

# PLURIVERSAL BRAZIL: A CONVERSATION WITH PATRÍCIA FERREIRA PARÁ YXAPY, ANDRÉ NOVAIS OLIVEIRA, FILIPE MATZEMBACHER, MARCIO REOLON, AND JULIA KATHARINE

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The following conversation about Brazilian filmmaking took place over email exchanges and recorded phone conversations in the weeks between late June and early September of 2020. In lieu of a real conversation, in person or online, all of the interviewees were sent the same set of questions, upon which they were invited to reflect.

Reviewing the last decade of Brazilian cinema, a striking sense of heterogeneity comes across. It is a “pluriversal cinema” that mirrors the multiple worlds and lives that make up Brazil.<sup>1</sup> This represents a shift in the sphere of filmic representation, and is the consequence of political and cultural changes begun during the early years of the Workers Party government. Through programs like *Cultura Viva* and *Pontos de Cultura*, and systems of quotas for the different Brazilian states, the Rio–São Paulo axis of cultural production and activity lost its prominence. A variegated country seemed to emerge on-screen, with many different regional accents and expressions on the soundtrack and distinct habits and customs captured visually as new participants entered the film scene with stories drawn from their local realities and experiences. Indeed, the twenty-first century carries the hopes of a much-needed pluralism, informing the self-representation of the Brazilian population and its culture, diminishing the gap between the country’s richness/diversity and the unifying structure of a nation’s imagined community.

Current film production complicates any attempt to forge an image of contemporary Brazilian cinema by those outside the country. In particular, during this last decade,

the concept of “the nation” as a grand abstraction has been replaced by its opposite: the small, concrete microuniverses inhabited by a plurality of bodies, in a proliferation and expansion of that which constitutes a cinematic Brazil, a Brazil into which, ideally, many Brazils fit—to borrow the Zapatista motto *Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* (“a world where many worlds fit”). The myths, allegories, and symbols that once constructed the international fame of Cinema Novo are mostly absent as unifying forces. Instead, Brazil has expanded, its stories’ scope has contracted, and the camera has narrowed its field of vision to show the microstories of the quotidian, thriving with a vivid sense of place and with characters deeply rooted in their “local Brazil.”

To better understand the dynamics of this new Brazilian film production, Patrícia Ferreira Pará Yxapy, André Novais Oliveira, Julia Katharine, and the team of Filipe Matzembacher and Marcio Reolon were invited to speak about their beginnings with film, the creative universes with which they are in dialogue, and the national or international audiences they have in mind when making their films. They reflect also on their place in the current film scene in Brazil, as characterized by nearly two decades of broad recognition of the country’s diverse population. Representative of the new “pluriversal” configuration, they offer vigorous insight into different microuniverses, in geographical terms but also in terms of social and cultural identities. Their acknowledgment of their roots and position in Brazilian society seems to induce a very personal approach to filmmaking, resulting in their integrating their own images and sounds, be it through dialogue, narration, acting, and/or self-fiction.

Working as independent filmmakers, the interviewees depend on public grants through cultural financing



Patricia Ferreira Pará Yxapy in *Letter from a Guarani Woman in Search of the Land Without Evil* (2020).

programs or work in small-scale productions, reliant on their own means and in collaboration with a close-knit filmmaking community. However, they all feel threatened today as the recent change in government casts a shadow over the country's cultural production and diversity of self-expression. Addressing this new concern, these filmmakers provide a sense of the ways in which the current political situation in Brazil has curtailed—or not—their projects over the past two years, and the ways in which it may continue to do so in the years to come.

Patricia Ferreira Pará Yxapy was born in a town in the northern Argentinian state of Misiones, near the border with Paraguay, moved permanently to Brazil at the age of thirteen, and since the year 2000 has lived in Koenju, a Guaraní village close to São Miguel das Missões, in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Like many Indigenous filmmakers in Brazil, she began making films through a workshop she attended with Vincent Carelli's *Vídeo nas Aldeias* (Video in the Villages) project, begun in the 1980s.

Collaboration has been part of her aesthetic practice for the past fifteen years, through her work with the *Coletivo Mbyá-Guarani de Cinema* (Mbyá-Guarani Cinema Collective), which she cofounded in 2007, in her current collaboration with her mother, and in the film-essay correspondence she has maintained over recent years with other female Indigenous filmmakers. Ferreira Pará Yxapy's aesthetic is based on an observational camera, and the sharing of intimate and spiritual narratives that are both personal and collective. Her numerous shorts reflect on Indigenous lives as a heterogeneous and vital force in movement, as a way of undoing the static image of a dead and homogenous "Indigenous" that has historically been represented in Brazilian culture, media, and politics. Her work offers an Indigenous gaze, as



André Novais Oliveira on the set of *Long Way Home*, with his hometown of Contagem in the background.

opposed to an image of the Indigenous, and privileges the sonic frequencies of careful listening so that these stories deeply touch the viewer.

André Novais Oliveira comes from Contagem, on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais). He is part of the film collective *Filmes de Plástico* and shares with his colleagues a strong affective bond with his hometown that comes to serve as a creative drive and to provide raw material for their cinematic universes. Novais Oliveira's films affirm an urban experience through a framing that becomes very personal as he commits to self-fiction (in the short *Pouco mais de um mês* [About a Month], 2013) and to filming his own family in fictional stories in a semidocumentary style (*Ela volta na quinta* [She Comes Back on Thursday], 2014) or in an unexpected fantasy turn (in the short *Quintal* [Backyard], 2015), making Black characters visible in a whole new way.

With a clever sense of pictorial composition, Novais Oliveira developed a minimalist style marked by slow tempos, where the characters become almost tangible presences (*About a Month*; *Temporada* [Long Way Home], 2018). A distinctive realism emerges thereby, with everyday chores and worries filmed in a contemplative way. This aesthetic endeavor flirts sometimes with a reflexive attitude that can even acknowledge the filmic apparatus (*Fantasma* [Ghosts], 2010; *About a Month*). His unique blend of cinematic aspects establishes a humane and compassionate filmic world.

Filipe Matzembacher and Marcio Reolon are actors who also write and direct their films together. They are based in Porto Alegre, the capital of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. Their work shows a marked interest in young queer individuals trying to come to terms with the world around them while affirming who they are. These characters often have to deal with family issues,



Filipe Matzembacher and Marcio Reolon on the set of *Hard Paint* (2018).

where the relationships are either estranged or difficult, even when they are loving, as in the short *Quarto vazio* (*Empty Room*, 2013, directed by Matzembacher), *Beiramar* (*Seashore*, 2015), the miniseries *O ninho* (*The Nest*, 2016), and *Tinta bruta* (*Hard Paint*, 2018). Arguably as a consequence of these complications, their characters tend to develop strong bonds as friends, lovers, or both, but that attachment remains problematic as scenes of departure and leaving (in *Empty Room*, the short *O último dia antes de Zanzibar* [*The Last Day before Zanzibar*, 2016], and *Hard Paint*) form a presumably unavoidable pattern.

The world in which Matzembacher and Reolon's characters evolve doesn't seem to be a safe place: there is a constant sense of the insecurity and risk that accompany any queer existence in Brazilian society. This aspect confers upon their stories an undertone of tragedy, expressed by the camera as a sort of uneasiness. Never really steady, the framing of their films is prone to close in on the characters, mingling the sense of risk with that of sensuality. As the films reveal mundane actions in all their corporeal qualities, a constant suggestion of sexual tension pervades the bodies throughout their interactions. It is a strongly physical and subtly psychological cinema that emerges, one where male homosexual desire and affection appear to be simultaneously natural and precarious in the face of the world.

Julia Katharine is an actress, screenwriter, and director from São Paulo. She is the first transgender woman to gain recognition in the Brazilian cinema milieu as a filmmaker and creator. Katharine is also one of the few people of Japanese ancestry to appear in a Brazilian film, despite Brazil's having one of the largest Japanese communities outside of Japan. Her filmic world presents an important intersection with the work of Gustavo Vinagre, in whose films she began to act. Together, they wrote *Lembro mais*



Julia Katharine faces the camera in *I Remember the Crows* (2018).

*dos corvos* (*I Remember the Crows*, 2018), her partially fictionalized autobiography, which Vinagre directed, and in which Julia Katharine pictures a life intertwined with cinema, as she comes and goes between real facts and purely invented ones, without ever letting her audience know which is which.

This emphasis seems to set the tone of her acting, rooted in an intimate personal relationship with the movies. Be it in Vinagre's short films (*Os cuidados que se tem com o cuidado que os outros devem ter consigo mesmos* [*The Care One Takes of the Care Others Must Take of Themselves*], 2016; *Filme-catástrofe* [*Disaster Film*], 2017) or in her own (*Tea for Two*, 2019), Katherine has a dreamy, discrete, but also charismatic presence, as if the actress herself inhabited the fictional world she has invented. In this flirtation with autofiction, she has slowly built a screen persona entirely her own. Her aptitude for staging and performing encounters has a counterpart in her interest in moments of waiting and suspended actions, as if existing in a filmic scene is enough, as long as this scene is filled with tender small gestures and generous feelings.

### Patricia Ferreira Pará Yxapy

I started working with audiovisual media in 2008, when I was twenty-one. The National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage [IPHAN, Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional] proposed a book project covering five Indigenous villages, including ours, about the Guarani's perspective on the [Jesuit] ruins [in São Miguel das Missões]. We suggested taking an inventory with audiovisual media instead of as a book. That is how the folks from Vídeo nas Aldeias [Video in the Villages] came to join the project and offer their first workshop here. I started with a second workshop, because the first one was in a village in Porto Alegre, a bit too far from here.

Some guys from our village attended that workshop, and during its second phase, the editing, I began to get close to them. They were working on *Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [(Two Villages, a Walk), Ariel Ortega, Jorge Morinico, and Germano Beñites, 2008], and I remember being close to them, helping them with translation. It was in this editing process that I started to realize the importance of this tool, of these images, of working with images, and I thought to myself, “Wow, that is so cool. We can tell our own story.” With that thought in mind, I partnered with the guys and we formed our collective, Coletivo Mbyá-Guarani de Cinema.<sup>2</sup> I joined them because I know the importance of these tools that are not ours. They can destroy, but, if we know how to use them, they can also be used to our benefit.

In the beginning, we used a camera, but it got too expensive to maintain, and we didn’t have the money. So now we usually use cell phones. Our project involves learning the basics to make a documentary, to make films, and sharing this knowledge in order to develop other Guarani filmmakers in different villages, since there are Guarani-Mbyá living in Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia—so, learning and sharing knowledge with other young filmmakers, within and beyond Brazil.

Since we live in a touristic location, often reporters would come to our village to interview us or scholars would come and make their own images and audio recordings. And I wondered, “Why don’t we do this ourselves?” When we are fighting for land demarcation, we are seldom heard. The elders have a lot to say, but since they speak only when among us, it stays between us; nobody else listens to their pleas. So, the goal is to take these pleas, this distress, to the general public. Nowadays, Indigenous youth have a lot of access to social media and to media in general. We can impart this knowledge from the elders so that a wider public can hear the elders speak. So [this audiovisual project has] a twofold goal: to share these worries with non-Indigenous people, and to share this knowledge across Indigenous communities, so they can see the real situation in their villages. To say nothing of its preservation function!

I started out thinking primarily about the border question: we don’t have borders in our culture, but at the same time we really highlight border issues—of land ownership and property—that need to be demarcated. So, in the beginning the films were mostly [a means] to talk a bit about the problems we face with land demarcation.

We think about Brazilian audiences in general, as they certainly need access to these images, because we suffer a lot of discrimination. Unfortunately, though, the films



The shaman Dionisio Duarte Vera Guaçu in *Tava, A casa de pedra* (*Tava, The House of Stone*, 2012), directed by Patricia Ferreira, Ernesto de Carvalho, Vincent Carelli, and Ariel Duarte Ortega for *Vídeo nas Aldeias* (Video in the Villages).

we make have much wider circulation abroad than they do inside Brazil. So even if we don’t think, “I really want to reach an international audience,” that’s how it goes.

One way or another, this work with film has facilitated things for us a bit, even if it required a good amount of work on our part at the beginning—for instance, to convince other Guarani of the importance of appearing in front of the camera. Even I sometimes don’t like to be in front of the camera, so I can imagine how people, especially the elders, felt there. But we started to talk to them, to underscore the importance of these images and of their speech. We had to take the camera and speak to it in a certain way in order to show them that the camera is like another Guarani eye. So, we had this long back-and-forth with our subjects so they could think of it in this way. With time, many of them understood what we meant, thanks also to our customs and our strong oral traditions. In daily life, we speak in Guarani with the children; women, especially, speak to their children in Guarani. I think this establishes a really good dialogue for the images we want to make, which then generate long conversations with the subjects we select. I usually focus more on their speech, on the beauty of the subjects, before I make new images for layering over [the interviews].

I like challenges. I started working [with audiovisual media] because, at the time, I noticed that the workshops were usually led by boys. That puzzled me, since in our culture, when you are in a village, you don’t notice the distinction between men and women. When we leave the village for the city, then the question arises: “Why aren’t women more present?” So that was my personal

challenge, as a woman, as a filmmaker, as a member of that group and working with them. I wanted to face that and understand it.

In politics, too, when someone shows up to fight for land demarcation, or in the media, it's the men who show up to speak with the non-Indigenous, even though women are always behind them. Everybody—not just the women, but also the elders and the children—supports them with prayers and ceremonies when one of the leaders goes to meetings with the non-Indigenous—or to demonstrations. The women who stay behind in the villages are the ones who support all of this, because their prayers are not detached from land demarcation. If we cannot achieve land demarcation, we will have no continuity for our culture, our prayers, our singing.

For a few years now, I've been thinking that I will address women's issues, the position of women in the village more. I have been thinking about women's participation, or rather, their *non*-participation—the reasons for that, the reasons why women are not featured in these films as much [as men]. In all of the films we make with the collective, the majority of subjects is male. We choose them without realizing this imbalance. Maybe it's because women are more reserved and we have to have a conversation, to ask [for our participation]. Men tend to be more spontaneous. . . . It's easier. Working with women then requires more dedication, more dialogue, a bit more inspiration [on our part].

I began to think more about women in the village: their role, their spirituality, their strength. To be a filmmaker, one needs dedication and time, no? Women don't have spare time; they don't have a lot of patience, especially the younger ones. One must be really patient to work with these limitations, especially when making a documentary in the village. You need to really like going from one village to the next looking for subjects, speaking with different individuals. And, many times, you need to understand their time, especially the characters' time, and their inspiration. You need a bit of dedication. My idea was to offer a workshop for women to make films, but we lack resources. There are [Guarani] girls in Argentina, for example, who are really interested; they like [making images] and know the importance of doing so.

I started working with my mother a bit; I wanted to make a film about her story and show the lives of women through my mother. We received a government grant to make these images, and she loved it. She even worked as a director in some ways: "Frame this from here, and I will do this, OK?" Sometimes when she is doing something

important, she calls me over. It was really cool to make these images. However, due to a lack of resources, we now have the images but no equipment for editing the film, which is titled *Pará Ytê*, after my mother's name.

With the current government, things have gotten worse for audiovisual production, and not only for Indigenous makers. In terms of resources, the impact is not that enormous for us, because these grants are never designed for the Indigenous population. In order for us to apply for these grants we need to partner with non-Indigenous makers. Video in the Villages used to help us with all of this bureaucracy so we could carry on with our workshops.

But today—and I'm speaking in particular about the latest change in government—of course it's much worse. The previous government did not openly speak about hating Indigenous peoples. And today we have a completely different president, who openly speaks out against Indigenous people, who hates the forests, who wants to destroy the entire forest. Then we realize how racist Brazil is and how racist people are, because they ultimately elected him. Now they have someone [in power] to encourage them to openly speak in the same manner.

I think our work has changed this point of view in some ways. I say this because we live in a touristic place. Due to the Jesuit reductions, there are a lot of ruins made by the Guarani alongside Jesuit ones.<sup>3</sup> And yet before we worked with audiovisual media, people in our nearby small town were very racist. We couldn't, for instance, frequent their restaurants. Nobody would help us when we entered the stores.

Now, since we started working with film and bringing these films to schools, I think they have changed the way they see us Guarani. We believe the population is somehow prejudiced against us because they lack any knowledge about us. Once we bring them this knowledge, they can change their opinion—especially the children. Bringing films to schools and speaking with teachers has already begun to change this point of view, because children learn from their parents. Maybe the world will be better if they learn a different way.

[Patricia Ferreira Pará Yxapy founded the Mbyá-Guarani Cinema Collective in 2008 in her village of Koenjo, in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. In 2011 she made her first film with the collective, the documentary *Bicicletas de Nhanderú* (*Bicycles of Nhanderú*). Their films delve into the spiritual and material life of the Guarani people. Her most recent work, *Jeguatá: Caderno de viagem* (*Letter from*

a *Guarani Woman in Search of the Land without Evil*), was included in the Berlinale Forum of 2020.]

## André Novais Oliveira

I discovered cinema through my older brother. He used to rent lots of films from stores in nearby neighborhoods; he was a great influence on me. The film festivals in Belo Horizonte that came shortly after that time also played a crucial role in my interest in filmmaking. More specifically, I used to attend the Festival de Curtas de Belo Horizonte [Belo Horizonte Short Film Festival] and the Indie Festival. Both festivals still exist, and I began attending them around 2001 or 2002. They were both very popular, with large audiences, and really impacted the city's cultural scene.

Each festival had a direct influence on my cinematographic practice, but it was in the Short Film Festival that I had more contact with other filmmakers from Brazil and abroad who were invited to discuss their films. I remember attending debates on films by Carlos Reichenbach, a director who has influenced me a lot. It was also through pamphlets distributed in that festival that I learned about the Escola Livre de Cinema [Free School of Cinema] and its classes. That's where I made my first short films. I was also influenced by Adirley Queirós's short *Dias de greve* (2009), which I saw in the Short Film Festival. In one edition of the Indie Festival, I attended a Charles Burnett retrospective, which revealed day-to-day life in Watts. All those films were very important not only for my cinematic eye, but for all of us at Filmes de Plástico. [Editor's note: See the article on Filmes de Plástico by Ivone Margulies in this dossier.] I'd be remiss not to mention Spike Lee's films, which heavily influenced my approach to the periphery and allowed me to identify the contours of black cinema for the first time.

At Filmes de Plástico, we are part of an increasing number of filmmakers exploring their own peripheral communities—or *quebradas*, to quote Adirley Queirós—and believe this renders a more intimate and sincere gaze at these neighborhoods. The diversity of points of view stemming from this generation of filmmakers and the one just now starting to bloom is resulting in potent films that bring not only a geographic displacement, but also a displacement of the gaze, from the previous foci.

From the start, we in the company began recruiting friends and relatives to act in our films. My family understood that right away. It was so natural for them that they took my invitation to act in *Ela volta na quinta*



André Novais Oliveira directs his mother, the main character of *She Comes Back on Thursday* (2014). Near the camera is Gabriel Martins, director of photography and filmmaker, as well as Novais Oliveira's associate in Filmes de Plástico.

[*She Comes Back on Thursday*, 2015] with little surprise. Autofiction is not in all of my films, but it's particularly present in *Ela volta na quinta*. Still, all of my films end up being somewhat personal, some more than others. As for my family, now my father, mother, and brother have all been invited to act in other films, playing diverse characters.

Race and class issues are present [in all these films] and have been conceived within the spaces that they depict in an effort to depict them in an honest and respectful manner. So, there is a gaze as well as a thought process surrounding representation that we already had in the collective. There are many types of peripheries, geographies, and characteristics to be found within the same urban area, as is the case with Contagem [a city on the periphery of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais]. In our films, the periphery is present in the audio track, through noises such as construction and saws, though more in some films than others.

My creative practice starts with writing the script, which may be what I most like to do among all the other filmmaking roles. I don't think I even consider any boundaries or limits for the universe I have at hand to write a screenplay. I feel free to imagine diverse elements that eventually mix with my own personal universe. I'm not alone in this; as a rule of thumb, Filmes de Plástico thinks of and worries about making sure our films reach more and more people.

I really enjoy contemporary Brazilian cinema. I also like to look at Brazilian cinema more broadly, history and all. Maybe there is this feeling of being partners on a journey. In the fifteen years that Filmes de Plástico has been

around, we have made friends—including some people who were making their first short films two years ago and are now making their first features. So there is a tight friendship with many of these other filmmakers, born and strengthened in film festivals and on film sets, and with many other film-production companies or film collectives.

Yet now, with many projects halted and with no new grants available in this moment, we feel as though the work of a large range of filmmakers and technicians will be severely impacted. The COVID-19 pandemic also aggravated this situation, having already postponed or even canceled so many events.

[André Novais Oliveira emerged on the film scene in 2010 with his short film *Fantasma (Ghosts)*, which premiered at the Tiradentes Film Festival. His *Pouco mais de um mês (About a Month)* premiered at the Director's Fortnight at Cannes in 2013, and *Temporada (Long Way Home)*, his most recent feature, at Locarno in 2018.]

### Filipe Matzembacher and Marcio Reolon

We both started in cinema with acting, but we had different trajectories. Marcio had already acted for a few years and went to film school after working at a video-rental store. Filipe used to work in advertising and was part of a theater group when he began to study film with the aid of a government grant [ProUni]. We met in film school at PUC-RS [Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul]. Even though we were in different years, we attended some classes together and soon began working with one another. When Marcio graduated, we started our production company, Avante Filmes, while Filipe was still in school.

Films have been a part of our lives since early on, providing us with an affective relationship as well as a space of escapism. Ever since our youth, we knew that we liked to tell stories. We are still cinephiles today: going to movie theaters is one of our major activities. In the pandemic, this has been suspended, but even at home we have been watching one or two films a day.

We are quite interested in narratives that challenge dominant social structures, but we don't seek to answer or present solutions to these questions; instead, we want to reveal their investigative process and the questions they raise. We usually invest in developing character studies, in narratives and aesthetic decisions and progressions through which the protagonist's subjectivity surfaces. This dynamic between the protagonist and their

perspective on what surrounds them is very interesting to us. Perhaps this approach has something to do with our past as actors, [influencing] how we foreground the work of the cast in our films.

We are interested in filming bodies in motion, how physical action can be a powerful element to reveal characters' emotional evolution. Some bodies may take over in front of the camera (as well as behind it) and exercise an agency beyond what we expect—sometimes generating friction over a social issue, even in more-progressive circles. We always wondered what these bodies and subjects could convey on-screen, and this certainly affects our work. It is as though we always pondered, “Within the story we want to tell and within the universe we want to create, how can we insert a plurality of bodies, subvert [social] roles, and so forth?”

In our creative process, we ultimately draw on a queer cinema that is more underground, and from such different genres as suspense, noir, and the Western. In thinking about our queer films in particular, we have been increasingly interested in universes that bring about the idea of “queer criminals”—those characters that are perceived by society as abject, but who manifest a disobedient and confrontational impulse that guides the narrative. We are not interested in manufacturing heroes, or in a more normative perspective, but in figures who unsettle the environment in which they live.

Our process is very much guided by desire. We feel that, in order to make a film, we need to have this great desire to make it. And we try to find this desire (which manifests itself in diverse ways) during the entire process. We try our best not to allow our desire to be tamed by others. We are not interested, for example, in making a film that seeks anyone's approval. Its reception—whether at film festivals or through commercial distribution—is not relevant to us during the production stage, precisely because our desire is not contingent on it. Our desire is to make films that we would like to watch; we want to make a film that would make us think, if we were a movie theater watching it, “We wish we had made this film.” It may sound very egocentric, but we believe that if we go through this process in earnest, our work ultimately communicates much more beautifully with a lot of people.

Of course, when we opt to make films in this manner, we know which doors we are closing, but it sounds more interesting to us to remain faithful to our desire. We know that when we depict Brazil, we don't export a generic *latimidad*; when we make urban cinema in Porto Alegre, or film bodies that have remained invisible and their



Shico Menegat as Pedro in *Hard Paint*, codirected by Matzembacher and Reolon.

libidos, or reject certainties and binaries in our screenplays, the reception to the film becomes more limited. We know that we are far from the Brazil that is lodged in the imaginary of the First World, but we insist that what we show is as Brazilian as any other region or portrayal of the country. Our effort is to affirm a plural *brasilidade* [Brazilianess] and communicate this as *latinidad*, not to reject the concept of *latinidad* itself.

We believe the honesty of our feelings is evident in our films, so whoever is so inclined will be able to see them, and perhaps that is why they have generally been well received. These desires aren't unique; other people share them and end up seeing themselves in the films. For example, when we opted to show nudity and to shoot sex scenes the way we did in *Tinta bruta* [*Hard Paint*, 2018], we were aware that those choices would limit the film's reach, but were nonetheless clear that was how we wanted to tell that film's story.

Being two *bichas* ["faggots"] who make films centered on LGBTQ figures in unconventional narratives, we are of course impacted by the expectations of a heterosexual audience. I think there should be an interest in this plurality of gazes on the part of the state, but the media—and even the film industry in Brazil—do not fully embrace this diversity. There is, for instance, a tendency to overlook the aesthetic choices of filmmakers who—like us—are part

of specific social groups and who make personal films; instead, the films are always discussed only through a political and representational framework. This is really frustrating, especially as compared with the reception of these films in other countries, where the audience debates cinema without the paternalistic, exclusionary vision so common in Brazil.

Since the early 2000s, Brazilian cinema has been able to form a more pluralistic range of voices with the help of public policies aimed at diversifying culture. Filipe, for instance, had the opportunity to enroll in our course only thanks to government scholarship programs, making him one of the first in his family to get an undergraduate degree. We live in the south of the country, far from Brazil's cultural and financial centers, and far from traditionally successful cultural financing. Our first feature film, *Beira-mar* [*Seashore*, 2015], was produced without any government grants; we got them only for postproduction and distribution—but *Tinta bruta* was financed through a grant from the now-extinct Ministry of Culture and its division for low-budget projects.

The political situation in Brazil has severely impacted our work. Living under this economic censorship defended by the state is a cause for despair. We try to transform the negative feelings into material for our own work,

but that's a hard task that we are not always able to achieve.

COVID-19 halted national production, but no more than what the state had already done. Sure, it has brought a new peculiar situation; as soon as there is the slightest sense of a return to normalcy, maybe we will need to rethink some scenes that counted on a lot of background talent. Honestly, though, we find it really difficult to imagine a film like ours with little interaction between characters.

[Filipe Matzembacher and Marcio Reolon are a team whose first feature, *Beira-mar (Seashore)*, premiered in the Forum section at the Berlinale in 2015. They returned to the German festival in 2018 with their second feature, *Tinta bruta (Hard Paint)*, in the Panorama section, and won the Teddy Award.]

### Julia Katharine

I started working with cinema as an actress, when I took part in a scene in *Crime delicado [Delicate Crime, 2005]*, by Beto Brant, and only after ten years did I return to it again, when Gustavo Vinagre invited me to act in his short film [i.e., *The Care One Takes of the Care Others Must Take of Themselves*]. After that, we worked on two other shorts, and he later invited me to work on his first feature, *Lembro mais dos corvos [I Remember the Crows, 2018]*, a hybrid documentary about my life. I've always wanted to make films, as an actress, writer, or filmmaker—all three practices interested me. I love cinema, and I have dreamed about the possibility of working with it since I was eleven. Because I am a transsexual woman, however, this always seemed impossible . . . until Gustavo made me realize that it indeed *was* possible. Gustavo always saw me as an actress, as a screenwriter, and as a possible future filmmaker, and he gave me the tools to have access to these positions. He hired me as an actress in his films and gave me creative freedom to collaborate on the screenplay for *Lembro mais dos corvos*. And he always motivated me to make my own films.

Were it not for him and Gilda Nomacce, today I might not be a woman of the cinema.<sup>4</sup> Gilda and I worked together in one of Gustavo's short films, *Filme-catóstrofe [Disaster Film, 2017]*, and she starred in my first short, *Tea for Two [2019]*, which I wrote, directed, and starred in as well. While Gilda is not a trans woman, she is the greatest cheerleader a trans woman could ever ask for in such a cisgendered environment as that of cinema.

She has been my biggest reference and inspirational muse as a screenwriter. Gilda is one of the greatest actresses in Brazil, and I don't think she has gotten the recognition she deserves, because cinema is unfortunately such an ageist space, due to a mentality that must be deconstructed.

We still lack trans women and trans men in positions of power and prestige in the Brazilian film industry. We are still not considered natural bodies by the heterosexual cisnormative society. There is a lot of prejudice against trans people, and one of the arguments for not hiring us is a lack of qualification—which I frankly recognize as a problem that can be solved only once we have more opportunities for work. I learn a lot while doing it, while working. It's sort of a naive and slightly utopian thought, but I dream of the day in which trans bodies will be received as natural in this environment, off-screen also.

We are so many: actresses, screenwriters, cinematographers; yet, we are still trying to carve our place in this environment. Thankfully, today in Brazil we have more trans women and transvestites who are actresses—great actresses, in fact; but few have real recognition and visibility. We are always working, because we make up a group that always goes after opportunities: Renata Carvalho, Leona Jhovs, Marina Mathey, Galba Gogóia, Danni Lisboa, Aretha Sadick—I could list the names of incredible trans actresses for hours. Brazilian cinema has given some visibility for the trans population—as subjects of documentaries and fictional characters written and directed by cisgender people—mostly white, of course. In Brazil, there are so few Asian Brazilians on television, in films, and in the theater.

I have done programming for a few film festivals—Kinoforum, Mix Brasil, Santos Film Fest [São Paulo], Digo [Goiânia]—and Cabiria, a script festival for women by women, in which I am the only trans woman in the group but feel very welcome. As for my work as an actress, that is still a work in progress. . . . I don't feel as comfortable as an actress as I would like to, and that might be because I don't have trans actresses as a reference—or, rather, I haven't had. As a filmmaker and screenwriter, my biggest reference is the American cinema of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s; that's what I watched the most during my life. When I mention Hollywood stars, I don't think of their bodies, which were molded to meet the beauty norm of the times. I think [instead] of their talent, because on top of being great actresses they learned how to deal with the *cystem* and to survive within it.<sup>5</sup> We need to deconstruct the idea of the

“feminine” that permeates the collective imaginary, including that of a majority of filmmakers. Without even realizing it, we end up reproducing the normative system, which is not good.

My creative process is very unusual. I begin playing with my Barbies, which I collect. I sit and play with them, looking at all those bodies, and I begin to create; I imagine possibilities. You could say it’s childish. When I was a little girl I had a Barbie collection, and I would reproduce with them the lines I saw in Bette Davis films, for example, or other films I used to watch. When I was fourteen or fifteen, my mother, who never quite understood my transsexuality, and felt guilty for perhaps having stimulated the feminine side of me during childhood, took all the dolls and donated them, without me knowing it.

That episode marked me; it was quite devastating. I spent many years without collecting, and when I took it up again, in 2017, I understood that the dolls would help in my creative process, would stimulate my imagination. I spend hours playing with them and creating the universes that I want to have in my films. I create families and think about the stories I want to tell. Today, the doll universe is way cooler, because it has a great diversity of bodies. I always liked melodramas and dramas, films with less action and more attention to characters and to the human relationships unfolding in the frame. I always wanted to make films that were just about that—just about people who meet, talk, and experience a situation that can be very good or very bad.

When I was about twenty, I discovered Ozu’s cinema, and told myself, “That is what I want. I want to create stories in which the main theme is human relationships, in a more delicate, somewhat melancholic way.” I always liked that type of cinema it’s what interests me. I can’t imagine myself doing a *Matrix* series, writing like the Wachowski sisters. I go to a more intimate place. There are also some Woody Allen films that got into my head—the conversations, so much dialogue. I have to find a balance, because I like to see the actor working with a lot of text, and at the same time I want to see the actors expressing themselves through silence.

The most important thing is to understand who you are and find a way to put your identity on the screen. I’m trying to find my identity through movies; I’m searching for the times that work for me. I’ve been doing this exercise of putting Julia on the screen through the

characters and the way I tell stories. I always say that I write about myself, putting myself in different situations and disguising myself. What I don’t seek is to do something with which I have no affinity. I really like having my creative freedom.

Every historical epoch has its configuration. At the moment, we are living in chaos, and precarity is part of that; we must assume the precariousness and make art anyway. With the pandemic and our current “misgovernment,” I think it’s high time to have a conversation about what we all want for Brazilian cinema. The government has closed the Brazilian Cinematheque and is chasing artists in a very veiled way: it’s not spoken about openly, but all the grants are being postponed, some have been canceled, there’s a lot of money not arriving where it is supposed to be. Brazil is about to lose its most personal and independent cinema, and we can’t let that happen. I think that at some later date we will have an arduous task to rebuild everything that will have been lost, hit, and affected.

Fiction is important for good mental health. With fiction we can suggest an action, a gaze, a hope against all that is happening. We need to make films no matter what, and to survive in order to tell future generations this sad tale we are living through.

[Julia Katharine is an actress, screenwriter, and director. She arose in the film scene in 2018, when she won the Helena Ignez Prize at the Tiradentes Film Festival in recognition of her artistic involvement in her pseudobiography *I Remember the Crows*, directed by Gustavo Vinagre. The film also received the Joris Ivens Prize for first feature at Cinéma du Réel (Paris).]

## Notes

1. For more on the pluriversal, see Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
2. See [www.facebook.com/coletivombyacinema](http://www.facebook.com/coletivombyacinema).
3. The Jesuit reductions were settlements for Indigenous people in the Rio Grande do Sul area of Brazil, in Paraguay, and in Argentina. They were established by the Jesuit order from the early seventeenth into the eighteenth century.
4. Gilda Nomacce is an actress from São Paulo with a career in theater, television, and film. She is very active in the theater and in independent cinema, and is known for deconstructed and spontaneous acting.
5. The word “*cystem*” is a play on the words *cis* and *system*.