



WOMEN'S CINEMA

IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGAL

Edited by Mariana Liz & Hilary Owen

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Women's Cinema in Contemporary Portugal

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Mariana Liz and Hilary Owen

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Para a Rosa
Para Big M and Little M

Unfinished: The cinema of Noémia Delgado

Manuela Penafria

A cinema with no films.¹ This short, seemingly flippant, statement at the start of a text on the Portuguese film director, Noémia Delgado (São Pedro da Chibia, Angola, 7 June 1933–Lisbon, 2 March 2016), is not intended to be read literally. Rather, it is a statement that sets out to locate Delgado in the history of Portuguese cinema, by highlighting how her work is characterized by the non-completion of cinema projects. More specifically, it is about proposals for films that were never completed, but which she intended to screen in film theatres. Her actual, completed filmography is sparse. *Máscaras* (*Masks*, 1976), a documentary shot in Trás-os-Montes, in the northern hinterland of Portugal (see also Patrícia Vieira in this volume), is the only film that would appear to justify Delgado's inclusion in the history of Portuguese cinema, since nearly all of her filmography was directed for television, and is therefore considered 'secondary'. The purpose of the current chapter is, nonetheless, to present and discuss Delgado's filmography, which covers the period from 1965 to 1988.

In order to do so, I have adopted what I have termed *teoria dos cineastas*, or 'filmmaker theory'. This emphasizes the filmmakers' own critical considerations and reflections as evinced in their written statements (including books, texts and manifestos), as well as in their verbal pronouncements in interviews, so as to ascertain the concept of cinema that they work with.² In Delgado's case, I adopt the term 'filmography' in its widest sense, as this allows me to go beyond the list of films which she worked on or actually directed, in order to include films that she wanted to direct but which, through no fault of her own, did not make it to the screen. These I will call 'film projects'. In her filmography, both finished films and film projects are read as symptomatic, reflecting a particular vision of cinema, because they do ultimately evidence a certain will to artistic creativity.

In order to convey Delgado's thought, poetics and affiliations, I will begin by discussing her actual filmography, and by highlighting the preponderance of documentary production within this. On the one hand, there is the single feature-length documentary that she made, *Masks*, which can be broadly aligned with ethnographic cinema. On the other, there exists a considerable corpus of biographical and cultural documentary, mostly short films screened on television, although Delgado also directed screen adaptations of short stories and novels written by Portuguese authors. In the second part of the chapter, using interviews given by Delgado as my primary source, as well as two interviews that Delgado conducted with other Portuguese directors, in which the issues addressed clearly reveal her own concerns as a film director, I will focus on her five film projects and her own personal concept of cinema. In that context, I highlight statements such as 'cinema is a form of dreaming', as well as her affirmation that films must be made viscerally, or as she puts it, in more explicitly female biological terms, *com o útero*, that is, 'with the womb'.

Noémia Delgado's filmography

Delgado's career in cinema began in the 1960s, at the height of *Cinema Novo*, the Portuguese New Cinema era, where she was involved in editing iconic films from the early years of this key period in Portuguese film history. She worked as an editing assistant on Paulo Rocha's films, *Os verdes anos* (1963), *Mudar de vida* (1966) and *A Pousada das Chagas* (1972). In the same role, she worked on *Pássaros de asas cortadas* (Artur Ramos, 1963), ... *E era o mar* (José Fonseca e Costa, 1966), *Faça segundo a arte* (Faria de Almeida, 1965), *Moçambique 65* (Faria de Almeida, 1965) and *A pérola do Atlântico* (José Fonseca e Costa, 1968). In the early 1970s she participated in the editing process of *O passado e o presente* (Past and Present; Manoel de Oliveira, 1972), as well as of *Meus amigos* (António da Cunha Telles, 1974). Working across documentary and fiction genres, Delgado began her cinematic career in editing, working on the creation of image sequences, which necessarily followed a specific logic or poetics.

Delgado began working as a director making short films for the newsreel series *Cinemazine*. She directed three black and white films in 35 mm format, which were produced by Cunha Telles Productions and dated 1965: *Amoladores*, *Fotógrafos Ambulantes* and *Escultura de João Cutileiro*. In 1972, she directed *Mafra e o Barroco Europeu*, a 35 mm format short colour film, referenced as a

commission by Torralta.³ After working intensively as an editor, then, Delgado began to work as a director on short, supporting films, which were shown before the projection of the main feature. Even after she started directing in 1965, she continued to work as assistant director, for instance, on António de Macedo's *Alta Velocidade* (1967), a film about the production of car engines in Portugal. She was also an assistant director (although uncredited) on the film *Torre Bela* (Thomas Harlan, 1971), as well as editing assistant in its recut Portuguese version.

The last reference to Delgado, before she herself took up directing, is found in the credits and special thanks of the film *Deus, Pátria, Autoridade* (1975), directed by Rui Simões. This collaboration on Simões's film immediately precedes Delgado's most significant film, *Masks*, from 1976. Her collaboration with Rui Simões on an acutely political film about governmental and social evolution in Portugal, exposing the fascist regime that had just been overthrown, emerges as a very logical step to take, in light of her opposition to the New State (*Estado Novo*, 1933–74) regime. Delgado had been arrested by the New State's secret police force PIDE (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*) in 1965 and imprisoned for a month in Caxias because, allegedly, 'the Soviet Union had partly financed'⁴ one of her trips to Paris. The fact that her name is mentioned in the credits of *Deus, Pátria, Autoridade* is not surprising in that context, but since it was a fairly low-key collaboration, it indicates that she was probably already involved in the filming of *Masks* at the time. This effectively aligns Delgado with the vision of other Portuguese film directors of the same period, including António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro, who found in Trás-os-Montes, a space where they could celebrate freedom and search for a potentially lost national identity that could be recovered through cinema, during the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 as well as immediately after it, and into the revolutionary period known as the PREC (*Processo Revolucionário em Curso*) (1974–6).

Masks (see Figure 1.1) was a pivotal experience for Delgado as a film director. It helped her to assert her own identity in relation to the predominantly male world of cinema in Portugal, and also in relation to a world where the urban experience was considered to be the norm. As Delgado has put it,

It was my first feature film and I was working with an all-male team. Paulo Rocha had told me that I had to be better than ten men in order to make the film. At the time I was pissed off, I wasn't there to measure myself up against anyone else.⁵

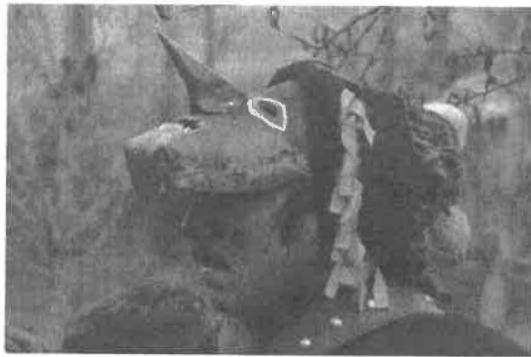


Figure 1.1 A man removes his mask in Noémia Delgado's 1976 *Masks* (Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema).

In Trás-os-Montes, Delgado recorded the festivities known as the *Ciclo de Inverno*, or Winter Cycle. She filmed Christmas with its *Festa dos Rapazes* (Young Men's Festivity) in Varge, the Saint Stephen's festivities in Grijó de Parada, New Year's Eve in Bemposta, the Epiphany in Rio de Onor and finally Carnival in Podence. In the only city used in this film, Bragança, she shot the Ash Wednesday holiday of 1975. As Delgado puts it,

I wanted to make a natural-looking film with minimum directorial intervention; I wanted the masks of Trás-os-Montes to be accurately represented, to lay down fundamental elements of their centuries-old tradition. After all, these rituals are how people live and breathe in Trás-os-Montes. I wanted the film to share that, but, since there is no such thing as an innocent film, there are also some reflections of my own.⁶

Confronted with a world of great visual wealth and a unique culture, the 'naturalness' and lack of intervention that Delgado refers to are evident in the observational register that emerges and sets the tone for the whole film. However, the intended accuracy of her recording does not imply there was no directorial interference.

Her intervention is, in fact, discernible on various levels. Right at the beginning, for instance, Delgado requests that the *Festa dos Rapazes* be restaged, while the recreation of this festivity in Rio de Onor is described by a voiceover. The audience is told that the festival had to be recreated because the ritual is no longer actually held since emigration has caused an exodus of the youth. Similarly, the audience is informed by a voiceover stating that the tradition,

which involved Death wandering the streets of Bragança and the Devil chasing girls has now been 'completely lost', and so the images in the film are merely an attempt to recreate and explain the meaning of these characters. The constant voiceover is also the director's own voice, as she addresses the audience to tell them what the image cannot explain with regard to time and space. For instance, the audience is told, 'In Podence, unlike what happens in other villages, the masked men appear at Carnival, and the Saint Stephen's Day festivities are held on 26 and 27 December.' The use of natural sound, in line with the observational register of the film, highlights the actual physical presence and existence of a group of boys in disguise. Yet, immediately afterwards, there is a scene in which the boys are having supper, and classical music is heard in the background, overlapping with the sounds of the scene's natural environment. At another point in the film, an image of some baskets of bread is set to its own soundtrack. These choices signal the representation of a collective imaginary. The scene with the supper that would seem to call for natural environmental sound, for instance, is transformed, through music, into a timeless moment.

Deployed in the precise sense that pictorial art uses it, the term 'portrait' contributes to our understanding of *Masks*. A portrait is the representation of a distinctiveness that identifies and characterizes the person depicted. In painting, the face reveals the skill of the portrait through the expressivity and affectivity of its features. In cinema, however, which deals with moving images, identity cannot be reduced either to immobility or to a single figure. If the portrait genre precludes action and 'the only actions admissible in a portrait are those that reinforce the "selfhood" of the person portrayed,'⁷ in the case of *Masks*, these actions are most readily expressed through collective representations, for instance, of a group of people engaged in a single action. In all these rituals, individuality becomes subordinate or non-existent. In *Masks*, several faces make up a single community that shares the same mode of existence. In this sense, there is a particularly telling close-up in which one of the masked men, who is facing the viewer, removes his mask. The camera immediately homes in on this young man who then hides his face behind the mask again. The sound of classical music heard in the background makes this close-up shot a supreme moment of identity disclosure, in which the young man's face is compared with the mask that he is wearing. For Catarina Alves Costa,⁸ *Masks* may be read as an ethnographic documentary film, along with *Vilarinho das Furnas* (1969) and *Falámos de Rio de Onor* (1974), directed by António Campos, and *Festa, trabalho e pão em Grijó de Parada* (1973), directed by Manuel Costa e Silva. Ethnographic documentary cinema sits somewhere

between 'ethnographic archive film' and a kind of 'poetic cinema' calling on the 'ethnographic imagination'. Or to put it differently, on the one hand, there are ethnographic archive films that are 'directly connected with ethnography as a field of study and are characterized by their mission to record ... in which cinematography is bound by the idea of an unmediated observation of reality'.⁹ On the other hand, there is the 'ethnographic imagination' that is exemplified in *Trás-os-Montes* (António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro, 1976). *Trás-os-Montes* is the kind of film which, as Costa puts it, 'visits a forgotten, archaic, romanticized and aestheticized world ... the kind of cinema that ultimately represents the rural world in a cinematographically reconstructed past'.¹⁰

In Delgado's view, cinema is meant to transcend reality without denying or eliminating it. In this sense, a particular imaginary vision remains consistently grounded in the reality that underpins it. For instance, Delgado makes a point of highlighting a further possible reading of the film. She recognizes that particular forms of social organization and a specific place are allocated to women, and to the way in which they participate in the rituals of *Trás-os-Montes*:

Connected to the cycles of birth, life and death, all the corresponding elements are embodied in the masked men and their rituals. ... These are mysteries that exclude the presence of women, whose only role is to wash the intestines of the sacrificed animal.¹¹

Although her film draws on the 1973 book *Máscaras Portuguesas* by the anthropologist Benjamim Pereira, *Masks* goes beyond the boundaries of strict ethnographic observation, without, at the same time, becoming purely imaginary either. The fact that Delgado herself draws attention to the role of women in the rituals indicates her refusal to record only the realm of the imaginary.

There are also everyday situations that the audience needs to see. *Trás-os-Montes* is based on an imaginary idea, an 'essence' that precedes the moment when the film is shot – and this 'essence' is then embodied in specific actions and cultural events. *Masks* effectively does the opposite of this, homing in on certain gestures and rituals, in order to reveal their 'essence'. The raw truth of these gestures emerges, for instance, in the killing of a goat, which is not glossed over, but brutally exposed. Delgado does not withhold, deny or conceal reality. She alternates, throughout the whole film, between the raw recording of events, explanations in voiceover and a soundtrack that lends every gesture an aura of its distant, ancestral past. What she records, as a result, is a particular mode of existence in the world.

There are two further titles in addition to *Masks* that demonstrate the director's commitment to representing popular culture. The films *Sombra, luz, ritmo* (1976) and *Ensaio no moinho* (1978) are more a series of recordings than actual finished films, as they have no opening or closing credits. In the first of these, there is a series of soundless shots, during which the camera, positioned indoors, shows an area with shadows and another area that is lit, apparently by natural light. A group of masked boys emerges from the shadows; when they become visible, we see them jumping, dancing and interacting with each other, or pitching hay with a stick. In the film *Ensaio no moinho* the location is a windmill where the rehearsals for the *Festa dos Rapazes* seem to be taking place. These are clearly unfinished films, but they are valuable as recordings, and useful for an analysis of Delgado's work. Although she does not mention *Ensaio no moinho*, Delgado does refer to *Sombra, luz e ritmo* in a 2010 interview, as a finished film in the sense that 'it was an experiment in gathering images. Not a very successful one. I should have known the men could not put those things across without being able to voice them'.¹²

After this foray into ethnographic cinema, Delgado worked exclusively for television. The remaining documentaries in her filmography are essentially short biographical films, which afford something of a contrast with *Masks*. The particular interest of these films, which were directed between 1977 and 1988 for Portuguese public television channel RTP (particularly for RTP's second channel, RTP2, which was launched in 1968 and has always been more culturally oriented), is that they reveal a different approach to documentary filmmaking. Delgado establishes a clear distinction between directing for big screen and small. Her television biographies focus clearly on ways of living in and interacting with the world rather than on the purely existential. The portrait genre, capturing the face and the essence of a person, tends to preclude 'action'¹³ – but it is precisely the actions of the subjects in question that are foregrounded in these biographical films made for television.

In 1977 she directed four films, entitled *Eça de Queirós: Notas breves sobre, Camilo Castelo Branco, Camilo Pessanha: entre dois abismos* and *Almeida Garrett 1799-1854: escrever é lutar*, for the *As Palavras Herdadas* series.¹⁴ These are short films, shot in 16 mm, colour, and dealing with canonical nineteenth-century Portuguese writers. Most of them feature a voiceover that tells us the writer's date of birth at the beginning and date of death at the end. This information demarcates their physical existence as a presence in the world that begins and ends the film. Between the first and the second of these dates, the films follow a

specific trajectory. The first appearance of each writer is either a statue, as in the case of Camilo Pessanha, or a non-photographic image, such as a painting for Almeida Garret, and a caricature for Eça de Queirós. The exception is Camilo Castelo Branco, who appears in a black and white photo about which we are told: 'My biography is simply the statement that I was born and that is all. I have no biography.' Consequently, in the only case where there is a photograph, the comment we hear denies the possibility of a biography. What Delgado's approach seems to emphasize is the legacy that each writer has left behind, through his literary works and his imprint on the world. By playing down the common elements that usually characterize this type of film, such as images of the author's face, Delgado directs our attention towards their actions, in contrast to the 'portraiture' of *Masks*, which is a film about the collective personality of the people of Trás-os-Montes.

Quem foste, Alvarez? (1988), dealing with the life of the Portuguese modernist painter Dominguez Alvarez (1906–42), is a film which uses several voices. The first voice that speaks in the film uses a photograph to introduce us to the house where Alvarez was born. After a brief argument in a café about whether an artist is always appreciated more after his death, a voiceover tells us that Alvarez was 'a preeminent figure of that Expressionist generation which became synonymous with fantasy and anguish in the imaginary of 1930s modernity'. As in her other films, Delgado takes biography as necessarily referring to a person's actions in the world, manifested in this case through works of art which survive their authors. Delgado also contributed three films to the *Artistas* series: *Simone (25 anos a cantar)* (1982), *Rogério Paulo – actor, encenador português* (1982) and *Rui de Carvalho – actor* (1982). These are short 16 mm colour films dealing with figures that would be well known to Portuguese audiences. In all of these, there is a particular emphasis on actions rather than on close-ups of faces, which would tend to make physical features indicative of unique personality traits. As with her biographies of Portuguese writers, the spotlight is on their performances and on what they actually did in their lives.

In addition to these biographical works, Delgado made other films that had a cultural focus. She directed films on *Regiões Vinícolas Portuguesas* (Portuguese Wine Regions) in 1982 and 1983, and between 1985 and 1986 she directed six television programmes, entitled *Arte Nova e Deco no Norte de Portugal* for RTP. In 1986 and 1987 she also shot a television series entitled *O trabalho do ouro e da prata no Norte*. Between 1979 and 1983 Delgado directed several films for television, most of them short films based on works of literature. This brings us to

an issue of fundamental importance for Portuguese cinema, that of adaptation. The first film in this collaboration with RTP, entitled *O ladrão do pão* (1979), is an adaptation of a poem of the same name by Alexandre O'Neill. Delgado also directed several adaptations for the television series *Contos Fantásticos*, including *O Visconde* (1980), adapted from *Os Canibais* by Álvaro Carvalho, which would later inspire Manoel de Oliveira's 1988 film of the same title. Other adaptations directed by Delgado and named after literary works include *A princesinha das rosas* (1981), based on a short story by Fialho de Almeida; *Tiaga – Reincarnação deliciosa* (1981), from a short story by Aquilino Ribeiro; *O defunto* (1981), from an Eça de Queirós's short story; *O canto da sereia* (1983), from a short story by Júlio Dinis; *A noite de Walpurgis* (1983), from a short story by Hugo Rocha; and *A estranha morte do Professor Antena* (1983), with a screenplay inspired by a Mário de Sá Carneiro short story. According to Delgado, who is heard in voiceover at the beginning of each film, these motion pictures are described as 'derived from', 'inspired by' or 'freely adapted'. The director thus makes a point of highlighting her own creative intervention.

To sum up thus far, Delgado's professional activity may be framed within two main Portuguese cinema contexts. The first centres on her participation in Portuguese *Cinema Novo* or New Cinema where she performed minor roles such as editing assistant. She then directed *Masks*, which was funded by IPC-Instituto Português do Cinema (Portuguese Cinema Institute) and produced by CPC-Centro Português de Cinema (Portuguese Cinema Centre), a director's cooperative, which was, along with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, responsible for most of the *Cinema Novo* film output. While other *Cinema Novo* directors completed their training abroad, this proved more difficult for Delgado. In 1965 she applied for a scholarship from the Secretariado Nacional de Informação (SNI – Information State Department) and was accepted at the London School of Film Technique, but the SNI subsequently suspended the public competition in which she had been the only candidate.¹⁵ In 1971 she finally obtained a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation scholarship to do an internship with Jean Rouch in Paris. However, Delgado's association with the CPC was not a happy one, and she was expelled for being interviewed by Alfredo Tropa on RTP. On this subject, the director herself claims that

they were very angry because they didn't like Alfredo Tropa, but I never understood why they didn't get annoyed with [José] Fonseca e Costa, who was also interviewed by him. It seemed to me more like a male versus female thing and they ganged up. I went to work in Rome in 1976.¹⁶

At the end of the 1970s and throughout the whole of the 1980s, as noted above, Delgado embarked on the second phase of her professional career, working in television production. The public service model of television needed a cultural programme in its scheduling, and literary adaptations were a particularly important part of that, conforming to established definitions of what was deemed appropriate national cultural production. In this context, Delgado became clearly established as a director for television. Other directors of Portuguese New Cinema (such as Paulo Rocha or Fernando Lopes, whose television work is only a part of their careers) also obtained a level of funding for film production that Delgado simply did not get. As she stated, 'Films like *Alvarez* do not go to film festivals. ... Making television is great, making *Alvarez* was really good, but it is time to explore other opportunities. ... And that is what I want to do now, make fiction films.'¹⁷ When she mentions wanting to make fiction features, it is clear that she wanted to make films to be released in film theatres and to stop being a director for television, a medium that was manifestly less artistically valued. The section that follows will focus on the feature films that Delgado wanted to make but could not.

Film projects: A particular conception of cinema

The reason I am choosing to highlight Delgado's film projects is that she herself was very clear about her desire to make feature-length films. Also, the dates when she submitted her proposals either preceded or coincided with her work as a television director. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that while her television work was her day-to-day occupation, Delgado was still persistently seeking funding to make films for the big screen. Her funding applications, however, were constantly turned down. Was it the topics she proposed to cover? Was it because her proposals were not good enough? Was it because she was a woman working in a field where more directors were men? It is difficult to formulate any concrete answers to this without reference to the official Instituto de Cinema e Audiovisual (ICA – Cinema and Audiovisual Institute) files for the competitions that she applied to. Unfortunately, that research was not logistically possible. However, a deeper understanding of the film proposals themselves might shed some light on the topic. Delgado's film projects never actually started shooting, but it seems likely that she had their scripts finished or in the final planning stages. At least five known films fall into this category.

The film *Ciclo de Verão* was a follow-up to *Masks*. In *Masks* Delgado had recorded the Winter Cycle festivities, so she intended to continue this by recording the Summer Cycle festivities. The proposal did not go ahead, however. As Luísa Alvã has stated,

Delgado already had a formal letter that confirmed the grant had been awarded to her, but the Portuguese Cinema Centre decided to allocate the funding to José Álvaro Morais who was working on a film about the painter Vieira da Silva, *Ma femme chamada bicho* (1978).¹⁸

A Escolha from 1973, which preceded *Ciclo de Verão*, was a fiction film with a screenplay written by Delgado. The synopsis of the script is as follows:

The story is about a woman's experiences. We meet Judith as a young woman, married to a much older man, an intellectual, who gives her a view of the world that fits with his own age and experience. They live a simple life built around set choices and restrictions, trying not to get trapped in the kind of facile, conventional existence that destroys people's sanity. Their lives are organized around life as a couple. The birth of their son introduces an element of absurdity into this. The son acts as a third player who intervenes in their existence as a couple and changes their entire lives. The son is born, and the husband dies, so Judith has to learn about life again and how to reintegrate herself into society. The son grows up. A new generation emerges, demanding a new way of life and new values. Judith does not want to lose her son and at the same time she is trying to regain, through him, the 'lost paradise' of her own youth. Yet, times have changed and the word 'purity' has a new meaning based on different assumptions. Judith ends up alone, trapped between a world to which she does not want to adapt, and a world that does not fundamentally accept her.¹⁹

This film, which was clearly focused on a female world, was followed by another film that also featured a woman protagonist, *As noivas ou a lenda das mulheres de luto*. *As noivas* is a film with a

political plot. ... The brides referred to here were women in mourning who had either lost their intended husbands in the Colonial War or were waiting for the return of men who had deserted the army. The PIDE (State Secret Police) were pursuing the young men who had escaped, to try and draft them back into the army.²⁰

The film is dated 1977, so it comes after the Colonial War, which ended in 1974. It is another fiction film based on everyday reality. *As noivas* was submitted more than once for IPC funding. An article published in 1983 in *Diário de Notícias*

informs us that Delgado 'is waiting for funding from the IPC for *As noivas* (which had been shortlisted back in 1977) and also for a feature film project called *Quinta Avenida*, about prostitution in Porto'.²¹

According to Delgado, *Quinta Avenida* 'is based on a true story',²² and an application for funding was submitted to IPC's production plan in 1984.²³ The same film was also listed for the following year.²⁴ This suggests that this proposal, like *As noivas*, was put in at least twice, so it is clear that Delgado had high hopes for it. In an interview in 1984, she explains:

The title is meant to be ironic. The film talks about a series of people in the context of prostitution. The lives and fates of these people are what interests me here, the kinds of choices they make, voluntarily or otherwise. Prostitution is not just a person who sells their body, is it? I didn't have to invent much for this one. You see it in the papers and in real life.²⁵

Quinta Avenida was set to be filmed in Porto, and was at an advanced stage of planning, as Delgado explains in the same interview:

I tend to have a very clear planning schedule when I am filming. But then when I actually start filming, I tend to change things a lot. It always happens to me. A shade of light, the décor, an unexpected sound or an actor's unconscious gesture, that sort of thing might give me new ideas and act as a creative stimulus. I like natural décors, but I choose the locations so I can use direct sound. And then ... you know? ... a film (she pauses) has to come from somewhere deep inside you, from the womb.²⁶

A escolha and *As noivas* were both film proposals with a female protagonist, but Delgado herself singled out *Quinta Avenida* as a symbolic, identity-defining film, a film that came precisely 'from the womb'. It was a fiction film with a screenplay written by the director herself, and it is noteworthy for its strong commitment to portraying a specific reality, prostitution, which was still a taboo subject in the early 1980s.

Many years later, in 2010, on the subject of films she wanted to make, Delgado mentioned one further film, *O Físico Prodigioso*:

I would very much like to have made *O Físico Prodigioso*, based on a novella by Jorge de Sena. So if anyone had doubts about the quality of the plot, I could say it was not even me that wrote it. I've kept the screenplay; the story is beautiful. I only added one thing: I gave a further twist to the ending. In Jorge de Sena's work, the main characters (a man and a woman who are in love) are hunted

down and killed. In my version, a red rose and a white rose would bloom in the place where they are buried and their spirits would live on. In my story, love would prevail. Love is immortal!²⁷

What Delgado adds to the story is her own philosophy of life as well as her personal vision of cinema as something that transcends more mundane, quotidian or fatalistic views of the world. Delgado's statement clearly reveals that she was developing both a poetics of her own and a strong, concrete understanding of cinematography.

The poetics and thought of film directors are revealed not only in their films but also in texts and other documents for oral or print circulation, as well as in their statements and interviews.²⁸ In the case of Delgado, it is crucial to explore what she actually says about her film projects because these statements show a very high level of reflective awareness about her own cinema. *A escolha*, *As noivas* and *Quinta Avenida* are clearly centred on the female gender. I would also point out that Delgado was both the director and screenwriter for these films. Female characters are made powerfully present, as are their life experiences or as Delgado herself would put it, their choices, the decisions they want to make and the decisions that are forced upon them.

The only one of these five film projects that did not have a screenplay written by Delgado was *O Físico Prodigioso*, adapted from the work by Jorge de Sena. In 1984, in the foreword to the fifth edition of *Antigas e novas andanças do demónio*, Jorge de Sena himself claimed that

sometimes a historical pseudo-reconstruction can capture our surroundings, or make us experience their historicity, much better and more objectively than some highly rated but aesthetically half-baked version of traditional realism that can be, indeed almost always is ... a dubious way of representing reality which is, by its very nature, always a work in progress.²⁹

This statement would certainly have appealed to Delgado, who seemed to regard cinema as having an unalienable relationship with reality of a kind that did not fit with more conventional forms of realism. 'To put it simply, I would say that, for me, cinema is another way of expressing love. You give it and you receive it. It's a way of enjoying a dream, or of exorcizing "demons"'.³⁰ This statement by Delgado gives us a better understanding of what she was trying to do when she changed the ending of Sena's novella. In her film version, love would have triumphed. Delgado is trying to tell the story of a love that survives death. 'Dreaming' and 'exorcizing demons' are the terms she uses to describe a cinema

that may originate in 'life' situations but does not engage with them merely representationally, opting instead to transcend them by creating a narrative structure from which the imaginary emerges as something purified or aspired to.

If interviews afford a clearer understanding of Delgado's specific ontology of cinema, they also offer a further point of particular interest. Delgado sometimes used interviews with other Portuguese film directors to express her own concerns, and although we have two surviving interviews with two different directors, the questions she puts are actually very similar. The first interview is with António de Macedo, who had just finished a landmark film of Portuguese New Cinema, *Domingo à tarde* (1966).³¹ Delgado asks António de Macedo if, at the beginning of his career, he 'had total freedom as a creator or were you tied by commercial demands?', referring to the short film *Verão Coincidente* (1962), adapted from a poem by Maria Teresa Horta, and *Nicotiniana* (1963), a film for the tobacco industry.

Pressing this question of possible creative constraints, Delgado clearly asks if there were any 'obstacles' to making *Domingo à tarde*. António de Macedo answers that the main obstacles were the process of adapting to the 'technicalities of the mise-en-scène, only having a 'small team' and getting the 'necessary documentation for filming'. Delgado goes on to ask if the fact that the film is based on a Fernando Namora novel, that is, a work already published, means it will be 'more easily accepted by the audience' and also 'about the characters, did you take them as the writer wrote them, or did you change them to how you wanted them to be?' She specifically emphasizes the issue of creative freedom, asking if Fernando Namora had raised any objections, before going on to ask António de Macedo 'if you could direct a film with a screenplay that you had developed yourself, which topic and characters would you choose and why?' António de Macedo's reply is science fiction, a genre he did indeed subsequently return to.

Through these questions, Delgado reveals an understanding of cinema as an autonomous work (distanced from literature in this case), and she insists on the creative freedom of the director. The António de Macedo interview also reveals her concerns about the processes of cinematic creation, production, circulation and reception. During the interview, Delgado clearly expresses her own personal opinions on the creative process and the division of labour:

I believe that there is a tendency among young filmmakers to take on the work that is really the editor's. On one level, I do understand the need to recreate

things at the cutting table; but I do wonder if it isn't rather limiting for the film itself in the sense that, when this happens, you don't get the necessary distance between the creator and the work.³²

To some extent, this non-separation of tasks has been a *modus operandi* for Portuguese cinema in general, and Delgado herself adopted it in the films she directed. However, she challenges this during the interview with António de Macedo. This might have been because up till that point, in the mid-1960s, she had been working as an editor for other film directors, and doing that job was her opportunity to assert her own artistic identity and professionalism.

On the issue of creation and production conditions, audience reception and even training, Delgado asks the following questions: 'Is there any potential in our country for a commercial cinema that would not require the director to make – thematic or formal – concessions?'; 'Won't commercial cinema alienate directors to some extent?'; 'If the audience is poorly educated, can we develop a cinematic language that actually speaks to our situation, so that the director can get a clearer view of the problems?'; 'Would creating an affordable magazine run exclusively by people in the cinema world not be a good way to educate audiences properly about cinema?'³³ These questions reveal her interest in a cinema where creative freedoms are protected without downplaying or rejecting a close relationship with the audience, who should have the opportunity to access film culture, while Portuguese cinema itself should move towards developing its own identity. On this subject, Delgado clearly believes that ongoing financial support is vital. She asks, 'Is the economic solution to have a smaller working team or to insist that the relevant authorities make annual grants specifically for filmmaking?'³⁴ By using the verb 'to insist', it is clear Delgado herself supports the second option – and António de Macedo agrees.

In the second interview, this time with Faria de Almeida,³⁵ who directed dozens of documentaries, on two of which Delgado worked as a producer (*Faça segundo a arte* [1965] and *Moçambique 65* [1965]), the main theme is his most important film, *Catembe*. Shot in Lisbon and Mozambique, specifically in the colonial capital Lourenço Marques, the film dates from 1965, the same year as the interview. Delgado asks similar (or even identical) questions to those she had previously put to António de Macedo. These questions are followed by other related ones, especially as regards Faria de Almeida's creative freedom. Once again, Delgado is interested in learning about the obstacles the director faced, as she asks: 'Were there any difficulties during the shooting of this film that compromised quality?'³⁶

What is notable here is that even when she is asking a question, Delgado takes a critical stance on *Catembe*:

Why did you direct a film that could best be described as a documentary, as a critical analysis of customs, and not a story that was really rooted in the African context, with black men as the main characters? ... Obviously, – socially – Africa is a mixture of black and white and a Mozambican culture *per se* ... is only just beginning to emerge from that fusion. However, there is such a thing as a black culture that you can access through dance, music, oral literature, and even in habits and rituals that constitute their own kind of philosophy. Don't you think all these elements offer a rich field that could be reproduced in cinema? ... Is the fact that black men are for the most part near illiterate a reason not to make non-documentary films based on their human problems, their daily lives, what they think and feel in their day to day existence – about love, work; how they experience contact with the white man, etc.? I think you are more of a spectator in your film *Catembe* than a man really engaged in the problems of your country, which leads me to conclude that you identify predominantly as European. Do you think you will ever make another substantive film in Mozambique? ... If you want to make a good film in Africa, based on African problems, is it enough just to send a technically well-equipped crew out from here [Portugal] without prior knowledge of the country in question?³⁷

These questions clearly contain an implied criticism, and Delgado hints at what she would have done as a director. She would have made a fiction film based on the lives of Mozambican people, using a storyline that she had developed herself, but drawing on her in-depth knowledge of the country's inhabitants and their identities, life experiences and stories. Delgado goes on to show an interest in Faria de Almeida's opinion about films adapted from literary works as opposed to screenplays written by the filmmaker, when she asks: 'Isn't the adaptation of a good book just a way to get round the lack of a good screenplay?'³⁸ What is evident here is Delgado's opinion that film directors ought to develop their own screenplays because, as her question implies, adaptations get made to cover the absence of screen-writing talent. As her earlier questions about *Catembe* indicate, Delgado sees a good screenplay as being inspired by the people and the situations being filmed. In fact, her views on whether to make adaptations or to use the director's own screenplay effectively disclose her own positioning in defence of auteur cinema, as inspired by the French New Wave, in which the film director is also the author of the screenplay.

In an interview for *Diário de Notícias* in 1983, Delgado claims, 'I never do things by halves,'³⁹ meaning that she invests the same level of commitment in television work and filmmaking for cinema, as she asserts her professional identity and her technical and creative competence. In the same interview, she shows that she is conscious of the value of her own work:

I have made use of all the skills at my disposal. ... If someone said: 'you are not good enough', then yes, sure, I would just go away. But no one has told me that, and I'm sufficiently self-aware to know. ... I've done all the jobs there are in cinema. On my own films, I am the assistant director, the director, the producer, the costume designer and the sound engineer. I do whatever needs to be done.⁴⁰

Delgado's frank expression of her feelings here is particularly interesting when she talks about filming *Masks*, and particularly about the issue of being recognized as the director: 'I don't know how they [the people of Trás-os-Montes] even realized that I was the director when I was surrounded by all those men!'⁴¹

Defining herself as a professional who knows her craft, every interview Delgado did shows that she was working in an environment that was hostile to her presence as a female film director and indeed, most of the time, she was the only woman. On the subject of the CPC, she states:

We had a meeting on one occasion and I said: 'you think I am just an editor, but I'm not. You can edit and still do other stuff, even mop the floor if you have to!' But at the end of the meeting, they all decided they were film directors and I was just an editor. I was the only woman in the room.⁴²

This meeting might have taken place in the early 1970s, a time when Delgado was, in fact, working as an editor. In the context she was working in, it was exceedingly difficult for her to escape that role and work as a director. One obvious consequence of this is that if we do want to work on her as a director with her own filmography, it is her film projects that offer the best window onto her thoughts about cinema. Her idea of cinema as an art form that transcends reality is self-evident there. It is revealing if not really surprising that she says exactly the same about directing films for television:

I have always felt really fascinated by stories like these [fantastic tales], even though I can't quite explain why. Or maybe it is because the imaginary somehow creeps into the real and this imaginary is there in all of us, lying dormant in our subconscious and our fears which suddenly wake up and take shapes that are strange and monstrous.⁴³

Delgado's interest in the fantastic also explains her filming of the *caretos*⁴⁴ in Trás-os-Montes, and the rituals displayed there through language and gesture.

Rather than being simply a director for television (or even in spite of it) Delgado clearly belongs to the history of Portuguese New Cinema, albeit unfortunately on account of those films that she did not make but which do obviously share the principal characteristics of New Cinema. As Leonor Areal puts it,

The key members of that school are the directors who stayed most faithful to a particular idea of art cinema, or 'the cinema of poetry' (to quote Pasolini) and, according to João Bénard da Costa, they share one essential idea: the issue of image as the manifestation of another, metaphysical, dimension; the image as a *mode of interrogation, a manifestation of myth, an imaginary that eludes representation*.⁴⁵

Delgado was a director whose actual completed filmography consisted almost entirely of films made for television. However, her actions as a film director show that she did want to film her own screenplays for the cinema. What Delgado left us, as a result, is a body of work that forces film studies to go beyond the study of actual, completed films. This is perhaps the greatest contribution that this chapter endeavours to make, and it is all the more important when we are working on cinema directed by women. What we are left with in the end are films that were made and others that were only thought of, films that are still waiting for the conditions that will enable them to emerge.

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Notes

- 1 The translation of this chapter into English was completed by Ana Rita Martins and Hilary Owen.

- 2 A definition of *teoria dos cineastas* can be found in Manuela Penafria, Eduardo Tulio Baggio, André Rui Graça and Denize Correa Araújo (eds), *Ver, Ouvir e Ler os Cineastas – Teoria dos cineastas*, vol. 1 (Covilhã: UBI, Labcom.IFP, 2016).
- 3 See António Cunha (ed.), *Cineastas portuguesas 1874–1956* (Lisbon: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2000), 55. Torralta – Clube Internacional de Férias, S.A. was a tourist resort in Tróia, Setúbal, which was built in 1972. I was unable to find any information on the film *Maíra e o Barroco Europeu*, its whereabouts or the reasons that led to its production.
- 4 Luísa Alvão, 'Noémia Delgado', Special issue of *Revista Enquadramento*, Cineclube de Guimarães, no. 15 (2018), 10.
- 5 José Gomes Bandeira, 'Quem foste Alvarez?', in *Catálogo Festfigueira* (1990), 314.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Luiz Carlos Oliveira Junior, 'Retratos em movimento', *Revista Ars* 15, no. 31 (2017), 185.
- 8 Catarina Alves Costa, 'Camponeses do cinema', (PhD thesis, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, 2012).
- 9 Ibid., 135.
- 10 Ibid., 27.
- 11 Anon, *Panorama do Cinema Português* (Lisbon: Cinemateca Portuguesa, 1980); emphasis in original.
- 12 In Ana Miranda (ed.), *Catálogo Olhadelas* (Porto: Confederação, 2010), 51.
- 13 Cf. Oliveira Junior, 'Retratos em movimento'.
- 14 In 1977 the short film *Costa de Prata* (*Silver Coast*) is listed in Noémia Delgado's filmography, but I could not find any detailed information about it.
- 15 Alvão, 'Noémia Delgado', 11.
- 16 Cunha, *Cineastas Portuguesas 1874–1956*, 53.
- 17 Bandeira, 'Quem foste Alvarez?', 314.
- 18 Alvão, 'Noémia Delgado', 7.
- 19 The film's screenplay is available at the library of the Portuguese Cinematèque.
- 20 In Miranda, *Catálogo Olhadelas*, 55.
- 21 Alice Vieira, 'Noémia Delgado realizadora: não faço as coisas com os pés ...', in *Diário de Lisboa* (3 September 1983), 18.
- 22 Bandeira, 'Quem foste Alvarez?', 314.
- 23 In 'Cinema português – cinco filmes para subsidiar', *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias* (17 to 23 April 1984), 13.
- 24 In 'Cinema português, júris e projetos para 85', *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias* (15 to 21 January 1985), 12.
- 25 Alves Costa, 'Para Noémia Delgado (sem subsídios) "o cinema é uma forma de sonhar"', *Jornal de Notícias* 96, no. 282 (20 March 1984), 24.

- 26 Ibid., 24.
- 27 In Miranda, *Catálogo Olhadelas*, 48.
- 28 As regards interviews and other written sources, I will only refer to the interviews actually conducted with Delgado. In the *Olhadelas* catalogue there is a reference to chronicles written by Noémia Delgado, in *Diário de Lisboa*, but I was unable to locate them. This newspaper is available online at: http://casacomum.org/cc/diario_de_lisboa/ but it has no search facility (accessed 3 July 2019).
- 29 Jorge de Sena, *Antigas e novas andanças do demónio* (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1984).
- 30 Costa, 'Para Noémia Delgado (sem subsídios) "o cinema é uma forma de sonhar"', 24.
- 31 Noémia Delgado, 'Gente de cinema em panorâmica: o realizador António de Macedo', *Jornal de Letras e Artes* (1965), 4.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Noémia Delgado, 'Gente de cinema em panorâmica: M. G. Faria de Almeida – realizador e produtor de cinema', *Jornal de Letras e Artes* (1965), 7.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Vieira, 'Noémia Delgado realizadora: não faço as coisas com os pés', 18.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 In Miranda, *Catálogo Olhadelas*, 51; emphasis mine.
- 42 Ibid., 54.
- 43 Alves Costa, 'Dois dedos de conversa com Noémia Delgado', *Cinema Novo* (1981), 17.
- 44 Translator's note: The *caretos* tradition is believed to have originated in a Celtic religious ritual, and it is still practised in some parts of Portugal, namely in the north of the country. During these rituals, young men put on masks made of brass, leather or wood, and wear suits usually made of colourful woollen quilts with rattles in their belts.
- 45 Leonor Areal, 'Estética da escola portuguesa de cinema: contributos para uma definição', in *Cinema em Português: IV Jornadas*, ed. Frederico Lopes (Covilhã: UBI, Livros Labcom, 2012), 101; emphasis in original.