



# **THE SPN/SNI CINEMA: FERROS'S IDEAL, THE ARDUOUS REALITY**

*Carla Patrícia Silva Ribeiro*

Escola Superior de Educação | Instituto Politécnico do Porto

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## FRAMEWORK: TIME PERIOD AND STUDY SUBJECT

**1930[1933]  
to  
1940[1949]**

– period of consolidation and institutionalization of the portuguese Estado Novo (“New State”)

**António Ferro**

– director of Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (“National Propaganda Office”), in 1944 Secretariado Nacional de Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo (“National Information, Popular Culture and Tourism Office), known as SPN/SNI

## FRAMEWORK: STUDY SUBJECT

The cultural space reveals itself, in this context, of extreme importance for the consolidation and maintenance of Estado Novo: “Ideology imposed theatricalization” (Ó, 1999:15).

### CINEMA



- Serves as a reflexion of political and ideological content strongly tied to Estado Novo's regime

*Or*

- "The truth is that cinema, if partner, has never been this policy's focal point" (Ramos, 1993:387)

????

## FRAMEWORK: AIMS

- To analyze Ferro's political and aesthetic actions towards the portuguese cinematography.
- To grasp the contours that its "Política do Espírito"("Policy of the Spirit") has taken in the cinematographic field.
- To understand what were the outcomes attained - the reception and the resistances to his purposes.

## ANTÓNIO FERRO, THE SPN/SNI AND THE “POLÍTICA DO ESPÍRITO”

Born in Lisbon in 1895, António Ferro is described as one of the "organic intellectuals" of Estado Novo, that is, a man who "relates his vision of society and politics with his cultural and aesthetic choices" (Torgal, 2005: 240).

### ARTISTICALLY, he's a **modernist**:

- Journalist (collaborations with *O Jornal*, *Diário de Lisboa*; *Diário de Notícias*, *Ilustração Portuguesa*)
- Writer (avantgarde works like *A Teoria da Indiferença*, *Leviana* or *Mar Alto*)

### POLITICALLY, he advocates an **authoritarian**

**nationalism**, which is believed to be able to operate the desired cultural revolution:

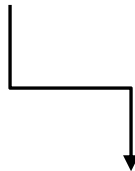
- Interviews with charismatic leaders of Europe (Gabriel D'Annunzio, General Primo de Rivera, Pétain, Mussolini, ....)

Series of interviews in 1932 with Salazar

designates Ferro as



Director of the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (SPN)



**“Política do Espírito” (“Policy of the Spirit”)**

- “A Portugal with an old soul and new sensibility” (Ferro, 1943: 17)

## “POLÍTICA DO ESPÍRITO”

- Participation in international exhibitions (such as in Paris, in 1937, or in New York, in 1939)
- Tourism campaign streamlined by SPN/SNI (initiatives like the tourism brigades)
- Campaign “National Neatness”
- Initiatives of valorization of popular culture (like the contest “The Most Portuguese Village of Portugal”)
- Creation of the Popular Art Museum (1948)
- Ballet Verde Gaio (1940)
- People's Theater (1936)
- Mobile Libraries(1945)
- Cultural Missions (since 1940)
- Literature, cinema, theater and visual arts awards
- Publications (like *Panorama*, *Revista Portuguesa de Arte e Turismo*, 1941, or the bulletin *Notícias de Portugal* , 1947)

## ANTÓNIO FERRO AND CINEMA – "SYNTHESES ALCHEMIST "OR "DILIGENT PUBLIC EMPLOYEE"?

As in other authoritarian regimes in Europe, Estado Novo "had to create an image of himself and thus to impose this image in a way that was both effective and (...) discrete" (Geada, 1977 : 74).

This is the task of António Ferro.

The vehicle is the CINEMA.



## Why CINEMA?

- In a country with the highest illiteracy rate in Europe, it was the most accessible media
- It has a chimerical, mystifying nature; it's civilizational; it constitutes a space of the imagination

Used as ...

- Instrument of transfiguration
- Device for promoting

Portugal

Estado Novo's regime

*More than reading, more than music, more than the radio language, image pervades, insinuates itself, almost without realizing it, into the soul of man.*

(Ferro, 1950: 44)

In Portugal, since 1932 that  
voices were heard that  
called for state action on the  
national cinema.

It was the director of the  
SPN to respond to these  
calls



Clear attempt to defend and guide the national  
film industry:

*Laying the foundations of a national cinema, with its  
unmistakable character, with its qualities and faults but  
always with a certain elevation, fleeing the paltry, the  
commonplace, the ordinary. (Ferro, 1950: 63)*

- Creation of material and human conditions which allowed the industrial development of the Portuguese cinema:

- Ordinance nº. 22 966, of 14 August 1933, which exempted the film company Tobis Portuguesa from the payment of contributions (real estate and industrial) and import duties (machinery, equipment and other materials necessary) for 5 years

- Project of a national newsreel, that focused on the official celebrations, the endeavors and the organizations/institutions of Estado Novo:

- In 1938 appears the *Jornal Português*, by António Lopes Ribeiro, the “official filmmaker” of the regime

- SPN’s Film Chamber, that employed a team of plastic artists, responsible for a series of short-films about the regime:

- *As Festas do Duplo Centenário; A Exposição do Mundo Português* (1940)

- *A Manifestação a Carmona e Salazar pela Paz Portuguesa* (1945)

- *Salazar e a Nação* (1958)

## DOCUMENTARIES

1933-1935: 9 documentaries

Salazar's resistance towards cinema as a vehicle for political propaganda?

1936: 21 documentaries

Salazar finally realizes the political power of cinema?

1939: 5 documentaries (of 300 meters, with sound and commented, whose themes were the Navy, the Housing Projects, Communications, the National Monuments and Statues)

Propaganda for the *Double Centennial Celebrations*

Propaganda of the country in the *New York World's Fair 1939*

Film genre that Ferro praises, where he doesn't detect the flaws of fiction films:

*[A] healthy trend of Portuguese cinema, not yet sufficiently developed (...), which demonstrate the real vocations of our filmmakers for this cinema genre, so delightfully expressive and educational. (Ferro, 1950: 65)*



The “SPN / SNI style”

## MOBILE CINEMA

Since 1935, the Mobile Cinema travels the country, specifically the towns and villages of Portugal.

These "caravan images" were created "to educate the neatness of the nation, to give them every week or every month, a few hours of joy and forgetfulness" (Ferro, 1950: 36; 38).

1937 - Performances in 96 villages

1938 - Performances in 141 villages

1939 - Performances in 306 villages

1940 - Performances in 264 villages

1941 - Performances in 351 villages

1942 - Performances in 258 villages

1943 - Performances in 216 villages

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**TOTAL –**

2235 Performances / 2 304 570 Spectators

1943 - Tour through Azores

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**TOTAL –**

116 Performances/ 230 700 Spectators

In addition to the preview of nationalistic documentaries and fictional films, SPN/SNI sponsored brief doctrinal conferences where guest speakers were invited to clarify the virtues of the system and the educational value of the films.

BUT, as Ferro remarked:

*We only have a People's Theater and two Mobile Cinemas, when we should have enough of them not to go back to the same land only once every three years. (SNI, 1948: 16)*



## FICTIONAL CINEMA – “political” films

*A Revolução de Maio* (1937)

*Feitiço do Império* (1940)

} by António Lopes Ribeiro

└─→ *To serve the propaganda of Portugal and to  
serve Salazar’s policy* (Ribeiro, 1936: 2-3).

- Sponsored by the SPN and the *General Office of the Colonies*, with the aid from the *Commissioner of Unemployment*
- António Ferro was the co-autor of the script for *A Revolução de Maio*, with the alias of Jorge Afonso

- Despite the publicity given, both during the filming, and on the premieres
- Despite the praise of the more conservative reviews

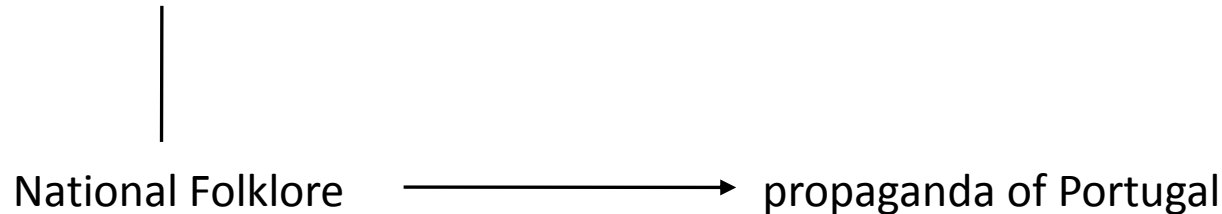
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Commercial FLOPS

## FICTIONAL CINEMA – “ regional” films

*Ala-Arriba* (1942), by Leitão de Barros

*Aqui, Portugal* (1947), by Armando de Miranda

*Rapsódia Portuguesa* (1958), by João Mendes



### Award-winning films:

- By SNI and the Ibero-American film media
- *Volpi* award at the Venice Film Festival of 1942 (*Ala-Arriba*)

## FICTIONAL CINEMA – historical films

*Bocage* (1936)

*Inês de Castro* (1945)

*Camões* (1946)

by Leitão de Barros

*Amor de Perdição* (1943)

*Frei Luís de Sousa* (1950)

by António Lopes Ribeiro

Ferro encourages filmmakers  
to use the Portuguese history  
and literature as sources for  
national cinema

goals

- To educate

-To convey a national  
consciousness/spirit

- To make the nation proud of  
its past

Excelent reviews

Commercial flops

The Director of SPN also advocates "**poetic films**" and "**daily life films**", while dismisses comedies, which are, in his words, the "cancer of the national cinema "(Ferro, 1950: 65-66).

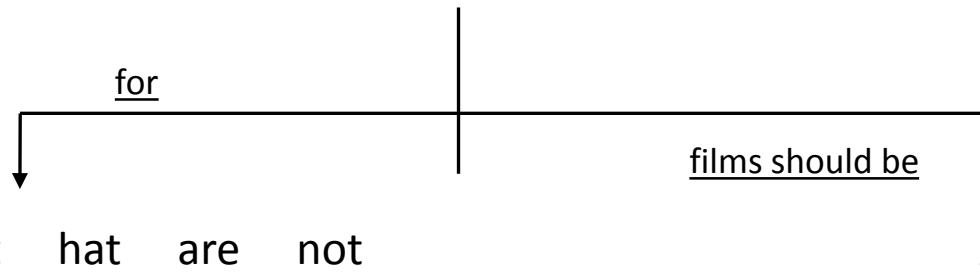
BUT...

- Comedies seem to be the genre that best communicates the ideas of order and discipline, so dear to the regime, through the figure of the police, authority presented as protector and advisor
- Comedies were the first genre to be financed by SPN (*Maria Papoila*, of 1937, by Leitão de Barros)
- Comedies are the most popular genre between audiences

## Protection Act to the National Cinema

[Diploma nº. 2027, 18 February 1948]

### *National Cinema Fund*



- Films that are not considered commercial enough

- *Rehabilitate the Portuguese cinema* (Ferro, 1950: 69)

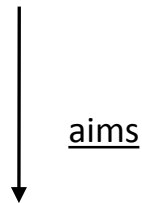
*Representative of the Portuguese spirit, whether translate the psychology, customs, traditions, history, the collective soul of the people, or are inspired on the great themes of life and universal culture. (Ferro, 1950: 118)*

## CONCLUSIONS

The question lies in knowing the role and importance of cinema within the regime, as a device for propagation and consolidation of the ideological discourse of Estado Novo, that effaced alternative discourses.

The question, therefore, lies in the role played by António Ferro, as director of SPN/SNI.

Based on his personal views, more aesthetic than political-ideological, António Ferro advocates an art cinema, non-commercial, and in return offers incentives, by the National Cinema Fund, to "poetic films" and "daily life films".



Cinema that merged avant-garde and nationalism, modernity and tradition:

- An aesthetic at the service of politics
- A **national propaganda artistic cinema**

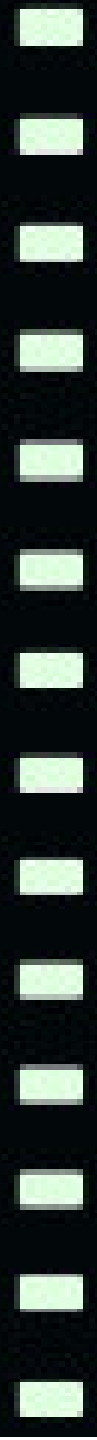
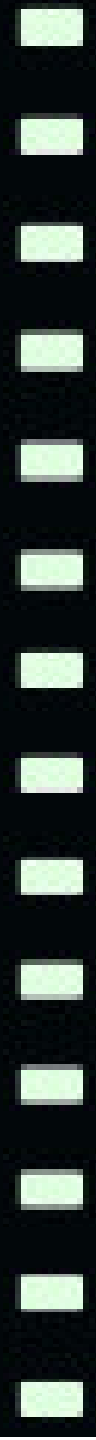


DID HE SUCCEED?



Ferro's **"Política do Espírito"** ("Policy of the Spirit") proved to be a **"Policy of the Feasible"**, within the logic of a normative regime. This was especially true regarding cinema, when Ferro saw his (bold) aesthetic and artistic renovation project confronted with the ideological and propagandistic regime's cinema, of certainly less broader cultural horizons.

Ferro's **"Política do Espírito"** ("Policy of the Spirit") also metamorphosed into a **"Handout Policy"**, with national cinema becoming increasingly dependent on official protection along the lines established in 1948, that encouraged a subsidy-dependent, conventional, low quality and politicized film industry.



Therefore, and as a outcome of the 1948 law, the period following the departure of the Director of the SNI (1949) is of difficulties in the State's cultural intervention, especially in the cinematographic field, with the regime battling with political and social crisis, that will undermine Salazar's Estado Novo and enable the emergence of the New Portuguese Cinema.