

# Activating Nostalgia

Cinemagoers' performances in Brazilian movie theatres reopening and protection cases

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## Abstract

Based on two recent Brazilian efforts to protect historical street-level cinemas in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, I aim to analyse the role of audience's activism in promoting engagements for the reopening and maintenance of picture houses, taking into account the handling of cinema-going memories by certain practices, actions, and discourses that I denominate as "activated nostalgia". I discuss the campaign against the closure of the Grupo Estação cinema circuit, located in Rio de Janeiro, and the recovering process of the Cine Belas Artes, an art and essay cinema situated in São Paulo. These movements operate their network across online social media and public events, hence accomplishing significant gains in terms of the maintenance of the places. I investigate the limits and intersections between enthusiastic collective performances and the uses of the cinema-goers' nostalgia expressions by institutional actors and managers involved in the final steps of the restoration projects. I suggest that the activation of nostalgia through cinema-goers mobilizations becomes a crucial axis for the formation of belonging and identity ties among cinephiles. Adding to that, it functions as a component of the uses of memory regarding street-level cinemas and its criteria for preservation, reopening or patrimonialization, often meeting the interests of forces of power engendered within governmental and private spheres.

In recent decades, mobilizations in support of old cinemas on the verge of closing or campaigns that struggle for the reopening of abandoned cinemas have erupted with a certain recurrence in several parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> There are more than few examples of groups, associations, individuals, government institutions, corporations, and other social agents who engage toward the same cause: saving historic cinemas from a definitive sociocultural and urban disappearance.

Within this scope, and in varied degrees, cinema-goers' memories of past cinema-going practices have supported the feasibility of preservation campaigns, projects, and mechanisms to safeguard cinema venues. Traditionally, these film exhibition places have performed a remarkable

role in the urban formation of both small and big cities, as well as in weaving ties of sociability among cinema customers, from regular to sporadic cinephiles, over the last century.

More specifically, this article examines the cases of the mobilizations of cinephiles and enthusiasts of *street cinemas* (traditional cinema houses mostly situated at street-level) against the impending closure of the Grupo Estação exhibition circuit and the Cine Belas Artes, respectively situated in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the two most important Southern Brazilian metropolises – and perhaps of the whole country.

For decades, both Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes exhibition rooms are cultural spaces of reference and symbolic marks of the cities of Rio

<sup>1</sup> There is an assortment of notable campaigns against the closure of movie theatres or its resurrecting through the world, at least in Europe and Americas. Among them, for instance, there are the great community engagement for the Fox Theatre support in Atlanta, Georgia, USA; three fascinating

reactivation process in Belgium (Cine De Roma, in Antwerp; Pathé Palace, in Brussels; and Cameo, in Namur), as well as cases such as the Regent Street Cinema reopening in London, UK; Cinema Imperator/Cinecarioca Méier, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Les Fauvettes Gaumont-Gobelins in Paris, France.

de Janeiro e São Paulo. Between 2011 and 2015, they have faced a serious financial crisis that has threatened the continuity of their operations. The Belas Artes was closed, while the Estação circuit had reached the brink of bankruptcy.

Each case involves different levels of participation of private and public actors in relation to business management, daily operation, and how the recovering from the crisis has developed. Still, what is common in these two examples of street cinemas threatened to disappear is unarguably the strong assemblage of enthusiasts, sporadic or frequent cinema-goers and cinephiles on the course of the rescue process of those cinemas.

Through mobilizations which included symbolic embraces, petitions, intense collaborations, social media campaigns, as well as political pressure, audiences engaged for the sake of cinemas united by the fight for the survival of these places in the cultural map and the exhibition market of the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, besides defending the affective relations built over time with the equipment.

A dense web of discourses thus emerged around cinema-going memories was rooted in some sort of activated nostalgia, that is, accounts organized around the evocation, reconstructions, and re-elaboration of longings and personal cinematic memories have supported the collective mobilizations and the critique made by people in both cases studied under the light of the notions of nostalgia and cinema memory.

As we shall see next, another aspect that seems to bring both objects of analysis together was the use of audience mobilizations and the power drawn from the activation of nostalgia as justification and instrument for the concretization of institutional projects. Such projects, which have involved business partnerships, political hindrances, and considerable financial investments have only consolidated right after the audiences initiatives, and were accomplished by private and state actors who were not exactly the protagonists of the demonstrations in favour of the survival of the exhibition houses, except in the case of Grupo Estação, whose manager Marcelo França Mendes was an important agent toward the impelling of the movement

This work encompasses an initial discussion of a wider research on nostalgia, cinema-going, and

movie theatre memories entitled

*“Activating nostalgia: audience mobilizations, cinema-going memories, and institutional strategies in the cases of Grupo Estação, Cine Vaz Lobo, and Cine Belas Artes.”*

(Ferraz, 2016-17)<sup>2</sup>

In that research, I am interested in understanding how people construct and represent their recollections and yearnings regarding picture houses facilities and past cinema-going habits, and how those powerful memories are used by institutional mechanisms related to contemporary cinemas reopening processes. Can the memory of cinema-going practices, which nowadays prompts mobilizations and projects in benefit of cinemas that are threatened of extinction be articulated to nostalgia as a way of structuring cinema-going memories?

The methodology of this study includes participant observation and personal interviews with costumers, activists, and institutional actors involved with the cinemas investigated. It is a multi-situated methodology drawn from ethno-historiographic methods. In this article, I am interested in shedding light on the assemblage of respondents' narratives, in the analysis of their performance on social media, and the historical data collected in archives and press publications, considering cinema as an institutional space connected to a broad cinematic culture and audience practices, taking into account the social environment as well as the economic, cultural, and political backgrounds, thus embracing almost everything that is tangential to cinemas as places. The cases cited here are the first subjects of the main research above mentioned and illustrate how, in spite of shutting down threats and pressures of a myriad spheres of power, community movements and *affective communities* act in defence of a cause that, in general manner, is based in individual and collective constructions of cinema-going memories. I believe the relevance of these cases is associated to recent Brazilian events involving the resumption of old movie theatres, which are promoted and operated by public or private initiatives, as well as the growth of campaigns against the closure or demolition of these cultural facilities. The civil society (former cinema-goers,

<sup>2</sup> This in-depth study is under development at the Centre for Advanced Studies of the Escola Superior de Propaganda & Marketing (CAEPM-ESPM), Brazil. The investigation has

connections with issues investigated by the Ways of Seeing Research Group (ESPM-CNPq). For more details, see: <https://modosvercinema.wordpress.com/>

fan communities, cinephiles, among others kind of enthusiasts) involvement in these actions is becoming increasingly high as well. There are also solid debates around the issue of preservation of symbolic and old movie theatres and other smaller picture houses which are disappearing or being occupied by protestant churches, drug stores, or department stores since the end of the last century in Brazil.

It is not difficult to perceive a kind of collective cultural trauma especially among intellectuals, cultural activists, and individuals from the middle class of Brazilian urban areas, who nowadays face difficulties in accessing films in cinemas, specially art and national films, in art picture houses located in squares or streets, not in shopping malls. From the agenda of the press to academic studies and social media discussion forums, generally, this issue appears loaded with grief for the loss of street cinemas or heavy critiques toward the disappearance of street cinemas from the everyday life. Such critiques are based in quite consistent data.

With the exception of some cultural policies of the governments of presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016), which allowed the advance of the national exhibition market, it is still concentrated in the hands of major companies. In general, these exhibition companies operate multiplexes located into shopping malls, spaces that, in Brazil, follow the logic of fleeting consumerism and, and not rarely promote socio-economical segregation and ethnic prejudice against the poorer or black people. According to official data from Agência Nacional do Cinema (Ancine), in 2015 there were only 306 street cinemas in Brazil: 10,18% of the total 3.005 existing cinema rooms in the country.

Basically, the street-level cinemas that still remain in Brazil do not have more than four screens at best. Most of those that survived the wave of closure of the last 30 decades have become alternative venues to mainstream exhibition chains. Their buildings are integrated into districts, urban centre's streets and squares, and are commonly more accessible to pedestrians. In general, these cinemas have programs focusing on art, essay or pornographic movies. Their tickets are generally more inexpensive than the prices charged by multiplexes localized in shopping malls.

It is also important to emphasize that projects sponsoring the reopening of street cinemas (like exhibition houses or cultural centres) did not necessarily promote the democratization of access to audiovisual productions. Some cinemas that are reopened with public resources are handed by the state to managers from private exhibition companies, without demanding actually efficient return in sociocultural investments. Besides, regarding these cinemas programs, managers go little beyond what is demanded by Brazilian audio visual laws in relation to reserve market of national film.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the events connected to the Grupo Estação and Cine Bela Artes constitute two interesting initiatives on which we can scrutinize some trends of the exhibition market as well as the ways how cultural policies applied to cinema have been working in Brazil. They are also very particular cases of audience engagement against the scenery of cultural and material erasure of historical picture houses and toward the defence of collective cinema-going practices connected to the public space and not shopping malls. Crossing these terrains, there are several uses of cinemas memory and the productive nature of an activated nostalgia by the audiences.

To analyse this frame, we need to consider some valuable meanings of memory and nostalgia, possible links between these concepts as well as the notion of street-level cinema as an urban, collective, and cultural facility as well as a powerful place for the production of memory, sociability, and affects.

## On nostalgia and cinemas: a short literature review

Narratives, feelings and experiences of nostalgia permeate these episodes of mobilizations in benefit of the cinemas' lives and are incorporated to preferred memory versions that cinema-goers construct about their personal and collective stories as associated to picture houses. The accounts and actions which tribute the past of glory as well as the joyous and vigorous cinema-going experiences of a bygone era can be observed as *nostalgia exercises*. It means that the characterization of yearning and past

<sup>3</sup> For more details about the Brazilian cinema policy related to the annual screen quotes, see: <http://www.ancine.gov.br/node/18023>

representations by cinema-goers is much more a distinctive way of being present and active in a delicate moment of threat of cinemas extinction, than an evasive, whining, null or consumerist orientation to the past.

In this sense, it is worthy to quote Katharina Niemeyer's comment on the word "nostalgizing" which, as I believe, is very close to the meaning of *nostalgia exercises* as proposed here. Niemeyer stresses that, although it is not found in dictionaries, the expression "nostalgizing" was used by John Tierney in an article published in 2013 by the New York Times, so to emphasize the constructive appeal of nostalgia. Differently from its given meaning as *state of being* and from the idea of passivity that accompanies the adjective *nostalgic*, the act of *nostalgizing* "would help to develop the feeling of being part of a community or a group" (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 10). Also according to Niemeyer, nostalgia is not only an expression of a feeling, but something we actually do and an act of speech that can be transformed into a creative process.

Bearing this in mind I propose the expression *activated nostalgia* to emphasize the idea of agency (practices and discourses) which seems to lie among the operations around audience activism. That active dimension of nostalgia is also very close to what Svetlana Boym (2011) calls "reflective nostalgia", which can be a creative and potentially critical type of nostalgia in contrast to the homesick, melancholic, and ritualistic "restorative nostalgia". Reflective nostalgia resides "on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging", it puts truth and tradition in doubt, and "does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones" (Boym, 2011). In these terms, nostalgia is not always retrospective, but

*"it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. Considering the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. While futuristic utopias might be out of fashion, nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather*

*sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space."*  
(Boym, 2011)

I argue that the power of nostalgia exercises as practised by the audiences are, in fact, so potent, in the sense described by Boym as "reflective nostalgia", that they prevent themselves from becoming "sentimentalized expressions of regret and yearning for times past" (Keightley & Pickering, 2013, p. 926). So potent, indeed, that they even work as both valuable justifications and instruments for institutional agents involved in the processes of rescuing cinemas like the ones of the Estação circuit and the Belas Artes. As I mention later, in both cases the nostalgic operations of cinephiles and cinema-goers around individual and collective memories related to their cinema-going practices, in different levels, were *sine qua non*-conditions for preventing cinemas from completely disappearing from the urban landscape.

This is particularly due to collective mobilizations and discourse networks which have worked based in a notion of nostalgia that is distinct from the complaints toward compensations or replacements demanded due to a loss; On the contrary, a the nostalgic content of actions and accounts in defence of cinemas has enabled very proactive operations, acting, by the way, as a fruitful reaction against the contemporary trends toward the erosion and erasure of spaces, memories, identity ties, sociability, and affects that, somehow, touch the trajectory of life and death of street cinema rooms.

We are facing two cases in which the production of cinema-going memories, the spontaneous mobilizations, and the collective claim of cinema fans and patrons are shown as essential conditions for the accomplishment of cinemas preservation and reopening initiatives. Nostalgia as a "specific form of passion, directed towards past passionate moments, or at least past moments of significance in a person's life course" (Bolin, 2015, p. 2) permeates that essential conditions from the very moment it is activated, but with a clear regarding to present situations and in attention to ways to avoid a desert future.

Related to memory, nostalgia includes imaginations and exaltation of that which actually we cannot enjoy anymore in the present, for time has consumed it. Often, nostalgia resonates among peers who will ensure the collective meanings of yearning, that what in Portuguese is

called *saudade*, nostalgia also seeks the recovery of a space, a time, a struggle, a feeling, a sensation which will never return with the same brilliance, as we know, until something threatens those sweet memories with the weave of amnesia or some project promises some sort of retroactive incandescence.

Through the praise of a past time and episodes generally imagined as a happy or special era that emerges from the life trajectory of cinemagoers, actions and motivations become organized in the present much in relation with the denial of forgetfulness or the hope that other moments as relevant as the last ones will be able to revive in the future, and this was not a utopian position of the enthusiasts.

In the light of this, we need to consider that the potency of these creations, as seen in the cases of Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes, works also for given strategic uses that find in cinema-going memories copious material for heritage/ patrimonialization processes, marketing projects, political plots, and achievements, profit, commercial arrangements, as well as identity belonging strategies and so on.

As Gary Cross (2015) notes, from the nineteenth century onwards, it became hard to separate the notions of nostalgia, patrimony and identity. The idea of nostalgia grew more and more complex as technology improved, the distances were shortened, and the discontinuous face of time, space, and life became clearer. It is no longer feasible to hold on to the old concept of nostalgia originated in medicine that, with a spatial nature, basically denoted the sense of “homesickness”; nostalgia has gained new contours, also embracing the idea of *lost time* (Cross, 2015; Bolin, 2015).

Over the course of Enlightenment, the non-recoverability and the irreversibility of time were acknowledged with the understanding that the past does not come back naturally; it irrupts the perception that the past can only manifest itself in the present through reconstructions and recreations anchored by rituals, relics, mementos, places of memory (Cross, 2015). “The past is a foreign country”, states Cross, echoing the famous David Lowenthal’s maxim. Gradually, the meanings of nostalgia have also gained a wider perspective, which emphasizes the double aspect of time and space.

Nevertheless, I comprehend that both studied cases deal with the topic of lost and irrecoverable times and spaces, which find in the present the possibility of their social representation

(Niemeyer, 2014; Deleuze, 1997). Processes of remembrance, protection, preservations, and patrimonialisation of movie theatres – as they are considered as spaces that engender a myriad of experiences and resonating moments – are highly dependent on affective and identity bonds cultivated by people as well as on the networks that unite these individuals around a very special place of speech and practice, that is, their conditions as cinemagoers.

The identity ties connecting the individuals to more or less structured symbolic communities often allow notable support for the manifestations of nostalgic tribute toward a lost time-space, passionately qualified as *good*. It is a virtual entity that, without great contingencies, becomes almost mandatorily unforgettable and remains to be actualized. In accord with the framing processes and necessities of the memories drawn in the present, these nostalgia expressions aim

*“to capture the kind of bittersweet remembrance of something past, something that one longs back for at the same time as knows that this moment is impossible to regain.”*

(Bolin, 2015, p. 3)

In this way, cinemas, which have performed comprehensive roles in the formation of audiences in the twentieth century, hence contributing with the urban occupation through cinematographic culture are sources of excellence to produce meanings of identity affirmations.

It is important to stress that the creation of affect bonds between the patrons of these cinemas is not limited to the sphere of the buildings spatial materiality, what confirms once more that nostalgia is not only a matter of a yearning to return to a *homeland*. Logically, the components that concern cinemas corporeality are, indeed, vital to the construction of ties between people and the movie theatre itself. Such tangible aspects pervade and define experiences and dispositions of the public (i.e. comfort and cozy design, spatial arrangements between the seats and the screen, lightning, the luxury of marble and velvet, foyer décor etc.), but although the reopening projects focus on the cinema facilities and its material heritage – as it is clear in the case of Cine Belas Artes, for instance – it is essential to highlight the intangible axis to which correspond the expressions of nostalgia.

Once applied to the cases analysed here, it let us understand that the network of memories



is activated and organized accordingly to imperatives of the present, such as the impending utter disappearance of the Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes cinemas.

### **In benefit of cinemas: the Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes cases**

The cinemas<sup>4</sup> are “collective urban leisure apparatus” (Ferraz, 2012) which have performed since the 20th Century an assortment of roles within the relationships between media and the cities. It participates in the production of the common and of ties of sociability, besides being a special component of urban occupation and the configuration of constructed spaces either in small or big urban centres. When their front doors and signs face the street, cinemas act in the quotidian of passers-by, decorate their paths, change ways, produce memories connected to a street or a square.

Predominant among the mass media of the twentieth century, nowadays, the movie theatre has other relationships with the urban space. In a time when the access to cinematographic audio visual works is enabled in large scale through other miniaturized and domesticated devices, the perception that big urban centres are connected to new levels of media and technologies becomes clear, particularly when we notice the disappearance of the street-level cinemas. It is then when the references to the past of these apparatuses and their role in the formation of sociocultural and generational contexts is highlighted.

Some cinemas, as the cinemas of Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes, become admirable spaces due exactly to their absence or risk of disappearing. Whenever saved from demolition and chosen as a token of a past era, they become perfect “realms of memory” (Nora, 1984). Then, the present assumes the responsibility of restoring the dignity

of these meaningful spaces, which are in process of decay due to rearrangements of media, urban, sociocultural, geographic, and political order. Between early 2014 and mid-2015, there arose a strong awareness against the disappearance of a cinema circuit called Grupo Estação, the owner of exhibition rooms in the south and west sides of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

At large, these regions aggregate middle and high classes despite the strong presence of slums and the mixture between wealth and poverty – the marking characteristics of Rio de Janeiro’s geography and social structure. In 2010, an overwhelming financial crisis has assailed the Grupo Estação and, from then on, its future was predicted by the accumulation of debts. After selling part of the shares of the company’s stock for an investment fund which failed to honour the contract terms, Marcelo França Mendes, head of the cinema exhibition circuit, has publicly disclosed the anguishing imminence of the film exhibition circuit’s bankruptcy.

The manager resorted to his own personal Facebook page to announce the crisis by means of unburdening and immediately, a legion of people began commenting and sharing the post, giving rise to one of the most significant mobilizations ever occurred in Brazil toward benefiting a commercial cinema exhibition circuit. Following this online commotion, initially restricted to Marcelo França Mendes’s personal page, there was the release of the campaign Apoio ao Grupo Estação! (Support the Grupo Estação!) through the creation of a fan page on Facebook by some enthusiasts.

The fan page started gathering emotional accounts from people who, in posts, described their life experiences as marked by going to the Grupo Estação cinemas, mainly to the Espaço and Estação Botafogo, significant rooms of the exhibition circuit. Memories of the first kiss, the beginning of a romantic relationship, comments on the movies and festivals promoted by the Grupo Estação and even personal photos and ticket images were posted in large quantities. The

<sup>4</sup> It is important to emphasize that I am addressing cinema both as an enduring medium and technology that, in several ways, is integrated into everyday life and communities, individuals, and cities macro and micro histories. The theoretical and methodological ground for this approach is the paradigm of *New Cinema History*, a research field which observes the triangulation formed by cinemas, exhibited films/film programs, and audience modes of consumption considering their multiple particularities. Based on methods

borrowed from ethnography, oral history, discourse analysis etc., and valuing the production of quantitative databases, the authors representing this trend develop a vigorous thought regarding cinema-going culture in relation to spectators’ everyday lives, tastes, and memories, as well as the spheres of power and ideology, local affirmations of identity etc. (Biltereyst & Meers, 2011; Maltby, Biltereyst, & Meers, 2012; Kuhn, 2002).

testimonials carried a strong affective charge and generally deplored the uncertain situation of the exhibition group.

The account of Denise Lopes, one of the people who writes in the *Apoio ao Grupo Estação!* fan page on Facebook, is one of those where we can perceive the engagement of strong emotional loads connected to personal experiences marked by Estação cinemas:

*"I love the Estação! Simple as that. My life, like many others, is entangled with the life of the Estação. I was proposed to during a film session at the Estação. [...] I was raised at the Estação. Still, regardless of the past, we know quite well how our cinematographic lives will be without those rooms. Nightmare. I don't even want to think about it."*

(Denise Lopes)

Another account that calls attention is Moisés Zylberberg's, who associate the Estação to stages of his life as a cinephile, showing that his cinematographic discoveries necessarily depended on the existence of this exhibition circuit:

*"The place where I have developed my character as a cinephile and human being can't close its doors. So many festivals where I have made friends with Fellini, Truffaut, Pasolini, Hitchcock, Zé do Caixão, Sganzerla, Glauber, Antonioni, Kubrick, Cronenberg, Buñuel, and thousands of others. [...] From 15 to 20 years old, I have regularly attended the Estação rooms, its cinema marathons that began at midnight and ended six o'clock in the morning when to the survivors were served breakfast."*

(Moisés Zylberberg)

It was also through the Facebook online network that the actions and acts of the fans were disclosed and organized beyond the social media network: symbolic hugs, bike tours, t-shirt sales etc. The main thread of all these aspects is the relation of sentimental proximity with such devotees have constructed over the years toward the Grupo Estação cinemas. Both online and offline, the mobilization was a pure exercise of cinema-going memories. Personal and group memories linked to the cinemas were activated and organized

according to imperatives of that present time of collective mobilization.

The modes of operation and intersection of mnemonic narratives about the survival of the Estação, I believe, are articulated in the quality of a non paralysing nostalgia: strong affections, and sentiments of longing and yearning were not meant toward the reconstruction and restoration of a perfect, crystallized past, but rather acted against the voracity of a financial crisis that threatened one of the few Brazilian art cinema circuits, in a sociocultural and commercial context where major exhibition companies prevail with their standardized cinemas.

The mobilizations were paramount in terms of gaining visibility for the risk of bankruptcy faced by the group, also in the local press. It was then when one of the biggest Brazilian cable television companies – the Grupo NET – signed a deal with the administrators of the Grupo Estação, thus assuming the cinema circuit debts. In this way, after the crisis and without risks of closure, the Grupo NET became the sponsor of the Grupo Estação. Due to contractual demand, the exhibition circuit needed to print the NET trademark in all the five cinemas of its network, which accommodate a total of 17 exhibition rooms. The historic Espaço and Estação Botafogo cinemas were renamed and now they are called Estação NET Rio and Estação NET Botafogo. The programs devoted to art films was maintained and Marcelo França Mendes is still in charge of the daily operational management routines of the cinemas.

Amidst all this, there is the interesting fact that, although the risk of bankruptcy has threatened the whole Estação circuit, the campaign's motto and most accounts from patrons were basically focused in the first cinemas of the group, the Estação Botafogo and Espaço.<sup>5</sup> Everything suggests that this have happened because these two cinemas were consolidated as cultural spaces with a prominent role in the formation of cinephiles and cinematographic leisure in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Opened in the 1980s, with programs always far from the Hollywood mainstream, both cinemas are part of a long trajectory of promotion of audience access to Brazilian and international art and essay films. The roots of this vocation is connected to these cinemas very own origins. For instance, the Estação Botafogo, the first cinema

<sup>4</sup> Both cinemas are in the same street at few feet from each other, in the district of Botafogo, a bourgeois region within the carioca south side, with large residential extensions in

spite of its bohemian and intellectual bias, strong commercial activities and the intense flow of vehicles and passers-by.

of the Grupo Estação circuit, was opened as a cinema club in 1985 in the rear of a gallery where Cinema Coper used to be.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, on the Facebook fan page of the movement, the testimonials are loaded with nostalgic references to an almost sacred past of discoveries. Deploring the risk of disappearance of cinemas, these accounts nostalgically recollect a time full of initiation rituals in cinematographic genres, filmographies, or directors, and of construction of cinephile careers, tastes, and identity ties.

That personal and collective memories connected to cinema-going experiences and audio visual consumption in the case of the Grupo Estação were produced and intertwined with the intention of saving the Estação cinemas. Besides that, that powerful activation of nostalgia – in terms of actions, discourses and reflections in benefit of the present and future of the cinemas – was gained an institutional bias when it was served to prove, directly or indirectly, the historical and sociocultural relevance of that exhibition circuit, and so allow tangible chances of take the whole Estação out of the crisis, getting the attention of the cultural marketing sector of the NET Group. In the combination of these vectors, expressions of nostalgia, without contingencies, were activated and intersected this process. However, the audience activism was restricted to Facebook and the acts performed in public spaces; at least until now, it seems to be no sound interaction from enthusiasts after the preservation of the Grupo Estação by the Grupo NET because, after all, that rescue process was merely a commercial transaction.

In the situation of the second object of this analysis, the Cine Belas Artes – a notable art cinema located in the most populated Brazilian city, São Paulo –, what calls attention are the intricate processes of reopening and patrimonialisation occurred between 2011 and 2015 through the active participation of the cinema-goers organized into the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* (Cine Belas Artes Campaign) as well as an assortment of public and private agents and power spheres. The Cine Belas Artes was originally opened as Cinema Trianon in 1956. In 1967, its program started to focus on art and essays movies and its slogan became “spectacle, controversy, and culture” (Soriano & Da Silva). After some reforms in the structure of the building and the division of the cinema into three separate rooms, there was a severe arson fire in 1982 and then it only reopened in 1983

under the management of the French exhibition company Gaumont.

Gradually, the cinema started to deteriorate and after being managed by some administrators (including the Grupo Estação, in 2001), it was led to the verge of closure by a financial crisis. In this occasion, it was organized an early movement in defence of the venue – “Viva o Belas Artes”. In 2003, a group of partners formed by producers and film directors initiated to manage the cinema, which, in the following year, relayed on the sponsorship of HSBC. However, the bank decided to quit sponsoring the cinema in 2010. Lacking funds to pay the costly rental of the building, the main manager of the venue, André Sturm, closed the Belas Artes doors a year later. So, it began the ruin of one of the most important places of São Paulo in terms of audience formation and activities for cinephiles.

For the preservation of what they have called *cultural and affective patrimony*, the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* was founded in 2011 by people who were sympathetic for the cause of the cinema reopening. Regular and sporadic customers and intellectuals still integrate the group that remains united so far. Back then, the objective was struggling in several areas to ensure the heritage listing of the Belas Artes building and its reopening as a cinema. To the context of the mobilization originated by civil society, there were added the steps of an intricate process full of disputes over power including public/government/judicial spheres, the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* itself, the cinema manager André Sturm, and the real estate owners.

Amongst a range of conflicts, an agreement between the São Paulo Mayor Hall, the manager André Sturm, and the national public bank Caixa Econômica Federal has enabled the reopening of the cinema. The bank became the sponsor of the space that currently is called Caixa Belas Artes. Recently, in 2015, on state level, the Belas Artes converted into a heritage listed building due to its importance in the qualified formation of audiences in São Paulo. As to the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* – whose initial work involved the gathering of documents, pressuring the public powers, collecting signatures for petitions, etc., was extremely relevant so that everything could, in fact, initiate – it was relegated to a mere supporting role as the process of Cine Belas Artes became increasingly institutionalized.

According to the one of the leaders of the campaign, Afonso de Lima (personal



communication, May 5, 2016), nowadays the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* has neither a solid participation in the cinema daily operation nor a position in the administration, despite its chair in the Cine Belas Artes Advisory Board, commission that, in fact, does not work regularly. It is also curious to observe that, officially (in Cine Belas Artes and São Paulo Mayor Hall/ State Government websites or even in the press accounts on the restoration of the cinema), the *cinemagoers' performances* represented by the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* do not accomplish much visibility, despite its crucial participation in the struggle for the reopening of the cinema. For the participants of the *Movimento Belas Artes*, the prevailing narrative, as usual, concedes the success of the reopening to the cinema manager, Sturm, as well as the *benevolences* of the public spheres (which have enabled the cultural patrimonialization of Cine Belas Artes) and Caixa Econômica Federal.

In face of these interests and power relations between the agents connected to the rescue processes in the two cases presented here, I think that the most significant difference between the cases of Belas Artes and Estação lies in the explicit governmental participation in the reopening process and in investment for the economic feasibility of that picture house located in São Paulo, while the cinemas of the Rio de Janeiro's circuit common traits between both cases, such as the huge presence of the private initiative in both administration arrangements and the key mobilizations of the civil society (acting by the cinemas' fans and audiences) against the closures. The nostalgia activation aspect and its uses by the projects is also a touch point between these two cases, as above mentioned.

In this way, considering the associations between nostalgia, media dynamics and communication technologies (the spheres where the dispositive movie theatre is located), as well as their intense contribution for the formation of communities and senses of identity belonging, it is mandatory to underline that the constructive aspect of *activated nostalgia* can be captured by political, commercial, and civil-social purposes.

When these three levels interact, as noted at some points of the analysed cases, the question grows even more complex. In general, what is most noticeable about these uses, after all, are the vectors essentially connected to consumption, marketing, and the promotion of the image of the agents involved in preserving cinemas – be they

governments, corporations, or banks. Niemeyer states that:

*"The use of cultural products and symbols of the past for political issues is frequent. It is also a successful commercial strategy of the economic sector. The marketing of nostalgia is flourishing, playing with the nostalgic emotions of potential consumers."*

(Niemeyer, 2014, p. 6)

The activation of nostalgia through cinemagoers mobilizations becomes a crucial axis for the formation of belonging and identity ties amid cinephiles, as seen above. Adding to that, it functions as a component of the uses of memory regarding street cinemas and its criteria for preservation, reopening or patrimonialization, often meeting the interests of forces of power engendered within governmental and private spheres.

## Short final notes

The experience of memorable moments, the sharing of a common *existential territory* and multiplicities developed for beyond the individual, resulting in a sense of collectivity marked by the *logic of affects* (Guattari, 1992) are aspects that operate in narratives constructions and activations, feelings and experiences of nostalgia. Situations of sociability and private life; watched, felt, and discussed films; smells; tastes; colors; varied sensations... that are assembled vectors which are connected to an intensive participation of the cinemas in the construction of "memory of urban places" (Jodelet, 2010) and personal memories of people who enlist themselves in the urban context by a collective experience.

There will always lay a danger of vectors being captured and of the production of clichés about the past that prevent the creation of alternative (and thus bolder) discourses that, due to their transversality, may escape consensus and homogenization practiced by the instrumentalization and officialization of memory.

The less these powerful aspects related to the expressions of *activated nostalgia* are prioritized by the institutional stages of the cinemas reopening and protection, the less are the chances for the enthusiasts themselves – the figures who actually commanded the departing point of the whole

thing through civil society campaigns and audience activism – to participate with their creative potentials on the fate given to the cinemas that are (or were) so dear to them. The nostalgia works through its active character, such as the movie theatre draws strength from memorable social, artistic and aesthetic aspects which, in turn, resonate in us and in our spaces of sharing. Both, nostalgia and cinemas, can reach much further beyond a simple ode to thematic ruins or profitable mummifications.

Due to the context of bewilderment, where the decline of territorial and symbolic marks which are paramount for the weaving and continuity of some identity and sociability ties is evident, the practices connected to activated nostalgia, understood as memory exercises that deal with the productive force of our forms of remembrance, might suggest alternatives to the establishment of such cultural spaces and collective practices, among which I include street-level cinemas and the cinema-going experiences. On the

account of important media, technological, as well as sociocultural and urban arrangements transformations in the last 30-40 years, street-level cinemas and the uses we make of them, today, are attempting to find the means to keep themselves both active and present in the cities and our lives. I believe customers and cinephiles mobilizations stem from this.

However, at least in Brazil, there is a long way to go until the power of these spontaneous mobilizations can effectively persist on the operations of the reopened and restored cinemas, in spite of the hard structures of the market and government cultural policies. It is urgent to think of meanings and ways of dealing with the potencies of nostalgia in face of the engagement of cinema memory and cinema-going practices; it is especially urgent when the instrumentalizations and strategic uses of these vectors tend to weaken, capture, modulate or crystallize the energies of what Pickering and Keightley (2006) call the “positive dimension in nostalgia” (p. 921).

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