

CONTINENTE

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Pernambuco at the Oscars



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The celebration honoring the journey of *The Secret Agent* will be remembered for a long time. The film earned four Oscar nominations and helped bring Pernambuco cinema to the international spotlight



Brazil at the Oscars

From a critic who covered film production to one of today's most prominent filmmakers, Kleber Mendonça Filho has become, since *Neighboring Sounds* (2012), one of the most acclaimed directors in contemporary cinema. With each new film, box-office and awards numbers continue to rise. The filmmaker has been receiving praise from audiences, critics, and festivals such as Cannes, where he won the Best Director Award in May 2025.

When we imagined that his third fiction feature, the 2019 phenomenon *Bacurau*, would be the peak of a successful film career, *The Secret Agent* managed to surpass it in number of viewers, box-office revenue, impact, and award nominations, especially with its nods in three of the main Oscar categories, Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor in a Leading Role, and the new award for Casting.

If Pernambuco has a long history with cinema, from the Recife Cycle (1923–1931), a period of intense film production, through the alternative Super 8 movement, to the revival of the local market which began with *Perfumed Ball*, movie from Lirio Ferreira and Paulo Caldas which in 2026 celebrates its 30th anniversary, the state's film industry now gains new momentum to strengthen itself, overcome challenges and borders, and project itself even further.

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The Secret Agent makes Film History

Oscar ceremony broadcast inside the São Luiz Cinema

Nominated in four categories, Kleber Mendonça Filho's film was not awarded at the 98th Academy Awards, but the director consolidates his international standing

TEXTO DÉBORA NASCIMENTO

Shouts and applause rang out in unison from the crowd gathered before the large screen set up outside Cinema São Luiz. On Rua da Aurora, in the Boa Vista neighborhood of downtown Recife, the celebration “Pernambuco at the Oscars” was underway – an event organized by the government of the state of Pernambuco on Sunday, March 15, to celebrate the participation of *The Secret Agent*, a film by Kleber Mendonça Filho, at the 98th Academy Awards ceremony, held at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.

The moment called for great excitement. It was the first time a film from Pernambuco had been nominated for the most famous film awards in the world. And not just that – it was nominated in the Academy Awards’ main categories: Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor, and the unprecedented Best Ensemble.

However, despite the cheering, predictions from international outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The New Yorker*, *IndieWire*, and *Variety* had already indicated that the feature film had little chance of winning in any of the categories. The forecasts published by these same outlets added a caveat: even if it was not the favorite in categories such as Best Picture and Best International Feature Film, the Brazilian film was the one that deserved to win.

“Winning.” That may not be exactly the right word to use for those chosen to receive the famous golden statuette. After all, this is not a sporting competition, where one person’s victory necessarily relegates the others to the label of “loser.” The fact is that the cliché holds true: being chosen as one of the nominees is already an award in itself. Every year, between 2,500 and 10,000 films are released worldwide. Brazil maintains an average of between 90 and 100 feature films per year.

Among all these titles, to be eligible for an Oscar nomination, a film must first be chosen as its country’s official submission and then be selected again from a list of more than 190 candidates. *The Secret Agent* managed to do that – and more than that, it was selected for the two main categories, Best Picture and Best International Feature Film. The first time this happened was in 2020 with *Parasite*, by South Korean director Bong Joon-ho. The second time was with the Brazilian film *I’m Still Here*, in 2025.

Now imagine being the third film, in 98 years of Oscar history, to achieve this feat. But *The Secret Agent* was not alone in this accomplishment. In 2026, *Sentimental Value* was also nominated in both categories. And it was precisely this Norwegian film that edged out the Brazilian one for Best International Feature Film. On Sunday (the 15th), at the moment the Oscar winner was announced, the crowd in front of Cinema São Luiz was disappointed. After all, in theory, this category would have been the “easiest” one to snatch.

In his acceptance speech, Joachim Trier, the director of *Sentimental Value*, made a point of stating that this was the first time a Norwegian film had won an Oscar. Born in the country neighboring Sweden, the homeland of Ingmar Bergman, the director made a profound film that deals with the relationship between a daughter and a negligent father. From this premise, the screenplay is filled with dialogue and scenes very much in the style of the Swedish master.

Both of the main contenders for Best International Feature Film, *Sentimental Value* and *The Secret Agent*, did not leave the Cannes Film Festival last May with the Palme d’Or, but they did win important honors – the



Director Kleber Mendonça Filho and producer Emilie Lesclaux at the 98th Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California

former received the Grand Prix for Best Supporting Actor for Stellan Skarsgård, and the latter won Best Director (Kleber Mendonça Filho) and Best Actor (Wagner Moura).

As has been happening for several decades, leaving major international festivals with arms full of awards helps a film be chosen as its country's representative and become a strong candidate for an Oscar nomination. That is what happened with these two films. Even though it followed the same path, the Palme d'Or winner, *It Was Just an Accident*, by Iranian director Jafar Panahi, lost momentum during the Oscar campaign period, and *Sentimental Value* benefited from that shift.

With *The Secret Agent* leaving the Oscars empty-handed, fans of the film were quick to attribute the "loss" to some kind of foul play in the Academy's voting process – which can indeed be quite complex, especially in the main category, Best Picture, since it is a system based on a ranked-preference from each voter. But so far, in Oscar history, there has been no evidence of sabotage or corruption, as previously happened with the Golden Globes, which in recent years made an effort to restore their reputation.

Although it is now more diverse, with more foreign voters and women (it used to be composed mostly of

white American men), the Oscars are still an award given by the U.S. film industry and, therefore, tend to prioritize English-language films. As a result, it is expected that they will reward their own productions. Thus, the main winners were titles produced in the country, such as *One Battle After Another* and *Sinners*, even though these films were made by filmmakers with distinctive styles who do not strictly follow the commercial cinema playbook.

Despite *The Secret Agent* not receiving the Oscar for Best Picture, that statuette went to Paul Thomas Anderson, an auteur who, surprisingly, even after making films such as *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*, and *There Will Be Blood*, had not yet received a single Oscar. On Sunday (the 15th), after 14 nominations over the course of his career, he finally won in six categories (Picture, Director, Adapted Screenplay, Editing, Supporting Actor, and Ensemble). There was a sense of reparation for the 55-year-old director, though perhaps not with his best film.

In the Best Ensemble category, *One Battle After Another* deservedly took home the statuette, if we consider its diverse cast, which, in addition to the welcome surprises Chase Infiniti and Teyana Taylor, included three Oscar-winning actors – Leonardo DiCaprio, Benicio Del Toro,



Kleber Mendonça Filho and his team on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival, on May 18, 2025

and Sean Penn. Penn won Best Supporting Actor at both the Actors Awards and the 2026 Oscars, leaving Stellan Skarsgård (winner of the Golden Globe in the category) visibly disappointed.

Wagner Moura, on the other hand, entered the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles with the calm knowledge that a win would be a huge surprise, since the frontrunner status was split between Timothée Chalamet and Michael B. Jordan – the latter having already won the Actors Awards (formerly the SAG Awards), the actors' union prize.

In 2007, Wagner had become a phenomenon of popularity with his portrayal of Captain Nascimento, the protagonist of *Elite Squad*, by José Padilha, and quickly turned into an idol of Brazil's far right. But the actor from Bahia soon dismantled that image by pronouncing progressive opinions in the media and later with the direction of the film *Marighella* (2019). As a result, many people aligned with the Brazilian

far right are celebrating on social media the fact that the artist, the film he stars in, and its director did not receive an Oscar.

But if Paul Thomas Anderson took 30 years, 10 films, and 14 nominations (!) to win his first Oscar, it makes little sense for social media commentary to mock a Brazilian artist, attending the most powerful film industry's biggest night in the world, for not having won a golden statuette on his first appearance as a nominee.

Even leaving the Oscars empty-handed, *The Secret Agent*, with more than 70 awards, can consider itself victorious. After all, it is the most-watched Brazilian film of 2025/2026. It brought 2.5 million people to movie theaters in Brazil alone, not counting international audiences. It grossed more than R\$94 million worldwide. It became a cultural phenomenon and has already made History as one of the greatest films in Brazilian cinema.



FOTOS NICOLE RODRIGUES

Crowd in front of the São Luiz Cinema to watch the Oscar ceremony
Director and his team attend the premiere of the film The Secret Agent at the São Luiz Cinema, on September 10, 2025



The Secret Agent on Rua da Aurora celebrates Pernambuco's audiovisual scene

TEXTO **CLEIDE ALVES**
FOTOS **LEOPOLDO CONRADO NUNES**



Screening of a clip from *The Secret Agent* at the 98th Academy Awards

A 9,900 kilometers distance and a four-hour difference on the clock separate Recife from Los Angeles. But on Sunday, March 15, 2026, a film with a Northeastern Brazilian accent – and its run for an Oscar statuette – intertwined the two cities. The celebration on Hollywood Boulevard, the address of the Dolby Theatre, where the world's biggest film awards take place, was broadcast at Cinema São Luiz, one of the filming locations of *The Secret Agent*. Rua da Aurora brought together the largest cheering crowd rooting for the victory of Kleber Mendonça Filho's feature film, nominated in four categories.

If in California (USA), at the Hollywood Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences gala, men wear black tie and women show off glamorous gowns, the universal outfit at the “Pernambuco at the Oscars” ceremony, promoted by the state government, was Wagner Moura's yellow T-shirt. Or rather, the T-shirt of the Troça Carnavalesca Pitombeira dos Quatro Cantos, from Olinda, which the character Marcelo/Armando wore in the film and which became a craze. Everything was yellow on the red carpet rolled out on Rua da Aurora, in the Boa Vista neighborhood,



Spectators filled the screening room of the São Luiz Cinema, many of them with Pitombeira shirt



downtown Recife, to welcome the public with frevo music and cultural attractions.

Cinema São Luiz, Rua da Aurora, the bridges over the Capibaribe River, and the old buildings of downtown Recife – filming locations for the movie – set the tone for the “Pernambuco at the Oscars” celebration, organized by the Pernambuco State Department of Culture (Secult-PE) and the Pernambuco Historical and Artistic Heritage Foundation (Fundarpe). The free program featured the Pitombeira dos Quatro Cantos and its frevo orchestra, as well as a parade of giant puppets depicting Kleber Mendonça Filho, Wagner Moura, and Tânia Maria (Dona Sebastiana).

A night to remember. That was the phrase most often heard among film lovers right after the Oscars ceremony ended, which was broadcast simultaneously inside Cinema São Luiz and on a large screen on Rua da Aurora, in a Carnival-like atmosphere. “*The Secret Agent* didn’t win, but I see no reason for frustration. We have to celebrate the potential of Pernambuco’s audiovisual scene and the leading role of our cinema,” says Elaine Oliveira, a postgraduate student in Visual Communication at the Catholic University of Pernambuco.



Image of downtown Recife shown in the scene from *The Secret Agent* at the 98th Academy Awards

A resident of Bomba do Hemetério, a neighborhood in Recife's North Zone, she made a point of following the ceremony through to the end at the "Pernambuco at the Oscars" celebration. "We showed how an excellent film promotion campaign is done. It was absolutely worth being part of this unique moment in cinema," says Elaine.

Journalist and copy editor Bruno Gomes was also present on Rua da Aurora, amid the crowd that filled the banks of the Capibaribe River. "There's no feeling of frustration at all, but rather pride in being and living what is most genuine about being from Recife and Pernambuco: love for our cultural identity. *The Secret Agent*, by Kleber Mendonça, came to crown this feeling – especially for film production in the state – by encouraging training and production in Pernambuco cinema, which has a history that goes back to Aurora Filmes in the early last century," emphasizes Bruno Gomes.

Actor Kaiony Venâncio, who plays Vilmar, the hitman in the feature film, traveled from Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), where he lives, to watch the ceremony of the world's biggest film awards at São Luiz. On Rua da Aurora, at every step he was approached by fans to pose for photos and record videos. "It was a wonderful surprise to receive all this affection. I didn't imagine there would be so many people," Kaiony comments. "We have no control over the voting, but I already feel awarded for being here tonight. And if there were an Oscar for hospitality, you would win it."

Architect and urban planner Amélia Reynaldo made the following observation about the awards: "More



There is no feeling of frustration, but rather of pride in being and living what the people of Recife and Pernambuco have that is most genuine: the love for our cultural identity."

important than the Academy's result is the recognition of downtown Recife in Kleber Mendonça Filho's films. Throughout his career, he shows Recife – its problems, its peculiarities, its daily life, its real estate issues. The feeling I have is that the country has already awarded *The Secret Agent*, a film that highlights what the city has that is most precious: its historic center."

The "Pernambuco at the Oscars" celebration began at 6:30 p.m. and ended around midnight. "Regardless of the awards outcome, this is an unforgettable moment. Cinema São Luiz, which welcomed people from Pernambuco for the Oscars ceremony and served as a filming location for *The Secret Agent*, is the temple of our



SILLA CABENGUE/FUNДАРPE

People celebrating in front of the screen positioned on Rua da Aurora



Olinda puppets by Wagner Moura and Kleber Mendonça Filho entertained the revelers/spectators



audiovisual culture,” emphasizes Fundarpe president Renata Borba.

“I consider São Luiz, a public street movie theater, to be the listed monument most embraced by the people of Pernambuco,” says Renata Borba. “Tonight (March 15) will stay in our memory because it brought together the people, tangible heritage, and intangible heritage,” she adds, referring to the cinema, inaugurated in 1952, and the Troça Pitombeira dos Quatro Cantos, from Olinda, one of the celebration’s cultural attractions.

For researcher of street cinemas Kate Saraiva, broadcasting the ceremony at São Luiz, complete with a red carpet on Rua da Aurora, was moving. “Seeing the power of Pernambuco cinema on the screen is incredible,” she says. “I couldn’t miss being here on this historic day, full of energy and excitement, at such a beautiful and creative celebration,” concludes documentary filmmaker Leila Jinkings, mother of actress Maeve Jinkings, who was part of the cast of *Neighboring Sounds*, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and released in 2013.

Kleber Mendonça Filho and his team on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival, on May 18, 2025



The international rise of a filmmaker

SOPHYA URSINE / DIVULGAÇÃO

DÉBORA NASCIMENTO

The Secret Agent

has cemented the name of filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho in the international film market. This is the first time a film from Pernambuco competes at the Oscars, and, right away, in its main categories: Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor in a Leading Role, and the new one for Best Casting. With that, *The Secret Agent* places Pernambuco, Recife, and Brazil at the epicenter of the global cultural conversation. Wagner Moura, for instance, in his interview on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on March 4, was asked by the host about the giant Olinda carnival puppet made in his honor – noting that Kleber Mendonça Filho has also “become” one of them.

Everything related to the film has been drawing attention and public engagement, such as the Pitombeira

CHRONOLOGY

22/11/1968

The director Kleber Mendonça Filho is born in Recife.

1982–1986

Lives in Colchester, Essex, England, with his mother and brother.

1986

The family returns to Recife.

1992

Graduates in Journalism from the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE).

T-shirt worn by Wagner Moura in one of the scenes. That alone was enough for the shirt to become a sales hit, on the bloco's website, through alternative brands, and even among street vendors. *The Secret Agent* has also encouraged many tourists to visit Recife to see the film's locations on scheduled tours.

The buzz surrounding the feature film has filled the pages of national and international press, rekindling the pride of being from Pernambuco and from Brazil – a feeling perhaps comparable to an excellent performance by the Brazilian National Team in a Soccer World Cup.

The film's success was not generated solely during its production period, but over decades of cinephilia, be it as spectator, critic, or filmmaker, on the part of Kleber Mendonça Filho. To understand the magnitude of what *The Secret Agent* represents today, it is necessary to go back to the roots of its author in Recife and understand that his training did not begin behind the camera, but in front of the screen and in the pages of the press.

A Journalism graduate from the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Kleber worked for 13 years as a film critic, writing on his website *Cinemascópio* and for outlets such as *Jornal do Commercio*, *Folha de S.Paulo*, and *Continente*. This practice of analysis, of deconstructing images and understanding narrative rhythm, shaped the future filmmaker.

His period as an observer culminated, in 2008, with the documentary *Crítico*. The film brings together testimonies from various filmmakers and colleagues about the importance of film criticism. In the same year, he created the Janela International Film Festival, with a special program each year, screening classics, restored films, and new releases of art cinema at the São Luiz Theater and the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation cinemas.

This was an extension of his work as a programmer at the Cinema da Fundação (Fundaj). In 2001, he taught the course "Critical Eye," from which new talents of Pernambuco's audiovisual scene emerged, becoming collaborators of Kleber in several of his productions, such as Daniel Bandeira, Pedro Sotero, and Juliano Dornelles, the latter being co-director on *Bacurau* (2019).

His short films, produced over 15 years starting in 1992 with *Homem de projeção* (about Seu Alexandre, the projectionist who became a character in *The Secret Agent*), served as the laboratory for his fiction feature films, the first of which was *Neighboring Sounds* (2012). Made with a budget of R\$ 1.8 million, the film was included in *The New York Times*' list of the ten best films of the year.

1990–2000

Works as a cultural journalist and film critic. Begins his filmmaking career directing notable short films, including *The Cotton Girl* (2002), *Eletrodoméstica* (2005), *Friday Night, Saturday Morning* (2007) and *Cold Tropics* (2009), the latter winning the Brasília Film Festival.

2012

Neighboring Sounds: His debut fiction feature is elected one of the ten best films of the year by *The New York Times* and chosen to represent Brazil at the Oscars.

2016

Aquarius: Starring Sônia Braga, the film competes for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Its release is marked by the cast and crew's red-carpet protest against the impeachment of then-president Dilma Rousseff. It wins FIPRESCI awards and solidifies his international reputation.

2019

Bacurau: Co-directed by Juliano Dornelles, the sci-fi/social thriller wins the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

2020

Bacurau on the Map: Releases the behind-the-scenes short documentary on the making of *Bacurau*.

2023

Pictures of Ghosts: Documentary focused on the history of downtown Recife's movie theaters and on the director's own trajectory. Premieres at the Cannes Film Festival (Special Screenings) and is selected to represent Brazil in the race for a spot at the 2024 Oscars.

In 2016, with *Aquarius*, starring Sônia Braga, the director experienced one of the defining moments of his public image due to his political stance expressed publicly in protest against the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff.

Critique of power structures and class relations also permeates the themes of his films. If in *Aquarius* resistance was urban, focused on preserving a physical and emotional space, in *Bacurau* (2019) it became collective, dystopian, and visceral, earning Brazil the Jury Prize at Cannes.

The Secret Agent tells the story of a professor and university researcher (Wagner Moura) who travels from São Paulo to Pernambuco to try to escape a death threat during the military dictatorship. His plan is to leave Recife for abroad with his son. Before that, however, he must retrieve from a public archive documents related to his mother's past.

The impact of *The Secret Agent* has already secured more than 159 award nominations, accumulating 85 wins (according to the Internet Movie Database), since

2025

The Secret Agent: A political-historical thriller set in 1977 Recife, starring Wagner Moura. Premieres at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, where Kleber wins the Best Director Award and Moura wins Best Actor, in addition to the FIPRESCI Prize and the Prix des Cinémas d'Art et Essai (AFCAE).

2026

The Secret Agent accumulates awards, including Best Non-English Language Film and Best Actor (Wagner Moura) at the 2026 Golden Globes, and is shortlisted for multiple categories at the 2026 Oscars, a record for Brazilian cinema.

Sônia Braga in a promotional photo for the film *Aquarius*, released in 2016





Fellipe Fernandes, assistant director, Kleber Mendonça Filho and Wagner Moura, behind the scenes of the filming of *The Secret Agent*

its premiere at Cannes in May 2025, where it won the awards for Best Director and Best Actor (for Wagner Moura). The film solidified its path of acclaim with the announcement from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on January 22, 2026.

With its four nominations for the 2026 Oscars, *The Secret Agent* surpasses *City of God* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, as neither of those films received as many nominations in the main categories.

By February, the film, which cost around R\$ 27 million, had drawn 2.4 million viewers to theaters, grossing R\$ 50.9 million at the Brazilian box office. The partnership with distributor Neon – the same behind the 2025 Oscar winner *Anora* – strengthened the international campaign, leading the feature to win Best Foreign Language Film at the 2026 Critics Choice Awards and the Golden Globe for Best International Film in 2026.

During the film's international promotional campaign, Kleber Mendonça Filho has taken the opportunity to establish connections with filmmakers, actors, producers, and distributors abroad. At the traditional luncheon offered to Oscar nominees, he spoke with artists such as Paul Thomas Anderson and shared the room with Steven Spielberg, whose *Jaws* (1975), the first blockbuster, is mentioned in *The Secret Agent*.

The director's fascination with cinema was sparked by his mother, historian Joselice Jucá (1941–1995), who took Kleber and his brother to Recife's movie theaters, like Cine Boa Vista, Art Palácio, Veneza, and São Luiz (a location in *The Secret Agent*), all mentioned in the documentary *Pictures*

of Ghosts (2023), in which the director reveals his personal and professional journey, his influences, and documents Recife's urban transformations.

Joselice also passed on to Kleber her caring for the people. That is why, in his films, ordinary citizens have a voice, as in *The Secret Agent*. Such is the case of artisan and seamstress Tânia Maria, 78. An extra in *Bacurau*, she earned the role of Dona Sebastiana, a character who shelters refugees like Marcelo (Wagner Moura).

Regardless of the outcome on the night of March 15, 2026, when the film faces strong contenders such as the Norwegian *Sentimental Value* in the Best International Feature category, and *One Battle After Another*, *Sinners*, and *Hamnet* in the Best Picture category, the four Oscar nominations are already considered a victory for Brazilian and Pernambucan cinema.

With all this, Kleber Mendonça Filho has become the filmmaker from Pernambuco with the greatest international prominence. Three of his fiction features, *Aquarius* (2016), *Bacurau* (2019), and *The Secret Agent* (2025), premiered worldwide at the Cannes Film Festival, competing for the Palme d'Or. Four of them, *Neighboring Sounds* (2012), *Aquarius* (2016), *Pictures of Ghosts* (2023), and *The Secret Agent* (2025), were included in *The New York Times'* list of the ten best films of the year.

Today, he has accumulated more than 180 awards over more than 30 years as a filmmaker, with 11 productions – seven short films and six feature-length films, including the documentaries *Crítico* (2008) and *Pictures of Ghosts* (2023).



Kleber Mendonça Filho and José Afonso Jr., with whom he made the short film *Lixo nos Canais* (1995)

Quick brushstrokes of Kleber Mendonça Filho's profile prior to the cameras

ERNESTO BARROS

In early July 1992, the Center for Arts and Communication at the Federal University of Pernambuco invited me to be part of the examination committee for an experimental project created by two students who were about to complete their journalism degree. Composed of two videos and a photographic exhibition, it dealt with the disappearance of neighborhood movie theaters in Recife.

The experimental project belonged to the young Elissama Cantalice and Kleber Mendonça. I believe I walked into the room knowing nothing except the project's title. But I remember my enthusiasm, the faint memories I had of those theaters, and my fascination with Seu Alexandre, the character in *Homem de projeção* (*Projectionist Man*), with whom I would later spend a lot of time when he was hired as

the projectionist for Cine Ribeira after the closing of the ArtPalácio in 1993.

I can't explain how those images of Recife's cinemas and Seu Alexandre's work crossed time and became the backbone of Kleber's two most recent films, *Pictures of Ghosts* and *The Secret Agent*, which blend past and present, personal life and fiction, in an organic way.

Little by little, I learned that Kleber had spent several years in Colchest, England, alongside his brother Múcio and his mother Joselice. I visited Kleber's house many times. In our first conversations, I saw that he had a deep fascination with films and with the way they were made and shown in movie theaters.

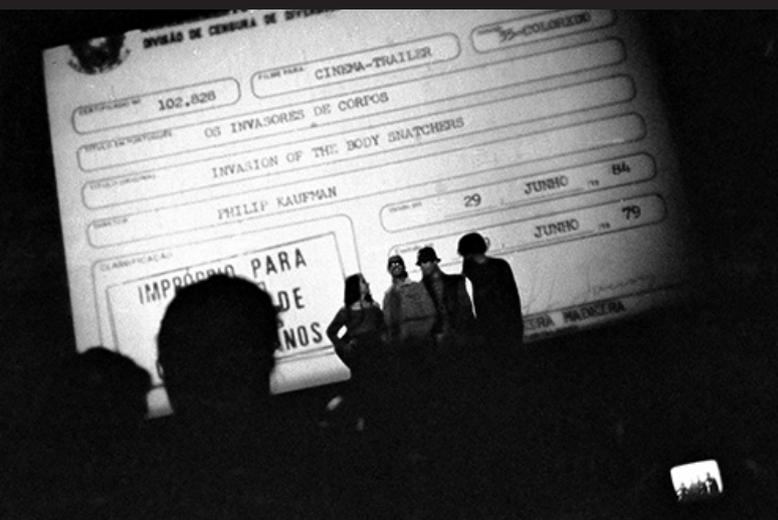
The living room of his Setúbal home was the best home cinema one could imagine. TVs in the 1990s were not extremely large, the standard was the 21" Sony Trinitron.



ACERVO AFONSO JR.

Kleber directed the music video for *Nervoso na Beira do Mar*, by Jorge Cabeleira e o Dia em que Seremos Todos inúteis

Kleber Mendonça Filho produced and directed the music video for *A Great Way Off*, by the band Templo Nublado



ACERVO AFONSO JR.

The apartment that belonged to Kleber's mother is the setting for several productions and parties



REPRODUÇÃO

Almost every Saturday, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes at night, he invited friends to watch films or for parties. There was a legendary screening of *Pink Floyd: The Wall*, by Alan Parker. At the parties, I remember standing still trying to figure out where the sound of REM, Prince, or Talking Heads was coming from. It felt like a rain of sounds invading my head, entering through the cerebral cortex like a neural experience.

In 1993, he was hired as a culture reporter for *Caderno C*, where he could write about everything he loved, film reviews, TV programs, music videos, and homecinema technology. In March, I was called to cover a month of vacation for Alexandre Figueirôa, then the film critic for *Caderno C*. We shared some assignments, the most notable being the rerelease of *Blade Runner*, by Ridley Scott, in the Director's Cut version, which premiered at Cine Ribeira. Shortly before that, he had shown me the videodisc of the International Cut, which already included extras such as texts and production design sketches.

Kleber didn't stay long in this first phase at *Jornal do Commercio*. He accepted an invitation from the American Consulate and went on to run the USIS (United States Information Service) office in Recife. There, Kleber worked hard to bring film retrospectives and university professors for lectures at universities and language schools. He curated an Orson Welles retrospective at the Ribeira and another of D.W. Griffith at the José Carlos Cavalcanti Borges Cinema Theater, which later became Cinema da Fundação. And he didn't stop making films.

In 1995, when Alexandre Figueirôa went to France to pursue his PhD, I returned for another stint at *Caderno C*, where I stayed until the first semester of 1997. Since I had been working in TV journalism at Globo Nordeste since 1985 and had finally completed my journalism degree at Unicap, I stayed there when I was promoted from image editor to text editor.

By luck, more than misfortune, the United States decided to shut down USIS, and Kleber was free to take over film criticism at *Jornal do Commercio*.

From the moment he joined the JC, Kleber was invited to implement the programming of Cinema da Fundação, while also dedicating himself more intensely to creating and producing his own films, which would project him internationally.

Ernesto Barros is a journalist, film critic, film programmer, and coauthor of *História ilustrada - Os 100 anos do cinema em Pernambuco*

FILMOGRAPHY

Fiction feature films

Neighboring Sounds (2012)

Life on a middle-class street in Recife undergoes a transformation when a private security company is hired to patrol the area. The presence of the guards bring a sense of protection but also awakens latent tensions and past traumas among the neighbors. The film uses sound design to create an atmosphere of constant unease and threat. It is a chronicle about fear, colonial legacy, and class division in contemporary Brazil.



Awards

36th São Paulo International Film Festival (2012) – **Best Film**
 Itamaraty Award (2012) – **Best Film**
 Rio Film Festival (2012) – **Best Film**
 Gramado Film Festival (2012) – **Best Film, Best Sound, Critics' Award**



International Film Festival Rotterdam (2012) – **Critics' Award**
 Poland Film Festival (2012) **Best Film**
 Copenhagen International Film Festival (2012) – **Best Film**
 Serbia Film Festival (2012) **Best Film**
 3rd Cinema Tropical Awards (2013) **Best Film**
 Toronto Film Critics Association (2013) **Best Film**
 Grande Prêmio do Cinema Brasileiro (2014) – **Best Original Screenplay**

Aquarius (2016)

Clara is a retired journalist and widow who lives in the Aquarius, the last old-style building on Boa Viagem Avenue in Recife. She faces harassment from a construction company that has bought all the other apartments and wants to demolish the building for a new development. Resisting the pressure, Clara defends not only her home but also her history, memory, and autonomy. The film is a portrait of individual resistance against cultural erasure and the power of real estate capital. Sônia Braga's performance is the pillar of a work about time and identity.



Awards

ICS Cannes Awards (2016) **Best Actress (Sônia Braga)**
 Sydney Film Festival (2016) **Best Film**

Transatlantyk Festival (2016) **Best Film**
 Lima Film Festival (2016) **Jury Prize, Best Actress (Sônia Braga)**
 World Cinema Amsterdam Festival (2016) **Best Film**
 Biarritz Amérique Latine Festival (2016) **Jury Prize, Best Actress (Sônia Braga)**
 Festival de Mar del Plata (2016) **ACCA Award – Best Film in the International Competition, Audience Award, Silver Astor for Best Actress (Sônia Braga)**
 Havana Film Festival (2016) **FIPRESCI Prize, Signis Prize, Roque Dalton Prize, Don Quixote Prize, Best Actress (Sônia Braga)**
 APCA Trophy (2016) **Best Film, Best Screenplay**

Aquarius (2016)

Fénix Awards (2016)
Best Director, Best Actress
(Sônia Braga)
San Diego Film Critics
Society Awards (2016)
Best Actress (Sônia Braga)
Syndicat français de la
critique de cinéma (2017)
Best Foreign Film
Bravo! Award (2017)
Best Feature Film
Cartagena Film Festival
(2017)
Best Film
Dublin Film Critics Circle
Awards (2017)
Best Film



CINEMASCOPIO/DIVULGAÇÃO

CINE SESC Best of the Year (2017)
**Critics' Award for Best Film, Best
Director, Best Actress (Sônia Braga), Best
Screenplay; Audience Award for Best Film,
Best Director, Best Actress (Sônia Braga),
Best Screenplay**
Panama Film Festival (2017)
Best Ibero-American Film
ABC Cinematography Award (2017)
Best Editing

ABRA Screenwriting Award (2017)
Best Fiction Feature Screenplay
Platino Awards (2017)
Best Actress (Sônia Braga)
Grande Prêmio do Cinema Brasileiro
(2017)
**Best Fiction Feature, Best Director,
Best Score**
Condor de Plata Awards (2018)
Best Ibero-American Film

Bacurau (2019)

In the backlands of Pernambuco, the small village of Bacurau realizes it has suddenly disappeared from digital maps after the death of its matriarch. Strange events begin to occur, including the presence of drones and a group of armed foreigners lurking in the region. The residents discover they are being hunted down and decide to organize a collective, armed resistance to defend their community. Mixing genres such as western and science fiction, the film is a political allegory about sovereignty and popular struggle. Directed in partnership with Juliano Dornelles.



Awards
Cannes Film Festival (2019) – **Jury Prize**
Munich Film Festival (2019) – **Best Film**
Lima Film Festival (2019)
Best Film, Best Director
APCA Trophy (2019)
Best Film, Best Director
Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film
Festival (2019) – **Best Film**
Montreal Festival of New Cinema (2019)
Best Film



CINEMASCOPIO/DIVULGAÇÃO

Grande Prêmio do Cinema Brasileiro
(2020) – **Best Film, Best Actor**
(Silvero Pereira), **Best Director, Best
Original Screenplay, Best Editing,
Best Visual Effects**
ABC Cinematography Award (2020)
Best Feature Cinematography
(Pedro Sotero), **Best Editing (Eduardo
Serrano), Best Production Design**
(Thales Junqueira), **Best Sound**
(Nicolas Hallet, Ricardo Cutz, and
Cyril Holtz)
Online Critics Society Awards
(2020) – **Best Foreign Film**

Pictures of Ghosts (2023)

This personal documentary explores the history of downtown Recife through the evolution of its now-extinct street movie theaters. Using archival material and home footage, Kleber Mendonça Filho reflects on how these spaces shaped the city's culture and social life over the decades. The film connects the history of his own home and family with urban decay and the technological transformations of cinema. It is a melancholic and affectionate work about the passage of time, architecture, and the persistence of the ghosts of the past. The narrative turns the urban geography into a sentimental and historical map of a Brazilian capital.



Awards

Lima PUCP Film Festival (2023)
 Jury Prize for Best Documentary
 Pingyao International Film Festival (2023)
 People's Choice Award Gala – Best Film
 Rio Grande do Sul Film Critics Association (ACCIRS) (2023)
 Best National Feature



São Paulo Association of Art Critics (2024)

Best Film

CINE SESC Best of the Year (2024)
 Critics' Award for Best Director,
 Best Documentary; Audience Award
 for Best Film, Best Director, Best
 Documentary

ABRA Screenwriting Award (2024)

Best Documentary Screenplay

Brazil Online Film Award (2024)

Best Non-Fiction Film

The Secret Agent (2025/2026)

Set in 1977, the film follows a man who arrives in Recife seeking refuge and anonymity during Brazil's military dictatorship. He tries to rebuild his life while being watched and suspecting he is being followed by invisible forces of the State. The plot dives into an atmosphere of paranoia and suspense, exploring the political tension and social control of the period through a personal lens. The feature marks Mendonça Filho's return to fiction with a focus on political



thriller and historical drama. It is an investigation into surveillance, political memory, and the scars left by authoritarianism in Brazil.

Shorts and documentaries

Homem de projeção and Casa de imagem (documentaries, 9' and 14', 1992)

Made with Elissama Cantalice as their final project for the Journalism program at UFPE, the two films address the decline of street movie theaters in Recife, a theme later revisited in *Pictures of Ghosts*. The first focuses on projectionist Alexandre Moura ("Seu Alexandre"), who became a fictional character in *The Secret Agent*.

Lixo nos canais (documentary, 35', 1995)

Co-directed with José Afonso Jr., it compiles some of the most absurd and offensive TV commercials aired in Pernambuco during the 1980s and 1990s, accompanied by commentary from the filmmakers behind such pieces.



Caged In (fiction, 33', 1997)

Filmed at Kleber Mendonça Filho's Setúbal apartment, which would serve as set for several of his films, it follows a character slowly losing his sanity in self-imposed isolation driven by middle-class paranoia, which fences off everything it owns. The idea is revisited in *Neighboring Sounds*.



The Little Cotton Girl (fiction, 6', 2003)

A collaboration with Daniel Bandeira (director of the features *Amigos de Risco* and *Property*), it is a "tale" about Recife's urban legends and hauntings, such as the little dead girl said to roam school bathrooms in the 1970s.



Green Vinyl (fiction, 17', 2004)

A film made from photographs that recreate a Russian fable about a cursed song. The music was composed and recorded by Silvério Pessoa.



Eletrodoméstica (fiction, 22', 2005)

An exercise in several themes that would later be developed in *Neighboring Sounds*, it follows the solitary yet yearning daily life of a 1990s housewife surrounded by household appliances.

Friday Night, Saturday Morning (fiction, 16', 2008)

A phone call between Recife and Kiev highlights the challenges faced by a young couple in a long-distance relationship.

Crítico (documentary, 1h22', 2008)

Filmed between 1998 and 2007, it features about 70 interviews with directors and critics from Brazil, Europe, and the United States about the conflict between creator and observer.



Cold Tropics (fiction, 25', 2009)

A "mockumentary" about climate change in the tropical capital of Pernambuco, which inexplicably becomes cold. Changes in the population's behavior address recurring themes in the director's filmography, such as social inequality and real estate speculation.

INTERVIEW

“It’s possible to be popular and good”





The filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho retraces his path, from childhood visits to movie theaters to his work as a critic, curator, and filmmaker who has helped decentralize audiovisual production in Brazil

Kleber Mendonça Filho in a press conference at the pre-premiere of *The Secret Agent* at Cinema São Luiz, on September 10, 2025

TEXT BY DÉBORA NASCIMENTO AND LUCIANA VERAS

Amid the release of *Bacurau*, Kleber Mendonça Filho gave a long interview to **Contínente**, published in September 2019. In it, the filmmaker revisited the beginnings of his passion for cinema, from the days when his mother, historian Joselice Jucá, took him to the old movie theaters, through the period he lived in England, and up to his return to the capital of Pernambuco. In this conversation, the director talks about his trajectory, education, work as a critic, inspirations, the market, and Brazilian cinema.

How was your relationship with images in childhood? What are your earliest memories of cinema and TV?

From a very early age, I had a very strong inclination toward cinema, toward the idea of cinema. It wasn't something I discovered at 11 or 14.

What is your earliest memory of a film?

There are two: going to the São Luiz with my mother to watch a *Tom & Jerry* marathon, which was very common at the time. You'd watch more than an hour of cartoons. And the other is a film called *The Island at the Top of the World*, which played at the Boa Vista. I was so little that, when we left and were standing in front of the theater, I saw the poster and reacted with total amazement: "Look, the poster of the film we just saw!" That was in 1973, I was five years old. It was me and my brother. Naturally, my mother took both of us to the movies. Something I think about a lot is that my generation is the last one that had access to the big theaters functioning normally. It was normal to go to the São Luiz, the Moderno, the Art Palácio. I still had that as a young adult. But then they closed. Each theater had a strong personality, not only architecturally, but each one's programming had a strong personality.

The Moderno was the hard hitting one, for the harder, macho films. The Veneza showed the big productions, the blockbusters. The São Luiz was very popular. Pernambuco was very lucky to have these theaters, each one building a different idea of cinema.

Was that your greatest childhood pastime?

It was a normal childhood, having friends at school, going to friends' houses, playing soccer... but going to the movies was extremely important to me. I remember typing on a typewriter to ask my mother to take me to see a certain film on the schedule. She always encouraged it a lot.



I learned that it is possible to be popular and good. You don't need to be popular and bad. "Auteur" and inaccessible, I think that's a distortion that exists in Brazilian cinema

At that time, what was your favorite genre?

But that's another thing. It was a very... different time. Today you have great films, but back then you had great popular films. Today it's harder to see a great popular film. But at that time, you'd see great films on a Tuesday afternoon at the Art Palácio. I think I was very lucky to grow up then. Today, the films I used to watch are shown in cinematheques and film festivals in restored copies for young people to rediscover. And you would just go on a Tuesday afternoon to the Art Palácio. Or the Moderno, or the Veneza.

Did you have a favorite theater?

I'm making a new film that is an essay on archaeology, starting from downtown Recife. From the extinct theaters. I've been working on it for a few years. I filmed in VHS, some Super 8, and some U-Matic from Center. By the way,

Genivaldo (di Pace), from *(the production company)* Center, deserves something very important said about him. He is present in all Pernambuco productions from the 1990s, from Fernando Spencer to Paulo Caldas, Lírio Ferreira, and Cláudio Assis. He helped everyone. *Caged In* was entirely made with Center. The only theater that survived, the São Luiz, is our unanimous favorite, the cinema we love. But if you really talk to people, the theater that lives in their hearts is the Veneza. Once, I posted a photo of the Veneza on Instagram, how it used to be and how it looked during a recent visit. There were 300 comments. Not silly comments, but heartfelt ones. That fascinates me, because it shows the impact a building can have. Someone built that with brick, cement, and decoration, and it had an impact on people. Imagine if the Tacaruna Multiplex closed, I don't know if anyone would say, "That theater 4 was so beautiful..." Because everything now follows the shoebox standard, which has to be practical.

The Veneza really had that quality of being a meeting point. It was a place of social life.

Because it was downtown. Last Friday, something beautiful happened. We left some friends' house, drove down Rua do Hospício, passed in front of the Veneza, and I thought: "Forty-five years ago, there would have been a line here for the 10 p.m. screening. What a shame!" But then, at the corner of Conde da Boa Vista, there was this wonderful group of 60 young people, of all kinds. And I thought: "How amazing!" In other words, the city changes but remains alive. Now the Veneza is in an almost organic, biological metamorphosis, turning into a low-income shopping center. They're building it almost like an Escher drawing. The upper part, where the balcony used to be, is completely intact because they don't know what to do with it. The lower part, where the audience sat, has become a bunch of cubes, corridors, stalls. This says a lot about how the city becomes something else. You go to a place, run your finger along a wall, and you can already see the past of that place beneath the paint.

Let's go back to your childhood and teenage years. There was a period when you lived in England, right? What was that like?

My mother went to do her PhD in History in England and took her children. We stayed from 1982 until the end of 1986. It was a very good period. Adolescence, from 14 to 18. We lived in Colchester, in Essex, Blur's hometown. My parents had already separated. My father stayed in Brazil. We went four years without coming back to Brazil because flying was much harder than it is today.



Kleber during the filming of the short film *Caged In*

How important was that period for your cultural formation?

I think it was enormous. But at the same time, that question is a bit like asking, “Do you think being a critic helped you?” I don’t know, but maybe yes. You can’t quantify it. Living in England gave me a language I command very well. That’s very important. Today, many more people speak English than back then. When I came back, it was something much less accessible. Because of the internet, English is more present. But it was very important, for reading, for making friends.

Was the experience of being a moviegoer in England different from being a moviegoer in Brazil?

Actually, in Recife I had access to everything the world and the English had in the 1970s. De Palma, Spielberg, *Superman*, everything was exhibited here. I grew up watching that. I was lucky to witness the good moment of popular American cinema. In fact, I learned back then that it’s possible to be popular and good. You don’t have to be popular and bad. Or *auteur* and inaccessible, which I

think is a distortion that exists in Brazilian cinema. There is always this abyss between popular film and auteur film, which is exactly the combination I try to achieve in my films. What happened in England is that, naturally, I moved away from the American diet, because if you let it run free, that’s what will shape everyone.

That was what we had most regularly here, and what we had the most access to.

Luckily, in the 1970s, I saw incredible films that are still very good today. They’re films that became part of cinema history, and they were American. But when I arrived in England, because of Channel 4, the BBC, and the film clubs, I began to have access to another diet – without dismissing the American diet, which I still enjoy. But then you get the films by those guys called Herzog, Fassbinder...

Do you remember if you saw anything by Truffaut in England?

The first time I saw Truffaut was on Channel 4. And it’s interesting because I watched it without any notion of



ACERVO DP

Image of the defunct Cinema Moderno, in the Santo Antônio neighborhood, is part of the documentary *Pictures of Ghosts* (2023)

his importance. I simply loved the film. It was *The 400 Blows*. And years later, in my first semester at UFPE, a professor started a discussion about that film and showed a photo. I said, “I’ve seen that film. That film is really good!” That’s when I began to understand its importance. Another important moment was the English TV premiere of Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo*. He had some funding from Channel 4, and it premiered on English TV a month after the theatrical release. It didn’t play in my little town, it played in London. We went to London every month. It was almost religious. My mother took us to the cinema, exhibitions, concerts, and it always ended with a film at Leicester Square. Sometimes we went on Saturday and slept there. Usually, we’d arrive early and return at night.

And when you returned to Brazil, did you experience any shock?

I didn’t have a shock going, nor did I have a shock coming back. I was very interested in England when I left, and very interested in Brazil when I returned. I came back in 1986, and the city was covered with Arraes posters. My uncle picked us up at the airport, and his car was

covered with Arraes posters glued to the bodywork, with the phrase: “He will return through the same door he left.”

Did you already have a sense of politics at that time?

Brazil was very messy, you could see it in the city. Of course, after four years as a teenager in England, you return to Brazil and there’s inflation, the country had just come out of the Cruzado Plan, Tancredo had died. But what I missed the most was music. I had fallen in love with pop music. And when I came back to Brazil, it wasn’t there. I used to go to the newsstand on Rua Sete de Setembro to buy the *New Musical Express*, the *Rolling Stone* from three months earlier. RPM was a phenomenon, and everyone said it was amazing. I listened to it and thought it was terrible. By then, I had already listened to The Cure, Eurythmics, Tears for Fears, Queen, Prince, whom I saw twice before returning. But what kept me happy was that I came back and there were still great movie theaters, showing amazing films with excellent quality. I kept going to the Veneza, saw *Blue Velvet* and *The Fly* at the São Luiz. It was as if I had left England – and cinema built a bridge.

You didn't feel in cinema the same interruption you felt in music.

I missed seeing more films outside the mainstream, but then VHS already existed. We returned to our original apartment in Setúbal. That was a bit of a shock, because that's when all the observation that appears in my films began. We returned to Setúbal and I noticed two things. The building where my father lived on Rua Oliveira Lima, in Boa Vista, when we were kids, you walked on the sidewalk and entered the building's courtyard, which was beautiful, with a garden, leading to an elevator. When we came back, there was a gate. And a few years later, they built a guardhouse that looked like a prison checkpoint. And in Setúbal, it was the same thing. You entered from the street and walked straight to our apartment door. But then they started putting up barriers. One day, I left home in the morning to go to university, and there was a man sleeping at our apartment door. That's when I realized everyone was closing themselves off. But no one noticed it. I had lived almost five years in England with the window open, without bars. And my window, when I opened it in Recife, had bars. When I made *Caged In*, a woman said that the bars were part of the film's production design. In the film, people see them, but in real life, they don't.

How did journalism come into your life?

It came because it was the closest thing to cinema that existed at the time. I think that as a child I never said, "I want to be a filmmaker." But I wanted to work with cinema. And since Recife, forty years ago, was very far from everything, much more than today, I don't think I had the possibility of imagining that. But my mother always encouraged me to think in that direction. There was even an incident in a classroom when I said I wanted to be a film critic. This was before going to England, in 1981 or 1982. And the teacher told me, "Shut up, boy." I told my mother, and the next day she went to the school, called the man out, and gave him a scolding: "Never speak to my son like that again. You have no idea what goes on in his mind." It was at Escola Dourado, at the end of Setúbal. But I don't want that teacher to appear in the story as a villain. He has passed away. He was a great Portuguese teacher. And he encouraged me a lot in writing.

But how did journalism itself come about?

I had a romantic view of journalism, to me, it was the writer who reported, I thought of Hemingway. That view was fed by books and films. And there was this idea that I wrote well. And I was terrible at math. I considered Architecture for a few months. But I realized it wouldn't

work for me. So I studied Journalism. And when I entered the program, the best thing happened: I found many people who thought more or less like me, who were gravitating around the idea of making cinema, which, at the time, was something nonexistent. In 1981, I went with my mother to the Veneza to see *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. We walked in halfway through and stayed for the next screening. It was incredible. But thinking back, it never made me want to make films, because it was too spectacular, too grand, like, "This isn't for me." But when I discovered *Halloween*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, and *Escape from New York* on VHS, I thought, "This is really good! Maybe I can make something like this." Because they were small-scale. I don't know if any child watches *Star Wars* and says, "I want to be a filmmaker." Another thing is that my generation didn't grow up watching what we now deeply respect in Brazilian cinema. I never had the chance to see Glauber Rocha at the São Luiz, the Veneza, the Parque.



The first Glauber Rocha film I saw was in England, *The Dragon of Evil*. The same with *Pixote*. I was proud to be Brazilian and sad to know that that was Brazil."

When did you see Glauber?

The first Glauber I saw was on Channel 4 in England, *Antonio das Mortes*. I felt proud to be Brazilian. The same thing happened with *Pixote*. I felt proud and, at the same time, sad to know that that was Brazil. I didn't know Brazil was so horrible.

When you returned from England, did you realize you had grown up without seeing Brazilian films?

More or less. But then there was another problem that overshadowed the one you're mentioning. When I entered

university, and until 2002 with *City of God*, Brazilian cinema was measured and judged by everything made during Cinema Novo. People expected me, a young guy who knew nothing, to make a Cinema Novo film. Because if I didn't, I would be labeled, criticized, and whatever I made would have no value. When I made *Caged In*, which premiered at Cine Ceará in 1997, the first review said it was absurd that a filmmaker from the Northeast, "a region so rich in folklore", would make a "São Paulo film," set inside an apartment. In other words, that was Cinema Novo teaching this critic how to react to a Brazilian film. So it's very curious that, over these 20 years, I only did the opposite of what was expected at the time. And that opposite slowly became the norm. Today you see *Divine Love*, *Permanência*, *País do Desejo*, *Rat Fever*. There's no problem being from the city. That's over. It's very curious to see that the beginning of Pernambuco's major film production was, in a way, innovative and refreshing, but still obeyed the obligations of Brazilian cinema at the time. *Perfumed Ball* (1996) is about Sertão and cangaço. *Cinema, Aspirins and Vultures* (2005) is about Sertão and cangaço. They're very good films, but they still followed that. Little by little, production changed. And when production changed, what did we do? We made *Bacurau*, which is a film set in Sertão with cangaço.

Can you talk about the importance of UFPE in your cultural formation, about that environment? Because today we're seeing a dismantling of public universities.

It was a very fertile environment, there were people from Architecture, Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Broadcasting, there was a great vibe at the Center for Arts and Communication. I had a memorable professor, Nelly Carvalho. Inês Amorim too, whom I met in Portugal, in Vila do Conde. She watched *Bacurau* sitting next to me. And of course, you make many friendships, exchange many ideas, dream a lot during those four years. The university shapes you not only academically but as a human being. You build bonds, and for free. I failed the entrance exam at the Catholic University and got third place at the Federal.

How did you start in film criticism?

I went into Journalism almost by accident. I spent a year without working in the field after graduating. I taught at Cultura Inglesa. In other words, I wasn't using the talent I had developed at the Federal. Then one day I took a course with Alexandre Figueirôa, in 1991 or 1992. It was a course at the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation, with Ana Catarina

Galvão. He liked me and invited me to take a test at *Jornal do Commercio*. And I chose to write about the end of Rádio Rock, which spent a year in Recife and then shut down. It was memorable. And then the team invited me to join the Caderno C. I started writing, and writing about cinema was something natural for me. I was very influenced by English critics at the time. I still didn't read French, and in England criticism is very pragmatic. I think my early style was very pragmatic, very dry. Even a bit cruel, I admit. Youthful things. And it drew a lot of attention, in a way. Then I began to gain some resonance.

Which Brazilian critics inspired you?

When I returned from England, I read *Set* a lot, it was the film magazine we had in Brazil, and *Cinemin*, a magazine from Rio. Actually, my references since childhood were Celso Marconi and Fernando Spencer, because I would buy the newspaper to see the cinema page, not only the texts, but also the theater ads. That stimulated my imagination a lot, the posters, the age ratings, the showtimes. But they were references. The thing is, each one wrote for a different newspaper. Naturally, since childhood, I wanted to meet these people. And it's beautiful to see the trajectory of Celso, Fernando, Ivan Soares, and Alex, who passed away a few years ago. It's basically the same thing that happened to me: you start writing, then you go on to program a theater; in Fernando Spencer's case, he went on to make films. It's like a cycle that repeats itself, always around the city.

How long did you work as a critic for Jornal do Commercio?

About 13 years. I felt I had some resonance, it was interesting. But that overlapped with my work at the Foundation, which began in 1998. In other words, it was a complete immersion in cinema. It was almost obsessive. I wrote, which put me in a position of always alerting to and announcing cinema. I started going to Cannes in 1999, and there I watched anywhere between 38 and 44 films. In other words, you were fed for the rest of the year. So the Cinema da Fundação already had its entire plan. Sometimes I would call six months before a release to say I wanted to screen a film.

At that point, had your mother already passed away? Did she see *Caged In*?

No. She passed away in 1995. She saw some interesting sparks. Before she died, when *Pulp Fiction* came out, at that time *Three Colors: Red* was also being released. There's a scene in *Pulp Fiction* that I thought was the best in



Actress Sonia Braga in an image from the film *Aquarius* (2016)

a Tarantino film, and it wasn't written by him. It was written by Roger Avary, who made *Killing Zoe*. It's the scene where Bruce Willis and Ving Rhames, mortal enemies, are killing each other and end up in a shop. And a lunatic, even crazier than they are, appears, captures both of them, and takes them to a basement. One of them is raped. And then these enemies now have to unite to get out of that situation. And I wrote about *Three Colors: Red* and that scene specifically – I remember my mother wrote me a letter to read when I woke up.

Is there a lot of her in your films?

A lot. In fact, I should dedicate all my films to her. I dedicated *Neighboring Sounds* to her, because of all the historical issues. Growing up, she explained racism, social differences. All of that was explained to me and my brother from an early age, in a way that, in other families, it was like, "Oh, it's normal for the maid to do that." So I dedicated *Neighboring Sounds* to her. Then I made *Aquarius*, which is basically her. That woman is her. Of course, with a cinematic veneer, but Clara is her. In the end, Clara is her and Sônia Braga, a strange Frankenstein, but Sônia Braga is also her. Sônia Braga is an extremely interesting, strong woman, and that's her. But my mother too. Then there's *Bacurau*, which also has a lot of things. But I can't dedicate every film "to my mother." She knows it's for her.

Was that trip to Cannes the first time a journalist from Pernambuco went to cover the festival?

It was the first time a journalist was specifically sent by a newspaper to cover Cannes. In 1995, Alexandre Figueirôa was living in Paris doing his PhD, and he traveled to Cannes and sent some articles here.

But you were the first journalist sent directly from Recife, right?

Which is incredible, because the press had a very provincial bias and thought it was enough to publish syndicated material. I even heard that inside the newspaper. But then comes an amazing woman named Carole Scipion, director of the Alliance Française at the time. She knew me and said, "Shall we go to Cannes?" She went to the newspaper, had a meeting there, and said: "We're going to Cannes."

Your trip to Cannes was important because it became a tradition.

This idea is almost a life philosophy: do something so amazing that it becomes impossible for anyone not to want it again. And it had an impact. The newspaper itself surveyed its readers. It was very well received. There was progress in the relationship with culture, with cultural reporting.

It was important to decentralize production, but also the critical gaze.

These last 20 years have brought so many good things to Pernambuco's audiovisual scene, from so many different people, that today I think it's as if people have become spoiled, you know? As if it were normal to premiere a film at Sundance, Berlin, Cannes. I remember when *Perfumed Ball* won the Brasília Festival, it was like a World Cup. I won the Rio Cine with *Caged In*, a video, Best Fiction Video. And it was on our local TV News. Today someone says, "Did you see there's going to be a film in Cannes?" – "Yeah, it's normal..." It's not normal. I remember when *Cinema*, *Aspirins and Vultures* and *Green Vinyl* went to Cannes. It was incredible. A short and a feature. Never had a film from Pernambuco been in Cannes, and suddenly we had two.

You went to Cannes all those years as a journalist, you took *Green Vinyl*, and then your two features premiered in Cannes.

I think it's incredible. I never stop finding it incredible. Last year, during the shoot, the actors would say: "I'm going to go ahead and buy my ticket to Cannes." And I'd say: "Are you crazy? What do you mean? First, we have to finish the film, edit the film, send it to someone who might, maybe, who knows, like the film." – "No, but it'll be there."

But before that, as a filmmaker, you made *Caged In* in 1997, and then *The Little Cotton Girl* in 2003.

Actually, between 1998 and 2002, I gave 100% of my energy to the Cinema da Fundação and to criticism. I put production aside because I was tired. In the 1990s, I never got approved in any grant. I never won. *Eletrodoméstica* was from 1994 and I only shot it in 2004. It became a period film. What I found strange was that it felt like a joke. When there were three awards, I came in fourth. When there was one award, I came in second. When there were three awards, I came in third. It was a bit strange.

What do you attribute that to?

I don't know, because it was a very provincial grant, it was local, and basically the same people always applied. They already knew the scripts. But I think there was a hierarchy. I was like the younger group. And there was the older group.

Or was there prejudice because you were a critic?

Maybe.

You're talking about the *Firmo Neto/Ary Severo* Competition, the grant that existed?

Yes. Then I started applying to federal grants too. Petrobras, and I still didn't win. Until 2003, when I won the Ministry of Culture grant. I shot in 2004. In the 1990s, I only made video. And video was treated with what I called "format racism." It was sub-citizen. The dialogue went like this: – Are you a filmmaker? – I am. – And what's your film? – *Caged In*. – Cool. Is it 35mm? – No, it's Betacam. – Oh, it's video... It's not a film. It's video, man.

And there was the word *videomaker*.

Videomaker. And then you'd arrive at a festival and get into the van with the 35mm short filmmakers. – We're dropping you off at the guesthouse first. – Oh, we're not staying together? – No, no, the 35mm people are at the hotel. You're at the guesthouse. – Ah, okay. And what time is my video screening? – It'll screen at 3:30 p.m. in the university classroom. But you have to leave early because it's a half-hour drive. – And the shorts? – No, the shorts will screen at night. Cine Ceará was an exception. It screened at the São Luiz at night. But the projector was a small square inside the big screen. All the others were in isolated rooms. So I got tired of that, because I even made good films, but no one saw them. For a video, *Caged In* was a phenomenon. But when I took over the Foundation, I started having much greater pleasures with programming and writing. And something incredible happened: the digital revolution. When the digital revolution arrived in 1999, actually with *The Idiots* and *The Celebration* in Cannes in 1998, when I read about it in *Jornal do Brasil*, I thought: "Ah, this is a video, but it's treated as a film. This is what I need." It took two years for that revolution to reach Recife. In 2001, I restarted my production in digital – which was now more noble, it was digital cinema. Then *The Little Cotton Girl* became digital cinema. And then there's this energy cycle: the more you make, the more you make. The less you make, the less you'll ever make. Then came *The Little Cotton Girl*, then *Green Vinyl*. And magically, *Eletrodoméstica* was approved by the Ministry of Culture.

For the making of your first feature, how was the process of leaving criticism? Because you were perhaps the most celebrated critic in the city, imitated, with students wanting to write like you.

Actually, I was feeling... you know, burnout? I was entering a burnout process, not physical exhaustion, but I kept asking myself: "What's the point of continuing to give opinions about everything?" Because sometimes



Actress Maeve Jinkings in an image from the film *Neighboring Sounds* (2012)

it was six films a week. It was like: “Kleber, 30 lines about these glasses here.” – Man, these glasses... I don’t know what to say about these glasses. And that wore me out. And something incredible happened. I wrote the script for *Neighboring Sounds* in eight days, in a hotel in Belo Horizonte, to submit it for a deadline, and I sent it. It made the top 20 finalists and didn’t advance. I sent the finished script.

What is it like for you to work with the same team, the one that goes from *Neighboring Sounds* to *Aquarius* and then to *Bacurau*?

There are very delicate issues in artistic creation that involve culture, and that’s very important to me, to all of us collaborators, actually. It’s delicate to say this, but here in Pernambuco, it’s not that we’re in a bubble, every region has its own way of doing, thinking, acting. The way here is very professional, but not in the “industry manual” sense of being professional. There are many crew members from Rio and São Paulo who seem to follow a market manual of “how to be professional.” We don’t follow that; we have another manual. For those who come from outside and see us working, they’re enchanted. Of course, some aren’t enchanted and try to fight against it, and that creates conflict. That happened in *Neighboring Sounds*, in *Aquarius*, and even more intensely in *Bacurau*. And very intensely, because we were

in the backlands working with people who had never participated in a film. They were treated with a lot of respect and affection, and that’s important to say, because the machine of making a film sometimes grinds people down. Some people think that’s normal, but no, I don’t think it’s part of the job. You don’t need to grind and hurt people. I prefer to avoid that. I don’t think it’s good, and many people on the team agree. Making a film is very tense. I don’t like people who artificially add tension on top of the tension that already exists.

Let’s take advantage of what you said to ask something related to a quote by Federico Fellini, in the book *Making a Film*. He says he makes a film “as if he were fleeing, as if there were an illness he needed to overcome, full of suffering and resentment toward the film, as if it were a misfortune he needed to free himself from.” What is it like for you to make a film?

So far, I haven’t felt the suffering he describes. But from what I’ve read about film history, it’s totally viable and possible. I can understand how it could happen, but aside from the tensions and worries inherent to making a film, I haven’t experienced that suffering yet.

Any anxiety?

Oh, anxiety, always. The main anxiety is whether all this work is worth it. It’s physically demanding to make a film, a test of health: You spend eight weeks and five days in the

backlands, and every day you're fine, jumping around, full of energy. I find that incredible, truly. I haven't had a miserable moment making a film yet, but I'm sure it could happen. What does happen, a lot, are worries. In *Bacurau*, for example, we lost three days because of bad weather. Imagine standing there with your arms crossed, watching a storm as the money goes away... Each day stopped was, I don't know, R\$ 90,000. The next day, another storm: another R\$ 95,000. That's agonizing. But we were ninjas and didn't lose a single scene. There were moments when we did something that worked. For example, Juliano went one way and I went another. Everything is hard, really. Everything was hard, but at the same time, everything worked out. A film always has many pieces. It's like a Lego set. Imagine you buy a giant Lego set and think: "Damn, I have to assemble this now, it's not going to work." And it takes a very, very long time to build.



As a child, I never said: "I want to be a filmmaker." But I wanted to work with cinema. And since Recife, 40 years ago, was far from everything, I didn't have the possibility of doing that.

The endings of your films feel like a punch: the confrontation between Irandhir Santos and W.J. Solha at the end of *Neighboring Sounds*; Clara going to the construction company in *Aquarius*; and the ending of *Bacurau*. How do you build that within the film itself? Can you talk about your process of how you think about narrative and structure everything to reach those endings?

I think there must be a sense of showmanship, of wanting to give the narrative a certain pleasure of spectacle. That's in literature, in music... You can't listen to *Bohemian Rhapsody* and think all that happens because he was simply doing nothing on a Tuesday. That's spectacle, made to... I get

goosebumps just talking about it. It's not normal. Of course, there are folk songs that someone wrote lying down and they're wonderful. Bob Dylan has a lot of that, he's a special talent. I think a narrative needs an ending, but also a good beginning. I'm a bit stunned that some films start in nothing and end in nothing. Sometimes the film isn't even that bad, but it could have some dynamic. Dynamic is very important in narrative. Now that I'm at this point in my life where I tell stories to five-year-olds, I see that great stories, all of them, have a dynamic. They start, they generate curiosity, you see the children doing this (opens eyes) and then you start explaining and they come and do this (shrugs shoulders, slightly leaning forward) and there's another point and they react differently. That, for me, is classic, it comes from the Greeks, there's nothing new. But, yes, I think the endings are very important. And, to get to the great endings, you have to have built them up. Some people say that, in *Aquarius* and *Bacurau*, it takes about 30 minutes to... "But about 30 minutes in, things get good," they tell me. I think those 30 minutes are good too. You're there, introducing people. You have to introduce the place.

A question about screenwriting: are you very strict, or can the script be changed during shooting?

I'm strict so that it comes out very good, so that when you read it, you get really excited. It can be changed, and often is. For example, the scene in which Tony Jr., the mayor in *Bacurau*, visits the community was rewritten in the second week of shooting. Because the way it was in the script, it would have taken almost a week to film, and we didn't have that time. So I said: "I'll only rewrite it if it becomes shorter and better." I think it turned out better.

But there's something you and Juliano Dornelles said earlier about *Bacurau*: that the idea came when you were at a film festival and were bothered by the way people at that festival related to the characters in a documentary being shown.

Some films, documentaries and fiction, show people in the Northeast being treated as simple people. I'm very sensitive to that, and Juliano is too, because we're from the Northeast. You've probably experienced moments like that in the South and Southeast... *Prejudice* is the right word.

As if it were a caricature of Northeasterners.

Exactly. Once I went to the Copacabana Palace for a DreamWorks junket (a launch event for big films, where journalists from all over the country are invited to watch the film and then interview the team). I get to the end



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Wagner Moura finally receives the Best Actor award at Cannes, alongside Kleber Mendonça and actress Juliette Binoche at the Cinéma Paradiso Louvre Festival in Paris in July 2025

of the hallway and there are two press officers from São Paulo running the junket. I give my name: “Kleber Mendonça, from *Jornal do Commercio*.” And she says: “Oh, Kleber, welcome. You’ll need a translator, right?” (*imitating a São Paulo accent*). Me: “No, no, I speak English.” “Oh wow, someone from Recife speaking English!” (*again with the accent*). These things accumulate over many years, and you know how it is, it’s “just a joke,” but it’s strange, very strange. I think it shows a lot about how the country’s logic works. That’s in *Bacurau*, in a strong scene, when someone says: “We’re just like you.” And the reply is: “But they’re white and you’re not white.”

In that last mass shooting in the United States, in El Paso, Texas, part of the press rushed to say the killer had a mental illness, but later it was discovered he had driven nine hours just to get closer to the Mexican border so he could kill more “brown people.” And he was white. If he had been Black or Arab, he might have been killed and immediately labeled a terrorist.

I need to isolate myself to write a new script, and I think this time I’ll shut myself off from social media. But for *Bacurau*, we thought it was important to stay connected all the time. Sometimes it was a problem, with wasted time and procrastination, but being open to permeability gave us constant access to information from the world. A lot of what went into the film came from this very strong relationship with violence rooted in American society, which should never be seen as a summary of that society. The United States is extremely complex, and all of us feed off the U.S.: they have a very rich culture in music, literature, but it’s undeniable that they have a history of violence, even the commercialization of that violence, and that came into the script. A story like this one from El Paso is fascinating. Not just that: when the guy is white, it’s not terrorism, it’s mental illness, or a “simple massacre.” At the Pulse nightclub in Florida, when an Arab man who struggled with his sexuality committed that massacre, it was terrorism. All of that went into the script, with purpose. I’m not American, but I know what’s happening. Juliano isn’t American either, but he knows too. And the narratives are very striking, because they carry cultural, political, racial, and religious weight. And products designed to kill people.

All of that is in *Bacurau*: those people believe they have the right to be there to hunt other people. This is a discussion we can bring to everyday Brazil, considering that the Military Police enters a favela in Rio de Janeiro and a onemonthold baby dies from a stray bullet. As if it were collateral damage.

A white middleclass person killed in a robbery is frontpage news. Six Black boys killed in a community on a Saturday night is backpage news. At the bottom. These different weights given to violence are the foundation of *Bacurau*’s writing. An entire community wiped out... why not? But the community killing all of them and cutting off their heads, “Oh, how absurd, savages!”

Did you travel a lot to choose *Bacurau*’s location?

We traveled a lot, and we needed an isolated community, a single street. About this idea of Sertão: my fear was writing something touristy and then arriving there and realizing it wasn’t like that. But when we visited the backlands, not only did we add new things, but many others were confirmed, the sense of community, the intelligence, how tuned in people were, their political awareness. And working with 100 extras from the region taught us a lot. They didn’t just teach us, even in scenes where they weren’t given a full briefing, just by looking at the scene,



VICTOR LUCA / DWELL GAÇÃO

Kleber Mendonça and Wagner Moura behind the scenes of the filming of *The Secret Agent*

they knew exactly what was happening, because that was part of their lives. My biggest fear was inventing something “cityboy” thing, but that didn’t happen. One thing did happen: it hadn’t rained in eight years, and when we started preproduction, it began to rain like it hadn’t in years. And then, *boom!*, everything turned green, a Hollywoodstyle explosion of nature. Great, then that would be the Sertão.

When was the script finished? Because there’s a lot of current material in it.

We finished it in the second week of March last year. But some details were added during mixing and editing. For example, during editing we added the reading of names at the end of the confrontation, a nod to Marielle Franco (a Black Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman assassinated in March 2018). When Sônia came to shoot, Marielle had died three weeks earlier. She had been with Marielle and was very shaken by her death. Marielle’s death was the execution of a Black woman with a strong

social and political stance, murdered professionally. It’s impossible for these things not to be in the film. I find it unbelievable to make a film in which Brazil isn’t present. Then you talk to the director and they say: “But didn’t you see the red hat in the background?” – No, I didn’t. “Oh, but that represents Brazil.” No, no, we need something stronger in this time of rights being stripped away.

Speaking of that, what’s the way to get around the dismantling of cinema?

If you think in terms of what is normal in the world, which is the government supporting culture, I think it’s a huge challenge. Because if they want to cut, they will cut. But I’d say it’s a very important moment for young people to go out and make very provocative, very strong films with minimal equipment. We’re in a fantastic moment for that. With a camera like this (*points to photographer Breno Laprovitera’s camera*), you can make a

highquality film, take it home, and edit it on your lap. Literally on your lap (*laughs*). And make a badass film. I'd love to see a reaction at that level, young male and female filmmakers making very simple and very strong films. Because today Brazil has every kind of film. I made *The Little Cotton Girl* with R\$ 78 and I made *Bacurau* with 8 million reais. *Bacurau* is one kind of film and *The Little Cotton Girl* is another. *Green Vinyl* is one kind of film and *Good Manners* is another, and both are genre films, both Brazilian. So I think it's a good moment to react. Now, regarding cinema made with normal structure, it seems to me there is a real threat. Today Brazilian cinema is very diverse: in sexual orientation, in themes, regionally. You have all kinds of directors making films in Pernambuco, Ceará making films, the kids from Contagem in Minas Gerais, people from Curitiba... It's diverse in a way it never was. And it's exactly now that this cinema begins to be dismantled. Because a film from Pernambuco, shot with Panavision lenses, an adventure film but also strange, goes to Cannes and wins an award, that is proof of this diversity.

Is your career threatened in that sense? Because there is this persecution, this demand that you return more than R\$ 2 million related to *Neighboring Sounds*.

Mine, I hope not. This is part of a sad moment we're living through now, and it's something completely unprecedented in the history of the Ministry of Culture and film production in Brazil. It has never happened with a film that exists, that was delivered. There have been some demands regarding films that were never made, which I even think is normal, but this is an act of extortion in a terrible moment for Brazil, against artists. What lets me sleep at night is knowing I'm not the first artist to be persecuted, nor will I be the last. It's curious that in this interview we're talking about an entire trajectory, from when I was a child, the 1980s... I've been making films for 25 years, all public and open, always in the clear, and nothing has changed in what I do, except that I keep doing more and more. There's the Janela International Film Festival (*created by Kleber and Emilie Lesclaux in 2008*), there's the work with the press, there are the films I make, and every film generates more energy. The only thing that changed was Brazil. It's a bit suspicious that the only thing that changed was the country. And it's exactly when Brazil changes, and takes on attitudes that are not democratic, that something like this appears regarding an artist like me, who has always done everything in the clearest way, even with international recognition. Anyway, we're in a legal process, with a lawyer.

Will this go to the Supreme Court?

I imagine so. But it's the equivalent of being robbed by your own country.

What does the Ministry of Culture claim? That you received funds and there was a cap that couldn't be supplemented with incentives from another source, is that it?

The grant we applied for, we and several other projects, had an interpretative gap, which was clarified with Ancine and with the Audiovisual Secretariat, and both said: "Yes, it's correct, you can supplement with money, but not federal money." So we used funds from the state of Pernambuco, other projects supplemented with municipal funds, and all of that was documented and filed and everything was fine. When the Temer administration came in, people who don't believe in the state as a supporter of culture took over. And the easiest target was me, partly because of the success of the films.



I knew Cannes for all those years as a critic, I knew all the doors and rooms and the whole way Cannes operated and now I was there with a film."

And perhaps also because of the protest in Cannes, in May 2016?

I'm extremely proud of the protest we made, but this had already been brewing for a year inside Ancine, from a person who created this situation in a lab. Because there was already an internal war there, a war of narratives, since she had been there during the Manoel Rangel years (*Ancine's president from 2006 to 2017*), so there was a sense of hostility.

Are you going to say who this person is?

I can't say here, but you should look into it. Then, when the Ministry of Culture became a coup-driven ministry, they took this and simply carried it forward, even though



Kleber Mendonça directing the film *The Secret Agent*

it made no sense. None. Especially because the film was delivered and none of the other films that followed the same legal procedure are being investigated.

So this was already being prepared throughout 2015?

Yes, but what really happened was when the ministry changed and became a coup-driven Ministry of Culture.

Going back to the protest, we wanted you to talk about the importance of going to Cannes that year. You were a critic, you went to the festival every year, and suddenly you were there as the director of a Brazilian film in competition.

I knew Cannes for years as a critic, I knew all the doors, all the rooms, the whole way Cannes operates, and now I was there with a film, seeing all the doors from the other side. That was very powerful, being there with my friends, having made such a personal film, unfortunately in a terrible month for Brazil, when democratic rituals were being abandoned. The international press didn't know, didn't understand

anything. In fact, the international press was repeating what came out in the national press, putting it into Google Translate. I think the protest was a warning, "pay attention." Several journalists told me: "We had no idea what was happening, now we do." It's good that *Aquarius* became part of a historical moment, and it's curious how it survived the protest. The film could have been *only* the protest, but it gained a life of its own and followed its own path.

Three years later, with *Bacurau* in Cannes, you decided not to make any official protest?

No, because when the film was announced in Cannes, the entire press asked the same question: "What will the protest be?" It was as if I were the protest filmmaker. And I remembered *Los Hermanos*: "Are you going to play *Anna Júlia*?" "Is there going to be *Anna Júlia* today?" And in reality, everyone already knows what's happening in Brazil. The international press is covering it, even better than the press here.

What kind of viewer are you with your own films?

I make the films I'd like to see. That comes from a formation, from many years going to the movies. I have emotional memories of great screenings I saw, sometimes alone, sometimes with others, and I want to recreate a bit of that feeling. As happens with all artists, there's always an attempt to return. I remember when I went to see RoboCop alone at the São Luiz in 1987, and it was the perfect action film, but at the same time it was something very special because it wasn't normal. That's what I wanted to make: an abnormal film. Bacurau is totally Brazilian, but at the same time there's something there that isn't very common. I don't know if it's the image, the camera, the violence, something that attracted me and Juliano a lot, and we wanted to show something in this film that wasn't normal. Something you may have seen before, but not *like that*.

The images in the film really bring an emotional recurrence, they take us back to films we've seen, but also echo the Sertão, the cangaço, which is so ours, and there's the literal reference to the severed heads, but also the sense of community.

Some people cling to this idea of the cangaço because of the severed heads, but what happened during the writing of the script and again last week is incredible: When there's a prison riot in Brazil, fourteen heads are thrown and some become soccer balls. That has nothing to do with the cangaço, it has to do with Brazil. Who knows if Lunga, Bacurau's character, and his gang didn't spend some time, let's say two years in a penitentiary, and saw that happen, and when they were in Bacurau, they thought, "I'm going to cut heads too"? It's not just the cangaço, it's much more complex. Someone saw the film and came to lecture me: "Look, but cangaceiros didn't cut heads, the police did." It's more complex than all of that, because Brazilian society is extremely violent, and now it seems to have lost its shame. That riot in Altamira (*in Pará, July 29*) was reported without shame. Damn... decapitated? Under the State's watch?

What did you think of the change in the criteria for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film? Now there will be nine nominees. You were harmed in the Aquarius year.

I think it's great, more chances. That was strange. A harakiri.

What impact does an Oscar actually have?

Incredible, it's very frightening. For the promotion

of the film, it's huge. I don't know if, after someone wins, it has any impact, maybe for the next project. Because there are many filmmakers who won an Oscar and nothing happened. But for promotion, it's gigantic. It's what the general public understands as cinema. Cannes is very important, but the Oscar... it's another level.

You're very active on social media. Do you deal with haters?

No, but sometimes one shows up and, in three seconds, the person is blocked. I create a FairyTale Kingdom... My social media is a FairyTale Kingdom, only with people who agree with me (*laughs*). It's good for mental health. It's good not to wake up and see someone who posted a dog being executed on Facebook. That's harmful. So, early on Facebook, I would see that and block the person. Not that they posted it *for* me, but it's the kind of person who thinks executions are cool, who likes aggression. Last week, a crazy woman showed up, I was patient at first, but then I saw she was a hardcore Bolsonaro supporter and blocked her. These people operate with "reality markers." We're here at Café Santa Clara, and the person shows up and says: "It's nighttime outside, it's 8 p.m., the cars have their lights on." But it's not nighttime, it's 11:50 a.m. and the sun is shining outside. That's what's happening in Brazil, that's what Antônio Prata wrote about. When *Folha de S.Paulo* says Bolsonaro is "controversial," no, he's not controversial, he's a scumbag, an idiot, a liar, and a son of a bitch. That's what he is. He's not "controversial." I used social media to write the *Bacurau* script, and now I'm going to step away to isolate myself and write another script. Because this new script takes place in 1970, I don't need social media to talk about what 1970 was like; I need to go to the Public Archive, look at photo archives, read books. But for *Bacurau*, it was extremely important to see, for example, a *New York Times* article about a group of soldiers in Afghanistan who went out shooting civilians because they had nothing better to do, they were bored out of their minds. And that was interesting for the project. When you're writing, you discover that the vocabulary of human cruelty is much larger than we think.

Which filmmaker would you like to see Bacurau?

I don't know if I have a fetish for a specific filmmaker to see my film. Maybe John Carpenter. He was in Cannes the same day we were presenting the film, but he was receiving an award. But deep down, I think I'm afraid of that. He's a grumpy old man.



Kleber Mendonça Filho on September 10th, at the simultaneous pre-premiere in Recife, at the Teatro do Parque (photo) and at the Cinema São Luiz