practices in times of dictatorship, subject to censorship and state legislation. Research by José Filipe Costa (2012), Michelle Sales (2011), Paulo Cunha (2015) and Mickaël Robert-Gonçalves (2018) have also provided a more accurate view of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary cinema. In recent years, the cinema of other revolutions and social movements has been equally analysed. Researchers such as Ros Gray (2007) and Raquel Schefer (2015) have looked into Mozambique; Catherine Roudé (2017) has investigated France; Mathilde Rouxel (2020) and Hugo Darroman (2023) have written on the Middle East; Go Hirasawa (2021) has covered Japan, while Sibil Çekmen (2022) and

Federico Lancialonga (2023) have researched Turkey and Italy, respectively.

The anniversary of a revolution should be seen as an opportunity to escape the ceremonial and rigid nature of an event that is immobile in time – the revolutionary event is, in fact, much more chaotic than some (hi)stories would suggest. The time is ripe for broadening the horizon of our collective memories, opening them to other pasts and, above all, to other possibilities and places, wherever and whenever cameras have sought to problematise our vision of history. The brilliance of art is proof of this sometimes-incomprehensible attempt, often abandoned in favour of soft, symbolic images of a society regaining a semblance of peace. The last few months have been marked by deepening social inequalities, the anachronism of authoritarian regimes and wars, and the political exhaustion of democratic systems. A moment such as this, when we will be celebrating the fifty years of the Carnation Revolution, should therefore invite us to analyse the traces, myths, explosions, failures, and eventual successes of past revolutions so that we can better understand the relationship between cinema, art, and politics *today*. As David Faroult writes, in the French context, "the question of militant theatre and cinema comes up again periodically whenever the state of the social movement challenges artists" (2007, 368, our translation). Rethinking the revolution should, then, mean making it present and alive, bringing the present and the past closer together and questioning the effects of the passage of time on images, narratives, and cinema itself as a historical device.

The five articles included in this special section were selected out of our belief in international research, particularly on a theme with a wide geographical scope such as this one, which highlights the need to adopt cross perspectives. Unfortunately, we received no texts on the Portuguese Revolution; nevertheless, the analyses proposed in these five essays allow us to update the links that can be established between cinema and revolution and, consequently, to extend these links to other historical contexts and case studies.

Before film historian became a profession, the history of cinema was mainly written by film critics, who tended to hold biased opinions and elaborate very personal and original histories that were the outcome of their own memories of watching films and cinephile tastes. The representation of the revolutionary years – in which the authors of these histories were often actors – would therefore draw heavily on memories

and result in glimpses and omissions. At their worst, these histories neglected certain films and overestimated others. In his article on what is regarded as a key film in the context of May 68, in France, Leonardo Esteves explains how *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* (1968) gained prominence in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, as it was placed at the centre of a conceptual debate over the idea of 'revolutionary film'. This return to the short film shot by the students of the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques reveals both the discussions of the post-68 period about the ontology of revolutionary cinema – discussions that would sometimes be answered by films, particularly those of Godard and Marker – and the socio-political tensions of the time. The critics' focus on the word "truly" (as in "truly revolutionary") reflects the sensitivity of the debate. It is also evidence of the fact that the revolutionary event could then be seen as the nodal point capable of fusing revolutionary practices and the arts into a single dynamic, allowing for a "privileged operation of crystallization and analysis of the contradictions that move social relations and the ways in which people suffer them and/or reappropriate them" (Barot 2009, 12, our translation).

The use of images of revolutions often leads to questions about the propensity of memory to "turn history on its head" or, as Paul Ricœur writes, to remind us that "the men of the past had an open future and left behind unfulfilled dreams, unfinished projects" (Ricœur 1998, 27, our translation). Films shot and screened in revolutionary contexts can reactivate (or not) revolutionary energy and the tensions that arise in the populations involved; they can also call into question the definition of a cinematographic work which, in militancy, "requires an extraordinary capacity for ingenuity, logistical invention, tactical and strategic moves" and "leads to rethinking the very concept of the work as a set of initiatives and not as a simple corpus" (Brenez 2013, our translation). The politics of these films and the modes of production they shape are another dimension of this tense and creative relationship between cinema and revolution (Costa 2012). Bruno Camacho Leal's essay on *Why is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1994), by Kidlat Tahimik, addresses the question of this filmmaker's personal commitment to the film. The problem, often addressed in the analysis of militant cinema, is masterly taken up by the Filipino director. Based on Bill Nichols' concept of "performative documentary", Camacho Leal analyses how the introduction of a personal dimension within collective memory lends itself to a deeper emotional adherence to the filmic

universe on the part of the viewer. This reflection could well be called upon to forge an analysis, along similar lines, of the Portuguese essay films *Gestos e Fragmentos* (*Gestures & Fragments*, 1982) and *Bom Povo Português* (*The Good People of Portugal*, 1981), by Rui Simões. In both cases, creative liberties were taken in relation to cinematographic genres. All these films may be representative of a "critical art", in the sense that it is an art that "knows that its political effect is achieved through aesthetic distance" (Rancière 2008, 91, our translation).

Another problem – a structural one – is raised by cinema in times of revolution and consists in the contestation of traditional forms of organisation and modes of production. This theme, studied by Paulo Cunha in the case of Portuguese cinema (2015), is at the centre of the practices and discourses of the Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu (Alternative Cinema Cooperative), which was active, in Catalonia, between 1975 and 1981, and which is the topic of our third essay, authored by Ana Algarra Navarro. Instead of analysing films and directors, the article places the emphasis on the ideological consistency of the works and the collectiveness of the paths. Caught under the influence of authorial politics, critics and historians have been prone to seeing in this kind of collective initiative an incongruous moment, insofar as they cannot identify a name that is already known to them and that they can safely place within a well-established history of *auteurs*. This attitude evinces a certain anxiety concerning the putative disappearance of *auteur* cinema. Yet, as in Portuguese revolutionary cinema, the collectivist moment was crucial for creating, as Algarra Navarro writes, "spaces for complicity and cinematographic discussion" that facilitated the formation and permanence of a "cinema capable of acting on the margins of hegemonic cinema".

The last two essays in this special section shift the focus to more recent fiction films: *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006) and *Marighella* (2019). Although they have different modes of production – the first is a European art film; the second is a major Brazilian production – both of these films address the question of how to represent the memory of a revolution in fiction, whether through the memories of characters inspired by reality or through the biography of an iconic figure.

In the case of the Romanian revolution of December 1989, Liri-Alienor Chapelan proposes to develop a "comprehensive theory of the audiovisual representation of the revolutionary fact" through the analysis of three projects made after 1989. These are: *Videograms of a*

Revolution by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică; a YouTube clip called "December 22, 1989, Romanian Revolution Uncut"; and Corneliu Porumboiu's film, *12:08 East of Bucharest*. Her aim is to examine how the status of being the first "televised revolution" changed people's perception of the Romanian revolution itself, as well as the subsequent discourses elaborated on those events. Employing a comparative lens, Chapelan reveals the multiple angles whereby memorial and ideological approaches were applied to the same historical object, touching on the very essence of one of today's most pressing problems, namely: that of understanding information in an ultra-connected world where images are present everywhere and all the time.

Finally, Jailson Ramos' text also addresses issues of representation, in this case the representation of a revolutionary figure, the Brazilian communist activist Carlos Marighella (1911-1969). The prism of subjectivity tightens, becoming more crucial, as the film follows the life of a character within a wider movement of actions and events. As a result, the gaze is focused differently than in collective and revolutionary films, so that the confrontation between revolution and cinema takes on a different shape. It is for this reason that Ramos pertinently analyses the relationship between production and aesthetics. Produced by Globo Filmes and O2 Filmes, two major production companies in Brazil, the film seems to serve a particular "aesthetic of violence". The author questions the effects this particular production mode may have had on the construction of the narrative point of view, on the representation of the revolutionary (and of violence) and, consequently, on the film's engagement with political discourse.

It should be noted that most of the articles deal with recent revolutionary events – that is, events that took place *after* May 68, the exception being the text on *Marighella* – suggesting, perhaps, that fiction needs time to digest history and account for it. They all prove, if proofs were needed, that revolts, insurrections, demonstrations and revolutions are as pertinent as ever.

To conclude, and picking up on the last article about Carlos Minghella, we should ask why revolutionary and anti-capitalist figures are of interest to capitalist film producers. As is usually the case with the *biopic*, a genre consecrated by Hollywood cinema that, par excellence, can write its own story, the final product is expected to take a neutral tone, without falling, at least explicitly, into either heroism or vilification.

More generally, this raises questions about the destination that can be given – and has been given – to revolutionary images: what has remained of them, what filmmakers have done with them, what the critics and the public have said about them and how this can affect us all.

Following on from our call for articles last year, this special section reflects our desire to progressively continue to help shape a "cine-geography" (Gray and Eshun 2011, 1) of the ways cinema and revolution have been "made" and "interrogated". It also seeks to answer a question that is fundamental to us, namely: how do revolutions continue to exist and manifest themselves even after the event? The films, issues and political figures analysed and discussed in these five essays will hopefully contribute to the global history of a cinema that has for a long time been confronting revolution and society in ways that are ever more creative and inspiring.

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Cinema e Revolução: 50 anos depois do 25 de Abril

RESUMO Este dossier da *Aniki* foi concebido para celebrar o 50º aniversário da revolução portuguesa de 1974-1975. Os cinco artigos que o integram reflectem a necessidade de reunir investigação internacional, em particular num tema de grande abrangência geográfica como este, evidenciando a importância de adoptar perspetivas cruzadas. As análises propostas nestes ensaios assumem várias abordagens – estudos críticos do cinema, história dos modos de produção, ontologia do documentário, análise comparativa – e transitam por diferentes formas fílmicas e territórios, nomeadamente: França, Filipinas, Espanha, Roménia e Brasil. Juntos, estes ensaios permitem atualizar as relações que podemos estabelecer entre cinema e revolução, bem como estender essas relações a outros contextos históricos e estudos de caso, desse modo contribuindo para a história global de um cinema que há muito se vem confrontando com a revolução e a sociedade de forma criativa e inspiradora.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Cinema e revolução; história do cinema; cinema militante; documentário; ficção; cinema político.