

## Tales of Alienation: Teaching Teresa Villaverde's Films

Well-known as one of the most important names in the “Portuguese School of Cinema” – an informal group of filmmakers that emerged during the 90s and onwards – Teresa Villaverde’s films have been critically acclaimed and well received in many film festivals, mostly in Europe but also in other countries. Filming since 1991, her films usually focus on social issues such as family, marginality and living in an alienating world where, as Ela Bittencourt explains (2012), the viewer is confronted with “situations in which social contact and human solidarity and kindness are seriously, often irreparably, broken”. Such is the case of *Os Mutantes* (*The Mutants*, 1998), *Cisne* (*Swan*, 2011) or *Colo* (2017), as the most recent studies show (López and Martin, 2017; Liz and Owen, 2020). Albeit being a well-known director, her role and influence in other contemporary directors as one of the first Portuguese woman filmmaker is still much understudied. In the Portuguese Cinema classes at the School of Arts and Humanities (University of Lisbon) I use Teresa Villaverde’s films – in particular *The Mutants*, but also other works – as way to examine not only some of the tropes of contemporary Portuguese Cinema, but also as a form of commenting on her importance for the future generation of female filmmakers that are now making a name for themselves. Furthermore, Villaverde’s tales of alienation usually follow women who struggle to find their own identity in order to survive in a world that is brutal and unforgiving. As such, and although with a reading that does not restrict Villaverde’s work to a single vision, her films are ultimately bound with the female condition, probably because, as she mentions in an interview, “I’m a woman, [and] it’s easier for me to write female characters” (Bittencourt/Villaverde, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is twofold: 1) first, and taking into account the theme of this conference, to briefly address Villaverde’s main tropes considering some her films, in particular those with female characters as main protagonists; and 2) to situate her importance within the context of contemporary Portuguese cinema and her influence on more recent female directors and why it is imperative to use her as example in the context of Portuguese cinema classes.

Keywords: Portuguese Cinema, Women in Film, Women Directors, Autism, Teaching.

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