

Podcast “Filming in Portugal. See the big picture” | Season 2

Transcription of the episode 7 with Rui Tendinha and Teresa Vieira

[00:00:14 Martin Dale]: So I'd like to welcome everyone to another episode of the podcast *Filming in Portugal: See the Big Picture*, a podcast of the Portugal Film Commission. I'm the host, Martin Dale, the journalist with *Variety*. Delighted to have with us today for this episode Rui Tendinha, film critic and presenter of Cine Tendinha, and Teresa Vieira, artistic director of Beast IFF, a film critic and journalist for Antena 3, Cine Europe and other media. Delighted to have you both with us. I'll kick off with a kind of more polemical question: is film dead or is it still alive and kicking, starting with Rui?

[00:00:53 Rui Tendinha]: That's the eternal question, isn't it? I think, in 20 years, if you do this again, you're going to start with the same question, because the medium is always a parallel media. I think people always think "oh, is cinema dead?" I think... Maybe. maybe no, definitely, my favorite director has just died very recently. Of course, I'm not talking about Bertrand Blier, but David Lynch, and people said he kind of helped to kill cinema as we know it. But at the same time, he was responsible for a certain kind of rebirth of the medium of cinema itself. It started on the 70s with *Eraserhead* and then just through almost the end, he was always renovating. So in my opinion, that's the key. It's always kind of be... pushed to a boundary, like it's almost dying. But at the same time, I think artists and filmmakers are always trying to set off a kind of a renovation, a rebirth of this other film. And that's about it. So to your challenging question, my answer is this.

[00:02:04 Martin]: Thanks very much. And Teresa, the same question.

[00:02:06 Teresa Vieira]: Yeah. I would like to say - I think cinema is both death and life, let's say. And so this will always be an eternal question because the medium itself kind of, like, in some ways it is basically that, let's say.

But I would like to mention, for example, what I feel from, for example, the Portuguese context, to not be too philosophical, you know, I just think that our national production has been growing exponentially, unfortunately, not with the same type of growth in terms of funding. But I think it is very alive and it's very out there. And so even though I could be very philosophical and talk about the ghosts of cinema and the lives of cinema, I would just like to focus on this particular case that I think it's very important, which is our cinema is very, very much alive. And I like that.

[00:03:02 Martin]: That's great. So I'll ask another polemical question: is film criticism dead or alive or kicking? We know that this is another eternal question, but particularly in the context of social media, all of these areas are questions... For instance, even things like photography, as professional photographers, still relevant because everybody can take photographs. And film criticism, everyone posts their own criticism of films. So how, in the current context, has this changed film criticism and how relevant does it continue to be today? So I'll go with Teresa this time and then to Rui.

[00:03:34 Teresa]: Yeah, I think it's shifting like everything in life. Right? And with the evolution of things, film criticism is obviously being found. Sometimes I find stuff in Letterbox that is more interesting than in certain media. And I think one of the things that has not been changing, and maybe that is the issue is, for example, in terms of the type of people that are doing film criticism.

And there's still a big lack of representation of other voices that have never been able to be in the, let's say, officially stated media as the appropriate media for film criticism. So maybe these new ways of doing it are just showing that maybe the official media should change a little bit, and so then it could actually be some type of representation of society and everything, which it isn't.

So, I don't know if it's dead. But I think it needs to change. And that's part of being alive, right? We change cells all the time. So I think film criticism from the official media needs that too.

[00:04:40 Martin]: And maybe, Rui, you're also a film critic. You appear on mainstream media, as it were. You also have an active presence on online media. So how is film criticism changing in the new context, and how relevant does it continue to be?

[00:04:55 Rui]: I tend to agree with Teresa. It has to change and is changing and is also very alive and kicking. Even, some people would say, like the old people from "Restela" - which is a Portuguese expression from Camões - "oh, too many amateurs, film critics." But that's it. So we have to live with it. And I think with this amateur - which is a word, by the way, that I really fancy -, we can discover new voices, new ways of thinking and reflecting, moving images and the new landscape of visual arts.

And I think we need these new voices, and it's very democratic in a way that we can go to Letterbox, or even YouTube videos. They are doing some criticism and we discover this. And of course, it's very important that the film festivals... In Portugal there are a lot of festivals, I'm also attached to some of them as a programmer, as a curator - and I do believe firmly that I can tend to believe that it's really relevant to film festivals, because it's there that it can be born, the discussion and the way of thinking about how can we perceive or see a film with a gaze that is felt critical and cinephile. So I do think this is important, this new renovation of film criticism.

[00:06:22 Martin]: And coming on to film festivals. Could you talk a bit about your own involvement and just explain a bit more? Because there's obviously a risk that film festivals can become a kind of parallel circuit, but certain films can't get beyond that circuit. So talk a bit about your own activity and whether there's a danger of becoming an area where people can't break out into the commercial cinemas.

[00:06:49 Rui]: Yeah, I'm attached to some film festivals in Portugal. I was also being programmer in Red Sea Film Festival in Saudi Arabia. But what I do think it's, of course, it could be dangerous that film festivals could evolve and still exist without a proper relationship with community and also to the various kinds of audiences. So I think festival festivals, especially in Portugal, are really important to a way of stand up, some certain kinds of films, and I mean short films. That's particularly very important to be shown and to be a showcase for new young talents.

But when I program films for festivals, for instance, I do program a new film festival in Douro, in a place called Baião. And the idea is to be a little bit of a formative kind of case for the younger audiences. And that's my spirit and the spirit of some other festivals, is to not teach a way of looking at cinema, which is very arrogant, but kind of help to set up a new way of looking cinema, that not just be entertaining or mainstream cinema or commercial films that are opening cinemas. To show to young audiences that there is a kind of a new cinema coming from auteurs and not from filmmakers that are hired just to produce and do films that are not personal.

[00:08:17 Martin]: And Teresa, obviously as you're artistic director of the Beast International Film Festival, I think that focuses above all on films from Central and Eastern Europe. But if you

could talk a bit about the festival itself and the similar question, how to make sure that festivals themselves get to the right audience, as it were?

[00:08:37 Teresa]: Yeah, I think that's a big question. Kind of difficult to answer it in its own complexity, but one of the things that I would like to say is that film festivals, we have a bunch of them in Portugal, and we have a lot of niche kind of festivals as well. So with different themes and with different regions and everything. So there's this step of little focuses on different things.

My festival, with my team and my friends, we created this festival for Central Eastern European films that, first of all, thinks about the concept of accessibility, which I think most of the festivals have this kind of ingrained. So, for example, the tickets to go to a screening are lower, usually with a film festival, which also, fortunately, will allow other people that maybe do not have the same access to maybe some rooms - let's say the more commercial like mainstream rooms - will have this opportunity by being more accessible. And this is just talking about financial terms.

And then most of the festivals, I think almost all of them, work with schools. For example, Tendinha was talking about this idea of new audiences and everything. And I think fortunately, it's a big focus that all the festivals have, including ours. That is this idea that we really want to bring new audiences. So then they can, you know, find their own path and define their own path with cinema. But just creating some options and giving them some options of other things that they can watch that are not just like the mainstream big blockbusters and just having some other things to watch.

And also in terms of the mediums that you present, for example, in our festival, we also do video art screening. So we try to mix different genres, different forms, and then also really connect with topics, like political topics, and just talk about it. And from our experience, the audiences really respond to this type of, let's say, experiments that we do in terms of programming, which because of lack of funding, is not dependent on the big premieres in our case - which also, you know, lack of money gives also kind of bigger freedom, let's say, sometimes. So... Yeah.

[00:10:47 Martin]: Great. And I'll continue in this polemical vein, if you like. If we're looking at Portuguese cinema, we talked about how it's grown exponentially. One of the, the sort of the audience level or comments that one reads on social media and so on, sometimes people criticize that Portuguese cinema is too much focused on getting to film festivals and getting good, reviews from film critics, but isn't reaching an audience.

There's a sort of polemical issue of to what extent film critics should be reflecting a more niche view of formation of audiences, or whether they should be reflecting the view of a broader audience. I don't have a position on this. I'm just, since it's one of the questions that come up, I'm interested in what role you think the film critic has? And in relation to Portuguese cinema, what's the relationship between the film criticism and Portuguese cinema?

[00:11:41 Teresa]: Yeah. One thing that I would like to say is that, for example, I think there's a lack of space for film criticism for short films. Still. And then when it usually happens, it is in a group, let's say "oh, there's these ten films. So let's talk about ten films in one page, the same page we would dedicate to a feature." Which I think from there, there's a big problem, because a short should have its own space, but of course, like it's not dependent on the film critics, it's based on the spaces that, for example, newspapers have that television stations have. And so this editorial side of it, without it changing, I think we cannot focus on a lot of the production that is going on, because we talk about Portuguese films abroad, but we also talk about short Portuguese films abroad.

And then where do they find space, unless they're like nominated for Oscars or selected to be nominated? So that is, I think, the first question. One of the good things that I see has been changing, for example, is that people are finding ways of, for example, distributing those short films in a package, let's say, which I think it's very good for audiences. Everybody knows from our history we used to show short films before features. Now we don't have that anymore. But this new idea of being able of curating a screening where you can show some Portuguese short films, I think is a way also of making our audiences connect with Portuguese production, that is not just the feature films.

[00:13:10 Martin]: Great. And so, Rui, in particular that question of connection, do Portuguese films have a problem with connection. And sometimes the films that have a bigger connection get a quite strong criticism as not being particularly good films. What's your view on this question of how the relationship between film criticism and Portuguese cinema?

[00:13:30 Rui]: Yeah. My opinion is that we have really a problem of distribution. You know, it's something that we should all pause and think and what we should do in terms of distribution for a niche film. Are they doing the right thing? I don't think so. Maybe I don't have a solution, but maybe the so-called conventional opening of a film commercial, opening, it has to change. And it has to be more selective and to think about their niche, their target audiences. And I don't think distributors do that. But when you pose this question of not getting audiences to see the new Portuguese cinema, I also brought up questions about education. You know, sometimes I'm invited to go to film schools and schools, you know, some schools also only for audio visuals.

And I think there is a tremendous lack of cultural knowledge of cinema, of arts and everything. And it's a problem of education. I do believe that our system of teaching in high schools... They don't care about arts. They don't care about culture. And this has to change. I remember once I had it by accident. A former Minister of Culture, and we talked a lot that there is something that has to be done. For them, for literature, theatre, for other forms of art. Something has to be like kind of a revolution in the way kids in high school are... Acknowledge this kind of information, because it's a big problem of education. I think.

[00:15:19 Martin]: And linked to that, the extent to which film criticism can operate as an educational medium. There's also, as Teresa was mentioned, pressure on the space that you have. And there's also a well known pressure that often reviews are limited almost when they're publicized to the number of stars that a film critics gives, rather than anything they actually write. How true is that? I'll go with Rui first and then Teresa.

[00:15:47 Rui]: Yeah. One of the places I write to is *Expresso*. I do believe that people don't read my texts, and the first thing they do is go and see how many stars he reviewed it. And it's sad, but it's true. There's a lack of time, with social network and everything. I think people don't stop and relax and read the text, critical or an essay. And people want fast information. They just ask me:

“So is it *Babygirl* a good film?”

And they don't want to hear my thesis on the film, for instance. I'm just saying it's also... A colleague of ours from critic, Vasco, once told in a meeting about some criticism in Batalha that there is a problem with the audience as well. What happened to the old cinephile movie goer? I think is getting dumber. And I know that the word is quite strong, “dumber”, but it's not getting smarter for sure.

[00:16:50 Martin]: And Teresa so the same question.

[00:16:52 Teresa]: Yeah. So I think also it has to do a lot with what's happening now, for example, this idea of like social media and everything. And we're talking a lot about film criticism as just the written thing, that people read. But film criticism can be something else as well. And so I think that maybe talking about, for example, more visual essays and, you know, for example, I do radio for the national radio and I do reviews in the national radio. And there is a different way of, you know, embracing the side of film criticism. But for me, it's kind of, we always talk just about the reading part. But film criticism can also be a lot more than that. So I do agree that I think that sometimes people are not reading as much as they used to, but people are listening to more podcasts, for example. So I don't know. I think there's different waves and we cannot just generalize, in terms of just the reading.

It's just that there are different media that we could use also. And so this idea of the changes that maybe we need to do, some sometimes it also has to do with this. Why not visual essays? You know? And then maybe, yeah, a TikToker that does that, maybe they will be able to get a bigger audience because it connects with how people are getting information. And so this idea of us just like sticking to one thing, I think it's more... But for example, Rui is a great example that he does much more than just, you know, just the written thing. And even I do.

We do a bunch of stuff precisely because of that. But we've all always done it, right? And it captures different audiences. The audiences that are listening to my 9 p.m. video art, short film criticism show, are not the ones that are reading it in Cine Europa. So it's just different targets, different audiences. And I think we should just, you know, not stick just with the problems with the reading of articles, I guess.

[00:18:46 Martin]: And then another question. When we use the word film criticism, we're often talking about feature films or perhaps short films. But these days, obviously TV series are a key part of the equation, with obviously the growth of the streaming platforms. How has this phenomenon changed your work and how do you view that progression? I'll go with Teresa and then with Rui. We talked about David Lynch, when he did *Twin Peaks*, that was a kind of a film director shifting into TV. But these days, a lot of film directors are giving a strong interest, at least, and working in TV series. So how does that change your work? Teresa first and then Rui.

[00:19:27 Teresa]: Well, I'm very happy about it. I'm very happy to talk about TV series. I do not like this idea that we should just, you know, stick with this idea of what criticism should be about. And I think as film critics, we're more than able to review a TV series. And honestly, it's like people watch stuff. So let's talk about stuff. And for me, I used to have a podcast just for TV series, while doing film criticism, but it's not that common. And I feel like it still needs a little bit of change. And I think that there is still this sort of perception that film criticism is in a certain level. And then when you talk about TV series, it's a little bit below. Still. I think there is still this prejudice about it, and I think it shouldn't be like that.

I think, for example, you mentioned *Twin Peaks*. Like *Twin Peaks* is an amazing, very long feature film, let's call it, like especially the third season... It's like, oh my God. But so for me, I think it still needs a little bit of change because also, who are we to say that only film is good, you know? Not at all. A lot of TV shows maybe are a lot better than a lot of films that were made, I don't know. You know, I'm just, you know, I'm being too extreme now, but what I'm saying is, I think we should have more of it.

[00:20:45 Martin]: Okay. And Rui, the same question.

[00:20:47 Rui]: I must say, we don't have plenty of space and time to share what we like. And I do think that we should, for instance, meet a fight for cinema. Not for streaming, for cinema. And when someone asks me:

“So you choose what you want to write.”

I tend to, even if I see *Disclaimer*, which is a great, great TV adventure from Alfonso Cuarón, I always think “no, I must write” - or speak if I'm on radio because I also do radio -, but I can, for instance, fight for my space. To give an example, for instance, a film like *Hors-Saison*, that just opened recently that I am really very fond of it. So I try to fight for places to promote cinema in the movie theaters.

And it's a personal fight, you know, although of course I enjoy TV series and this is one of my best experiences ever was to see *Twin Peaks* in the big screen in Cannes, the 2017. So in my opinion, of course, there's a space for everything, but I cannot multiply and the space is limited. So I do fight for TV, for both cinema, in my space and especially a Portuguese cinema, if we want to change something. If they say

“Oh, you want to write about *Frozen* or *Wicked* or *Banzo*, the new Margarida Cardoso” - I go for the Portuguese.

[00:22:26 Martin]: And that brings us on to the question of Portuguese cinema. So we talked about the exponential growth, the short film scene and so on. But as film critics, how do you both view Portuguese cinema. Is it an interesting moment? Obviously, there was the dean of Portuguese cinema, Manoel de Oliveira, João César Monteiro. These people are no longer with us, but there are many, Miguel Gomes, Pedro Costa, there are many filmmakers who are known internationally are win awards at the top film festivals. There are also some of the more local films, there's the tension between auteur cinema, commercial cinema, there are multiple issues... I'll go with Rui and then Teresa, how do you view Portuguese cinema at present?

[00:23:15 Rui]: I have to say that we are living in a good time for Portuguese cinema, not in terms of getting box office results in Portugal. So obvious is kind of a disaster. But I do think we are living here. I don't want to say golden age, but it's something like in a few years you're going to say:

“Oh, this part of the decade, something has come, and this new look.”

Also, you know, established names like Canijo, Pedro Costa, I don't know, maybe their best works recently, which is kind of a way to celebrate.

And I just recently had an interview with Thierry Fremaux, which happens to be the artistic director of Cannes and Lumière, and he was saying that every year he feels Portuguese is getting stronger and is very powerful. That is his word. Powerful. So you should always be proud of this.

But I also do think we should open our eyes better for young names and young talents. And we just... Teresa is going to Rotterdam, then Berlin. We will have new voices there, new names. And, I can say we are living great times. And I've seen some of these films that are going to be in Berlin and in Rotterdam and I'm very excited. And it's a great time. So we should be more optimistic with Portuguese cinema.

[00:24:34 Martin]: So the young turks, the filmmakers of the Nouvelle Vague began as film critics. Have either of you made any films or have any desire to make films?

[00:24:48 Rui]: Well, I don't have desire to make fiction, but I've been doing some documentaries. Once or twice I did some small docs for Antena 3, when I was in Antena 3, and it's something I really enjoyed to do. Films about films, films about shooting. And I'll still pursue that.

And actually, I'm with a project. And recently I was also, suddenly by accident, and I really enjoyed, I was a producer of a film, with Anabela Moreira, which is one of my favorite actors. And because I'm in a festival that commissions films, and suddenly I was the producer of a fiction film. And for me that was very rewarding. And I made it, and I'm happy.

[00:25:30 Martin]: And that side of making films, what do you learn? Does that also enrich your film criticism?

[00:25:37 Rui]: Yes. Of course. For me, if I could be a film critic for the rest of my life, I'd be more than happy. Because it's the art of sharing thoughts and my love of cinema. That's it.

[00:25:48 Martin]: And Teresa, what's your view of Portuguese cinema in terms of its dynamism from the perspective of film criticism at the moment?

[00:25:56 Teresa]: Yeah, I think, honestly, I see a lot more diversity. Still not at the levels that I think would be ideal, but I think it's improving a lot. And that is being shown also in terms of the themes that are being represented in our cinema. And so we are expanding. We're not just like the slow cinema talking about trees or whatever. It is expanding and each person has its own voice.

But I do feel so many... I wouldn't call them new voices, because a lot of these people have been around, but they were probably not being highlighted or not getting funding. And so I think that changes also when the funding changes, which I think still needs a lot of change, but I can see that there are a lot of almost like guerrilla style, like productions that managed to get to the big festivals and then, okay, there's like this person that is working here for a long time and deserves attention.

But I think honestly, we keep just evolving, you know, and with this bigger representation, let's say, of diversity - not only of the directors but also of the teams, and also in terms, for example, of artists doing films as well, because I think for a long time, maybe still a little bit, there has been some prejudice about like artists doing art films or whatnot.

And we see more than ever this sort of the dilution of this concept of art film and just becoming like, oh, I am an artist. And I also make films, you know. So I'm very excited to see that some frontiers are being kind of let go? And now we're probably walking towards what would be this sort of ideal way of having the sort of big cosmos of what Portuguese cinema could be.

[00:27:46 Martin]: But just to expand a little bit on this question of diversity, you're talking obviously not just the mix between male and female directors, nor the mix of different voices of different communities. Just explain a bit more what you mean by that.

[00:28:00 Teresa]: It's exactly what you're talking about, all of those terms. Because, honestly, all of the names you mentioned were male, you know, and white. And directors, also. So for me, I think this side of diversity is like me saying Paula Tomás Marques, Isadora Neves Marques, Alexander David, Ágata de Pinho.

So mentioning, you know, other people and, you know canons exist for a reason, but I want our cannon to be a little bit more expansive. And that's what I'm feeling, that people are breaking

this idea of... I hope it will get to the canon of like... It's not just Miguel Gomes and Pedro Costa. They're also the canon. But there's so, so many other people and in different... And besides also directing. So I think there's... Yeah, it's improving, but yeah. Still not quite there. Yeah. But I was talking about all those terms. Yeah.

[00:29:01 Martin]: And just adding to that question, this question of how to get to audiences. Now, you talked a bit about, for example, short films. There's not a big enough space. There are distribution problems. Do you think it's just primarily a question of film education or there can be also evolution of... You talked about the types of films that are being made. There's much more diversity of different genres and different approaches. What do you think are some of the challenges in terms of Portuguese cinema getting a bigger reach to Portuguese audiences?

[00:29:38 Teresa]: I think, you know, in a capitalist system that is being driven about what you also expect to generate some specific market, that also creates a challenge. For example, we were talking about the distribution, but if you have a premiere of a Portuguese film that only screens at 1:00 pm, how can you get numbers? You know? So I think there's a lack of space.

Of course we have fortunately, some cinemas that create that space, like Cinema Ideal, Nimas, Trindade, even Batalha, etc. But still, that is, you know, not the rule. And so I think that sometimes we are judging the audiences not being interested, but how can they be interested in something that screens at a time that, you know, most of the population is not even able to go there? And so the options, which also are a lot, we have a lot of films that are being premiered every week. It creates a problem, generally speaking, that you have a lot to offer. And then sometimes it ends up that the Portuguese films are not in the best times and spaces.

So I do agree about the educational side, of course. Like, I don't remember watching Portuguese films in high school and I was studying science, and that has nothing to do with it. Even people that weren't studying science like me, they also didn't have that chance. So that also needs to change. But there is the Plano Nacional de Cinema and they're working on it, and there are a lot of other associations and other spaces that are working with the audiences in that sense, and bringing the films closer to people. Also cine-teatros, cine-clubs, whatever. People are doing that. But I think, yeah, it's an issue that, you know, still exists. But this question of distribution, I think is also important to note. You know.

[00:31:26 Martin]: Okay. And then the other question that we had was whether you, in addition to film criticism and artistic director of a film festival, have you also done filmmaking?

[00:31:35 Teresa]: Oh, no. No. I do a lot of Instagram stories and that's great for me. But I think, for example, for me, film programming is definitely something that I really love. You know, film programming and film criticism for me, live and breathe with each other. And for me, film creating is almost like creating a film, in a way. You can create a whole narrative with just one screening, and especially me, that I work with short films, it's a very interesting challenge. And for me also, for example, film criticism it's a different way of creating a new universe. It's not trying to be a film, is not trying to translate a film. It's just creating a whole new universe.

And for example, for me, I like for example, not just with the writing, but even with the writing, creating this sort of like universe, but then also, for example, with the sounds. How you with sounds can expand this idea also of film criticism, of how you without words... For example, how can you try and connect with something, you know, with the essence of a film? Let's say. So not a literal kind of criticism, let's say. And I like those challenges. And maybe I don't want to do a film, but I want to do everything that is connected with film, you know.

[00:32:53 Martin]: And Teresa it's our last question. You talked about distribution. So how do you see the future of film, with streaming platforms and so on? The spectators in some countries have been declining. The pandemic was a big shock too, obviously, because it closed the cinemas during the pandemic. We talked about is film alive or dead? And very much we concluded it's alive. But how do you see? As a phenomenon, will it be increasingly viewed through smartphones and through computer tablets and TVs? How do you see the future of cinema in that sense?

[00:33:25 Teresa]: I think that definitely, the streaming side will keep growing. Most definitely. But one of the things, for example, that I felt recently is that sometimes there are some surprises, let's say.

Of course, blockbusters are what they are. But I remember when *Wicked* premiered, after the premiere, like 2 or 3 days after, I went to the screening and people actually dressed up to go to the screening and I'm like:

“Are we back to the 60s, where are people dress up to go to a film?”

And then the other day I was talking with a colleague of mine that, for example, for *The Hunger* in the 80s here in Portugal, people dressed up full on goth to watch Bauhaus, David Bowie or whatever. And so there was that effort. And then suddenly in 2024, I'm seeing people doing that for *Wicked*. So there are those phenomenons, and I don't know if we keep having this sort of, maybe the new generation will see this sort of nostalgia side of them, but they also go for those nostalgic sides. I don't know how they embrace it. I'm not part of that generation. But if they do embrace it like that, I don't know.

I think there's... I don't know, I cannot say cinema is doomed completely because, you know, so many interesting things are happening. In TikTok people are highlighting video art pieces that were completely unknown, and now they're just coming back to life. So I don't... I'm scared. But I'm kind of optimistic, too, that both things will coexist in a way. And I hope they do.

[00:34:59 Martin]: That's great. Well, I'd like to thank ever so much, Rui and Teresa, for being with us. It was a fascinating insight into the current and future state, perhaps, of film and television and from the perspective of film criticism. So thanks ever so much to you both.

[00:35:14 Rui]: Thank you so much.

[00:35:15 Teresa]: Thank you, thank you.