

## RICARDO COSTA AND THE FLOWING PICTURES

by José de Matos-Cruz \*

*From the end of the seventies until the middle of the eighties, Portuguese documentary cinema reaches its ultimate significant phase inasmuch as artistic expression and multiple testimony are concerned. Some celebrated filmmakers sign films and series at a time when open-minded experts involve themselves in photography and other alternative creators, with pictures that are moving for the same reasons. At the same time, the connections between movies, television and other media start to strengthen, as policies of the European Union begin to settle.*

### RHYTHMS AND RITUALS

Celebrated by his testimonial incursions with the series MAR LIMIAR (*Sea Frontier*) – 1975/1977 –, Ricardo Costa starts another TV series in 1979: HOMEM MONTANHÊS (*Mountain Man*). This series is a tetralogy of long feature documentaries, screened in theatres at special events. It began by being broadcast on TV. It is produced by his own company, Diafilme, and co-produced with RTP (Portuguese Television).



The first film, **Castro Laboreiro** (1979), portrays ancient traditions, in a reflective and intimate way. And also the impact of modern society on one of the most remote regions of Portugal. It is divided into three parts (1 – Inverneiras (*Winter Fields*), 2 – Transumâncias (*Transhumance*), 3 – Brandas (*Summer Fields*), which describe the life cycle of peasants,

their migration from the plains to the mountains and vice-versa. Emigration, an extreme consequence of local migrations, is due to “a hard and hopeless existence” which deeply subverts the customs and the communal systems of those societies. In a very personal style, Vitor Estêvão signs the cinematography both of the landscapes of Castro Laboreiro and those of Parque Nacional da Peneda-Gerês (Peneda-Gerês National Park). The film is first shown in 1979 by RTP1 (channel 1 of the National Television) and was subsequently screened in several theatres.



The second documentary of the series **Pitões, Aldeia do Barroso** (*Pitões, a Village of Barroso*), 1979, was written and directed by Ricardo Costa in cooperation with ethnologist Viegas Guerreiro, a passionate specialist on the region. Vítor Estêvão focused his camera on Trás-os-Montes, namely the region of Pitões, while the director went back to editing together with

filmmaker Luís Gaspar. Their focus: the social organisation of one of a number of Portuguese villages where untouched traditions persist in larger numbers. Part 1 – A Aldeia (*The village*), Part 2 – Toma lá, dá cá (*I give it to you, give it back to me!*), Part 3 – A Festa (*The Feast*). The decline of the ancient communital system occurs when individuals start adopting the capitalist way of production and when individualism flourishes as a consequence. The religious feasts of São João are captured here. Emigrants from Brazil and France who return to their lost paradise are shown in playful or dramatic encounters. Together with *Castro Laboreiro*, broadcast in 1979 by the National Television Network (RTP), *Pitões, Aldeia do Barroso* is screened in theatres, first at the International Film Festival of Santarém, where it wins the Prize of the City, and later at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of Figueira da Foz, in 1981.

## UP INTO FICTION

Genuine documentary filmmaker, Ricardo Costa directs his first long fiction movie in 1978-79, **Verde por Fora, Vermelho por Dentro** (*Green Outside, Red Inside*) – 1980. The film has traces of surrealism in which the passage of time is gloomy. The story was written by Ilídio Ribeiro, Maurício Cunha and the director, whom together with Jaime Campos and Óscar Cruz handed the production over to Diafilme, where Carlos Fonseca took care of it. A middle-



aged man returns to Portugal from somewhere in order to manage a property inherited from his family, and in which he intends to grow bananas... Rogério Paulo plays the hero in a sarcastic, symbolic comedy, full of historical and political references, as well as strong erotic connotations he acts out with Adelaide João, the deaf and dumb housekeeper. And also

with Teresa Melro and Ana Nascimento, the hero's frivolous daughters. Produced with no subventions, the shooting took place near the town of Santarém - Vale de Lobos, Quinta do Alviela and Quinta do Gaia, a farm and a house which belonged to Alexandre Herculano. The film has its début in Lisbon, at the movie theatre Estúdio 444, October 1980. At the occasion Ricardo Costa emphasized the care taken in "avoiding intellectual trends by the usage of a language easily understood by all audiences".

The third movie of the series *Homem Montanhês*, **Longe é a Cidade** (*Faraway is the City*) is shot that very same year (1981) by the same team, in eastern Trás-os-Montes. He also edited it with Ana Luísa Guimarães. In three parts: Part 1 – Masculino e Feminino (*Masculine and Feminine*), Part 2 – Do Granito da Montanha (*From the Granite of the Mountain*), Part 3 – Das Raízes da Cidade (*From the Roots of the City*) he portrays both typical and surprising situations in Moimenta, a north-eastern village, full of ancient communal traditions. By way of contrast he shows the trends, impacts and options of modern social life that forces men, women and above all young people to perform a kind of flip-flap along a contradictory and degrading life course. Broadcast by the RTP in 1981, the film is shown at the International Film Festival of Figueira da Foz (Portugal) that very same year, at the *Musée de l'homme* in Paris in November 2001 and at the French National Film Archive (*Cinémathèque Française*) in January 2002.

Ricardo Costa went on with his mountain men saga, shooting through Vítor Estêvão's photography and at Serra da Estrela, the movie **Ao Fundo Desta Estrada** (*At the End of this Road*). It portrays life in a village near Guarda, called Videmonte, on a textile and semi industrialised region. He begins by registering situations which establish theme lines unfolded on subsequent episodes: 1 – Ouro Branco (*White Gold*).



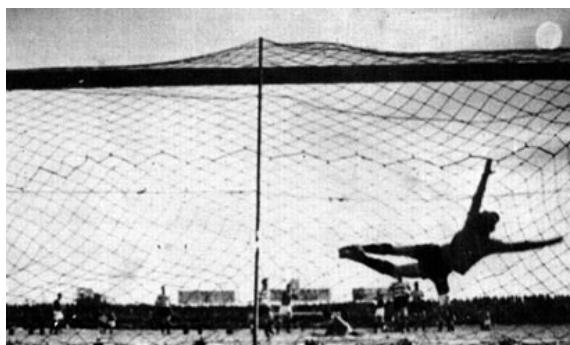
2 – Entre duas Terras (*Between two Lands*), 3 – Quem não é João Soldado (*He who isn't a João Soldado*). Old stories, life and death, ancient games passed on from one generation to the next. That is to say, the way by which “progress” affected the circle of immutable moments which are centuries old... He does it both with staged situations which cannot be separated from the documentary and

others scenarios which were not manipulated but constitute fiction. Improving this methodology both in genre and in style, the filmmaker concluded that “Portuguese people are particularly open, skilled and apt at performing their own roles”. RTP also broadcast *Ao Fundo Desta Estrada* in 1981.

Later, in harmony with the ethnographical and anthropological prevalence, following “an almost affectionate approach to people”, Ricardo Costa shoots **O Pão e o Vinho** (*Bread and Wine*) for Diafilme, the same year. Shooting takes place in Alentejo, at the Redondo region, the photography being the responsibility of Vítor Estêvão, shared by Ponces de Carvalho on the third and the last episodes. Cruz is still the producer. Efficiently decoded, bread and wine are shown as very important elements in the life of a man from Alentejo. Present also in religious rituals they control life both symbolically and physically. They're essential goods, and represent hard work and pleasure, body and blood in religious mythology and in human nature. He also refers the rural tradition of *Janeiras* (door to door singing at the New Year) and “*pão por Deus*” (door to door begging for goodies at All Souls Day), earthenware from Redondo and Easter rituals. And a religious procession with profane roots - that of Veronica. A difficult dialogue between the past and the present: Peasants who squat

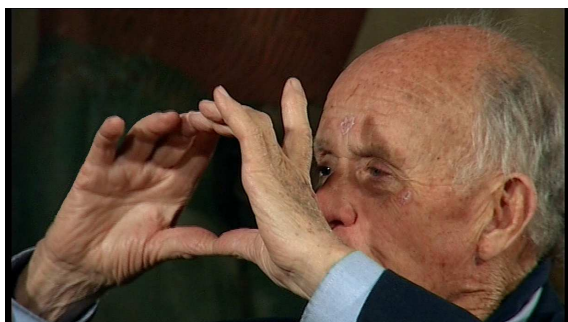
abandoned properties, and who organize themselves in cooperative units. Politics, life, magic, feast, music. Starring Vitorino, Janita Salomé and the Grupo de Cantares do Redondo (a Singing Group from Redondo).

In 1983-84 Ricardo Costa, by showing us pictures from another time, different wills, celebrated the hundredth anniversary of soccer in Portugal with the film **O Nosso Futebol** (*Our Football*), 1984. It's a Diafilme production with an estimated cost of 6 million escudos, sponsored by Santa Casa da Misericórdia. The director worked out the script with José de Sá Caetano based on a text by Vítor Ferreira. Photography was carried out by João Ponces de Carvalho, Moedas Miguel and José João. It's the Portuguese version of a *phenomenon of the masses*, since its first public trials at the small town of Cascais in 1888. Then he shows the evolution of soccer in the twenties, the Portuguese National Stadium, its peak of glory in the sixties, the Revolution of April the 25<sup>th</sup> and the present. The story also focuses on the social and political implications, certain historical contradictions of this country. The music is by António Victorino de Almeida who improvised on the piano at the pace of the images shown. He also serves as guide through a route punctuated by interventions and conviviality. With the cooperation of Vítor Santos, Neves de Sousa, Manuel Sérgio and Fernando Marques da Costa, amongst others. **O Nosso Futebol** was first shown at the Rex Theatre by Cine-Filme, in December 1985.



## BACK HOME

Time flies when one is happy. That's why Costa's flowing pictures stopped before they surged anew in a different way. Back home and without actors at his disposal the director steps in front of the camera and films himself. First with his old pal Jean Rouch or *Zazou Rebelle*, both sitting at a mirror, looking at each other and at those looking at them, trying to understand what they see and what that means: **Paroles** (*Words*), 1998, shown at the *Musée de l'homme* in Paris, November 2001 (the first part), and in January 2002 the second part, at the French National Film Archive.



Three years later, still without actors, Ricardo Costa goes back to the past and evokes a meeting with Maria José, an eighteen years old maid in his parents' household who used to tell him farfetched stories when he was a child. Then, he starts telling his own story, 50 years after having heard the first. **Brumas** (*Mists*) –, *Venice Film Festival*, 2003. One can thus see how his images evolve



in the long run: softly, backwards and forwards, like waves hitting the rocks of the fishermen's neighbourhood where an old wrinkled widow lives in peace. Shot where he was born, **Brumas** is the first film of a new trilogy, **Longes**.

What are the reflections and the distances, the experiences, the references? What's next?

NOTE: Ricardo Costa's filmography includes a wide number of short and middle-length feature films. He also shot two long feature films: **AVIEIROS** (1975) and **MAU TEMPO, MARÉS E MUDANÇA** (1976).

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SEE: <http://ricardocosta.net>  
Ricardo Costa's Personal Site

### \* Biography

José de Matos-Cruz was born at Mortágua, in 1947. A licentiate in Law by the University of Coimbra, 1973, he writes in newspapers and magazines since the sixties.

He has written fiction and poetry books, some worth mentioning: *Tempo Possível (Possible Time)*, 1967, *Cafre (Kaffir)*, 1970, *Alma de Cadáver (Soul of a Corpse)*, 1985, *A Erosão dos Lábios (Lip Erosion)*, 1992, *Hexálogo (Hexalog)*, 2000, *Os EntreTantos (MeanTimes)*, 2003, and *O Infante Portugal (The Prince Heir of Portugal)*, 2007. He was the founder of several comics magazines and coordinator of a comics section entitled *Quadrinhos (Comic Strips)* in the evening paper *A Capital*. In 2004, he started publishing a periodical webzine, *Imaginário (Imagery)*.

He also wrote books on Cinema such as monographs on Charles Chaplin (1981), Manoel de Oliveira (1996), António de Macedo (2000), Artur Ramos (2003), António Lopes Ribeiro & Francisco Ribeiro (2008). His masterpieces include, *O Cais do Olhar (Quay of Sight)*, 1980-1999, which brings together all Portuguese long feature films in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; in 1989 a *Prontuário do Cinema Português*, hand-book with a detailed description of the Portuguese films produced from 1896 to 1989; *O Cinema Português (Portuguese Cinema)*, a catalog of Portuguese films from 1986 to 1998, printed in 1998; and in 2002, *30 Anos com o Cinema Português (30 Years of Portuguese Cinema)*.

From 1986 on, he writes film reviews in the daily paper *Diário de Notícias*. In 1995, he gave counsel on the series *História do Cinema Português (History of the Portuguese Cinema)*, broadcast by the RTP, the Portuguese National TV station. He gives counsel on dictionaries, encyclopaedias and several RTP programs (1989-94) and on production (1989-99).

From 2000 to 2010, he was a professor at the *Escola Superior de Teatro e de Cinema*. He created a film data base called *Cinema Português (2002-09)*, published by a department of the Portuguese Foreign Office, the *Instituto Camões*. In 2003, he started teaching a film course at the *Universidade Moderna*, Lisbon. From 1980 to 2008, he organised *Filmografia Portuguesa* (a systematic list of Portuguese films and their features) at the *Cinematheca Portuguesa, the Portuguese National Film Archive*.

In 2005, he published a monograph on the actor Joaquim de Almeida (*Joaquim de Almeida - 1838-1921 - Um Actor de Montijo*), which would become a digital handbook on Portuguese Theatre, the *Anuário Teatral - Portugal - Século XIX*, a work still in progress.

*José de Matos-Cruz - Memórias Afectivas e Outras Histórias (José de Matos-Cruz, affectionate memories and other stories)* is a DVD film by Delfim Ramos, which portrays him as a living and creative witness.

In 2010, he became member of the board of the *Fundação D. Luís I*, at the town of Cascais.

SEE MORE: [http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9\\_de\\_Matos-Cruz](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_de_Matos-Cruz)