

MARIA JOÃO MAYER and FRANÇOIS D'ARTEMARE  
presents



30. Venice  
International Film  
Critics' Week

DAVID MOURATO RODRIGO PERDIGÃO  
MARIA JOÃO PINHO CHEYENNE DOMINGUES

# MONTANHA

A FILM BY JOÃO SALAVIZA

## SYNOPSIS:

A hot summer in Lisbon. David, 14, awaits the imminent death of his grandfather but refuses to visit him, fearing this terrible loss. His mother, Mónica, spends her nights at the hospital. The void already left by his grandfather forces David to become the man of the house. He doesn't feel ready to assume this new role, but without realizing it: the more David tries to avoid adulthood, the more he gets closer to it...



## INTERVIEW WITH JOÃO SALAVIZA

There are a lot of obvious links - on numerous levels, - between "Montanha" your first feature film and all the shorts you did before it. These first films - "Arena" (2009), Cerro Negro (2011) and "Rafa" (2012) seem to be rehearsals for "Montanha" (2015).

I always have the same feeling when I'm filming: maybe this will be the last film I'll ever make. Whether out of material considerations, circumstances, or whether it's because one day I might no longer want to look at the world through cinema. I think this is a very healthy awareness because my short films - and the feature even more so - were made at very specific moments in the lives of the people I filmed. The films couldn't have been made at any other time. It was the coming together of my life with the lives of the people I filmed that led to those films, and they're unrepeatable. It's miraculous and incredible when cinema can manage to achieve these unrepeatable things.

I always think of that semi Chekhovian idea that objects and memories pursue us to the end of our days. And in my films, I feel that too. In a certain way, there's a transmission of something invisible that takes place from one film to another. In the feature, I felt there were a lot of things that came from before.

**A continuity that you will continue to explore...?**

"Montanha" might possibly have been a sort of turning point and I think that from here on out I'm going to start filming other things, other places. I feel that "Montanha" was, in some way, the end of my cinematic adolescence, in parallel with the end of the real childhood of the character I filmed, David. I felt the analogy.

**There's a desire in the film to explore urban spaces. The invisible city that simultaneously presents itself as a monumental city.**

It is a purely affective interest. I mean, whether I'm filming Lisbon, or filming places I'm unfamiliar with. I don't know whether the city will be *invisible*, exactly. I try always to take the view that the camera doesn't see more than the person I'm filming can see.

I feel it is very interesting to film adolescents - as much in my short "Rafa", as here - for the way they draw on an urban cartography that follows different impulses from the functional impulses that we normally follow. We sit on a park bench, use the lift rather than take the stairs and so on. Adolescents - at least the ones in the past, from my generation; the last ones, perhaps, to grow up without a cell phone in their pocket climb onto garage roofs to play ball, clamber up electric masts instead of trees, go to patches of waste ground to ride motorbikes or play football... So, it's that thing of how these kids are drawn to covert places which are their places and theirs alone. And in that sense, they're invisible because they're small areas of intimacy that are found in the niches of public spaces.

**This film is an exploration of the society we could call a society of fatigue. "Montanha" is a film that's also about fatigue and about a character who is caught up in that environment : a society that offers no solutions, that's amorphous, that doesn't pulsate with change.**

The film is focused on those three or four days in which everything happens. Where there's an overwhelming sense of a great catastrophe, the death of a grandfather, which is a shadow hanging over the entire film despite the fact he remains invisible. And mainly because I wanted to film this very buoyant sensation of time and space suspended for those few days, which is a very adolescent sensation. And that has a lot to do with sleepless nights, with this feeling of fatigue that builds up until that last breath. It's as if the grandfather's death restores serenity, in a way. I think there's an historical aspect in the film, that is precisely to do with filming a generation that is growing up completely out of tune, however much technology gives the illusion of permanent connectedness. I think the adolescents of today are completely alone and no one really knows what the struggles of today's adolescents are.

I think that adolescence thrives on struggle against enemies, many of which are internal or spiritual.

**Or invisible, like faith...**

We don't know who it is. And in that sense I'm a great admirer of the films of Antonioni. I think that, in some way, he manages in his trilogy "*L'Avventura*", "*La Notte*" and "*L'Eclisse*" - this trilogy of incommunicability - he manages to film very well this rambling of modern man, this aimless wandering, a kind of disenchantment. Now I look back and feel in some way that my film is also about a loser. I filmed a *beautiful loser*, like in "Rebel Without a Cause", one who is constantly losing throughout the film. He loses his girlfriend, loses his relationship with his mother, loses his best friend, loses his grandfather, and loses a year at school. He loses everything. And I realised during editing that contrary to the idea of adding a scene so that it brings something new to the scene before (like building a pyramid), my film is a sort inverted pyramid. Each scene steals something from David. He gets poorer and poorer, more denuded, with fewer things to hold on to.



**A question I felt was central to "Montanha" is the question of skin; your exploratory relationship with skin..**

I very much want to film the invisible desire there is between people. The way bodies connect to one another. Our body is a sort of barometer that carries a terrific weight, but that at the same time anticipates something. And filming the adolescent is, for me, the possibility of filming a body in transformation and that was the idea of my film. In Montanha, perhaps more than in all the others, I managed a connection that I felt very deeply between the camera, as a vehicle for observation, and the bodies in front of me that are constantly changing.

The film puts forward the idea of salvation through intimacy. Of intimacy, through contact. So, the film has a lot of scenes that take place in unmade beds. There are several scenes where David is lying down. The bed - and this is something that seems almost comical - is also the stage for a large number of scenes in this film. I think that the film suggests, to a small degree, that place of intimacy. Not the bed, exactly, but a private and intimate space, as a place to meet and of salvation. Dense and saturated inner spaces, filled with the day's dust and sweat.

Between the first and last day of filming, with a long pause in the middle, six months went by. At the end of that, we shot the final scenes of the film. David was changing. And I think that can be sensed in the film.

**Is this a film of memories, too?**

There's something very Lisbonian and specific in David that is inspired by my own personal history : I grew up between the ages of ten and sixteen in a building full of military men, a house for retired soldiers and I was the only child, the only adolescent with a feeling of profound loneliness, of having no one to talk to. In "Montanha", David is always drifting through empty spaces. Where are the young people ? It's as if the young have run away...

Pierre Bonnard said he didn't paint from sight but from memory. I think that's a beautiful idea. He saw his wife grow old but what he remembered about her was her youthful body and he always painted her young. He said seeing was treacherous because it only gives us the surface and appearance of things, and memory gives us the essence. I made this film holding on, a bit, to my memories of adolescence; trying to make the film a cross between the experiences of the kids I was filming and my memories. And I think that is what makes the temporality of the film a bit strange, and it makes it almost dreamlike as well.

**There's an atemporal atmosphere...**

...Cloudy, perhaps. That's why I think that everything in the film builds a sort of suspended time and space. The film takes place on the eighth floor of a building with a view over the city, that gives the idea of floating above the city. The bodies gravitate in a space that is distant. It seems as if the city is a distant place, unreachable.

**It seems to me that your path to this film was by way of obsession. Obsession for a theme, a form, a specific discourse, a particular dramaturgy. A bold path towards cinema without compromise. Now that you've finished Montanha where will this path lead you ?**

I am never really sure where I'll go when I finish a film. I'm always a little bit lost. Films have to make sense in my life. Films allow me to go to places and get to know people - and know them deeply - which, in another context, I wouldn't have known. It's going back to my adolescence through a 15 year old kid who lives in a Lisbon suburb, and who I am not related to. To be able to rethink things of mine, my life, through what I do, which is cinema. It's an opportunity that I won't give up and I continue to wonder where films are going to take me. I always feel that cinema is ahead of me. It's the films that drive me.

**And do you feel like experimenting now?**

I want to film other places. I would very much like to film in Brazil. That's where my roots are. I'm the third generation of links between Portuguese and Brazilians in my family.

**Referring back to your short "Rafa": you dedicated the Berlin Golden Bear to the Portuguese government, on condition there would be a new policy of support for cinema. Is it easier to make films in Portugal now, or not?**

There've been some battles won by Portuguese directors, by those who want Portuguese cinema to go on. I think those battles were won because we've spent four years under a totally ideological discourse that sold us the notion the country is in debt, a debt that is more than financial. It seems that Portugal has a moral debt to Europe and the world.

And then there's the idea that we export our best, we have to sell the best there is in Portugal. And, in fact, these four years have served to show that Portuguese cinema and Portuguese directors have much more important things to say than most of the Portuguese politicians who represent us abroad. In fact, a new film law has been passed and films are slowly reappearing. But I think that Portuguese directors live in a state of permanent alert because there have been decades and decades of instability and threats that from one moment to the next everything could be at risk. So there are no certainties.

Interview by Guilherme Blanc. July 12, 2015





## CAST

**DAVID** David Mourato  
**MÓNICA** Maria João Pinho  
**RAFAEL** Rodrigo Perdigão  
**PAULINHA** Cheyenne Domingues  
**EMA** Ema Araújo  
**GUSTAVO** Carloto Cotta  
**CRIS** Ana Cris  
**ALICE** Margarida Fernandes

**DIRECTOR AND WRITER**  
**CINEMATOGRAPHER**  
**EDITING**  
**SOUND**  
**PRODUCTION DESIGNER**  
**COSTUMES**  
**MAKEUP**  
**SOUND EDITING**  
**MIXING**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**  
**PRODUCTION MANAGER**

## CREW

João Salaviza  
Vasco Viana  
Edgar Feldman, João Salaviza  
Olivier Blanc  
Nadia Henriques  
Margarida Ruas  
Araceli Fuentes  
Nuno Carvalho  
Thierry Delor  
Renée Nader  
Angela Cerveira

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Producers: Maria João Mayer and François d'Artemare

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