

# When red carnations infiltrate the sociology of arts: an essay on popular culture and social change

Augusto Santos Silva

## 1. The Portuguese transition to democracy

Portugal lived under a dictatorship and was engaged in a colonial war until 1974. That year, a military coup led by very young, middle rank officers (mostly captains and majors), toppled the Government, and launched a political transition aiming at three goals, known as the three Ds: democratisation, decolonisation, development. Popular appropriation immediately transformed this coup into a revolution, and for a year and a half (from April 1974 until November 1975) intense debate took place on the design of the new political and economic regime. Meanwhile, the war ended, and all the African colonies became independent countries. Finally, in 1976, a new Constitution was approved, defining Portugal as a multi-party democracy and a Welfare state; the Parliament was elected and the first Constitutional Government, led by Mário Soares, was appointed. The President, the two regional assemblies and all the municipal bodies were also elected, thus concluding the foundation of the new regime. The objectives of decolonisation and democratisation being accomplished, a new path to development was then initiated, with the candidature and eventually, in 1986, the formal membership to the European Communities. Since then, the Portuguese people have been dealing with the various political alternatives to pursue the combination of liberal democracy and social and economic development, with major achievements and no less important blockades and pullbacks.

This is the shortest possible version of the Portuguese history of the last 50 years. This chapter is an invitation to see it from the perspective of culture and lifestyle.

## 2. Before the Carnation Revolution

Salazar's regime was very conservative and traditionalist, always trying to avoid any risk of diversity and change. It considered any movement of a certain openness as a threat, even if directed towards political allies, like the United States – for instance,

Coca-Cola was forbidden in the continental Portuguese market. However, the regime could not stop all the internal effects of the Post-War dynamics in Europe. Furthermore, decisions taken by the dictator himself, such as the colonial war, inevitably produced bold consequences in terms of ordinary people's social experience and patterns of behaviour.

Among those effects, one must underline the massive experiences of emigration and war in Africa. More than 1.5 million Portuguese abandoned the country to work abroad: 9 hundred thousand, between 1957 and 1974, to France (Pereira 2012); but many others to Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland (and also to Canada, United States, Venezuela and other countries, in what regarded the Atlantic archipelagos of Azores and Madeira). They were generally young adults, coming from the working class, peasantry, and Northern rural areas. From 1961 to 1974, almost one million young men took part, as soldiers, in the colonial war in Africa. Immediately before and after the independence of Angola and Mozambique, in 1975, more than a half a million of Portuguese people, that lived there, returned to Portugal.

If we consider mass movements, these were the three main sources of novelty experienced by a rather rural, low educated and premodern population: the contact with Europe, as workforce, and the contact with Sub-Saharan Africa, either as settlers or as military. From distinct and partially contradictory angles, all of them posed challenges to Salazar, to his successor, Marcello Caetano, and to the three main pillars of their regime, the Army, the Catholic Church, and the entrepreneurial conglomerates closely affiliated to colonial and economic policy. Nevertheless, these were not the only changes at stake, during the 1960s and the beginnings of the 1970s. Demographically less pervasive, but extremely relevant from the social and political point of view, was the evolution of social structure due to increments in manufacture, tourism, and the banking system; and, most of all, the emergence of students as a critical collective actor.

During the Portuguese dictatorship, youngsters studying at the University represented a clear minority: when new universities were launched, in 1973, the number of university students were a small part of the respective age group. But universities were already cultural and political laboratories. They were contexts of rapid socialisation into the ideas, sentiments, attitudes of the European youth, as well as familiarisation with the books, movies, music, clothes and ornaments the latter was consuming. From 1962 onwards, the regime was regularly challenged by opposition movements originated in Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto, the three cities hosting universities. At the same time, a small but influential cultural industry emerged, built around non-conventional activities, aligned with European and North American models but disapproved by national authorities, such as rock festivals, jazz, political

song writing, experimental cinema, modern theatre, and literature. Marxism, feminism and anticolonial thought significantly influenced, then, the social awareness of the younger, educated generation.

### 3. A radical change

It is important to consider all these movements that were pushing different sectors of the population away from Salazar's representation of Portugal, conceived as a small, humble home, isolated from modernity and protected by authority, invested by God and history in an intercontinental, colonial mission, fighting communism, democracy, Enlightenment and Western moral depravation. In society, almost nothing starts from scratch. And the first consequence of the democratic revolution, in April 1974, was that it gave room to all these movements: not only to the political forces and ideas oppressed by the authoritarian regime – that are not the subject of this chapter – but also to the symbolic and behavioural changes, that is, the transformation of values, attitude, self-presentation, social interaction and consumption patterns.

The liberation inherent to the fall of the dictatorship was, first and foremost, the liberation of exactly what and whom had been prohibited. The songs, films, plays, novels and essays that were forbidden or subjected to censorship; the facts and opinions that could not be reported on television, radio and newspapers; the hairstyling, clothes, drinks, body language that were considered indecent; the public gatherings, meetings and free occupation of urban streets and squares, that were banned and deemed illegal: all these kinds of social participation, creative activity, self-expression and group formation suddenly came to light and conquered the public sphere. Thus, in the middle of the 1970s, democratic transition happened under a quite festive atmosphere, suggesting an endless set of possibilities and repertoires of action.

The red carnation was rapidly elected as the icon of this vibrant, inclusive way of undertaking political change. On the 25 April of 1974, early in the morning, a soldier participating in the military coup asked a working-class woman in the street for cigarettes. She had none and, instead, offered him and his companions the carnations she carried. The carnations were used to decorate their rifles' pipes, symbolizing the peaceful purpose of the coup, thus becoming the very icon of the 'Carnation Revolution'. They were white and red. But in the process of their definition as a political icon, only the red ones were retained, highlighting the progressive orientation that was pervading the ongoing transformation. Joyful, peaceful, and progressive – that was the self-representation of the democratic revolution, and how it was perceived by the public opinion.

It was also radical, meaning that it questioned almost all grounds of personal and social life. Gender relations, labour, land ownership, power in the classroom, housing

and urbanism, healthcare, wages and pensions, management, neighbourhood, religious beliefs, mass communication, freedom of speech, arts, all were issues for proposals and acts of vindication: all were arenas for the dialectics between tradition and modernity, continuity and disruption, reproduction and innovation, that characterised the second half of the 1970s in Portugal. In Habermasian terms, the gap between the 'system' and the 'lived world' reached its minimal level (see Habermas 1987). In that sense, because everything was being re-founded, the Carnation Revolution was itself a *cultural* process, through which ordinary men and women were seeking, and discovering, new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Moreover, arts and culture were instrumental for the revolution. They were seen as providing tools to overcome some of the structural handicaps of the Portuguese population, such as illiteracy, patronage, unfamiliarity with cultural goods, strong dependency vis-à-vis a pre-Vatican II Church. Many artists, performers, teachers and students actively engaged in programs aimed at raising the 'collective conscience' of lower classes, in rural and urban areas, in a rather top-down political campaign, led by the military and left-wing activists, that used culture as a potent means of ideological indoctrination (see Almeida 2025). Consequently, the criteria to assess any work of art relied on its 'social usefulness' – let us say, a kind of 'marginal utility' to the collective process of revolutionary awareness. This functionalist approach to culture became hegemonic in the political and cultural fields: from music to cinema, from literature to theatre, the point was to measure the added value provided by art to the redefinition of ordinary people (namely, the working class in farms and factories, and the peasantry) as a 'historic subject'. Form was, therefore, less relevant than substance to assess the quality and significance of art; empathy with lay audiences was far more important than the interaction with cultivated connoisseurs; and the more didactic the more legitimate cultural performances would be.

#### 4. A new cultural landscape

This was the prevalent atmosphere in Portugal, in the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution of 1974 and throughout the remaining years of the 1970s. Liberation and experimentalism were the keywords. But not focused on the formal aspects of the artistic work, nor on the endogenous dynamism of the art world, since the main trend was to open this world, abolishing the boundaries that usually separated artwork and social activism, by means of a language and content that could be intelligible and meaningful to larger, popular audiences.

This process happened in a context characterised – due to the Salazarist hostility vis-à-vis culture – by a very weak institutional structure for the arts: few art schools, and very peripheral in relation to the core of the education system; residual profes-

sionalism; only two television channels, both state-owned; a very fragile entertainment industry and, of course, no significant room for independent theatre or cinema. So, in 1974, it was really urgent to create such a structure, in a democratic way, founding a cultural policy and demanding the Government's attention to education and arts. Meanwhile, artists had to find ways to produce and perform, to search for funding, to reach audiences, to attain a minimal level of professionalisation. It was time for 'doing it yourself' in a very specific manner: as 'do it yourselves, collectively', that is, 'do it ourselves'. It was time to act the way Walter Benjamin, and not Theodor W. Adorno, advocated (see Benjamin 2017a; Adorno 2003).

Certainly, there was a lot of experimentalism, in the sense of discovering and testing new manners of doing things. But not a strictly formal one since the main goal was to ground art in social life. New ways were indispensable, in fine arts and cinema, overcoming conventions that enclosed paintings and sculptures in museums, far away from ordinary people, or depreciated realistic movies and the genre of political documentary. And indeed, the Carnation Revolution gave room to artistic installations, interventions in public space, happenings, and film directors like Rui Simões and Alberto Seixas Santos brought the faces and voices of workers to the screen. At the same time, singers and actors – and even chamber groups and orchestras – used all sort of facilities (schools, parishes, trade unions, local associations, etc.) to perform comedies, epic dramas or classic Portuguese playwrights in popular contexts, or to seduce and motivate people with revolutionary songs. However, the overwhelming tendency was to destroy elitism, tearing down the conventional walls separating the arts and ordinary people. It was to achieve an *external* revolution – a revolution in the relationship between artists and audiences – and only subsidiarily an *internal* revolution – one oriented towards the language and grammar of artwork. Didacticism and political campaigning dominated the former, and the consequences were very effective. On the one hand, several elements of, let us say, a national or European canon, in theatre, literature or music, were finally brought into light, thus allowing a larger audience to discover authors like Bertolt Brecht, or even Portuguese classical playwrights such as Gil Vicente and Almeida Garrett, or modern ones such as Luís de Sttau Monteiro and Bernardo Santareno. Some folklore was revisited and recreated in a minimally cultivated variant, both in the Northern region and in Alentejo. On the other hand, the politicisation of cultural forms was a powerful means of improving social awareness, citizenship, and collective engagement, disseminating a broad political message framed in democratic, progressive, participatory values.

In comparison, the attention paid to more formal, internal, endogenous elements of the artistic practice was less important. That does not mean it was non-existent:

the mid-1970s were also a time of radical questioning of academic traditions, for instance the one led by the poets Melo e Castro, Alberto Pimenta and Maria Teresa Horta, novelists like Maria Velho da Costa, and several painters and sculptors involved in provocative public art. However, the visibility and influence of this kind of experimentalism were quite residual, due to the hegemony of the quest for public discourse and political conscience, rather than for formal art.

The outcome was actually some tension between different approaches to the social role of art. One can see it in theatre and in 'popular music'. Since its foundation in 1973 (the year before the Carnation Revolution), by two extraordinary young actors coming from the university, Luís Miguel Cintra and Jorge Silva Melo, the company Teatro da Cornucópia has combined progressive politics and an endless pursuit to artistic novelty (see Serôdio 2001). Its influence was obvious, still shadowed by the emergence of an assumed militant theatre (for instance, Teatro da Comuna or, since 1976, Teatro A Barraca). Among songwriters, the most prestigious figure was Zeca Afonso, a hero of antifascist resistance, who started his career as a singer of the traditional music of Coimbra university students (the Coimbra *fado*), and then evolved to a highly elaborate body of original music work, with influential lyrics, by himself or important Portuguese poets. His songs were subjected to censorship, and several of them became anthems for the young opponents to the dictatorship. The military movement chose one of them, *Grândola, vila morena*, as the final passcode for the launching of the coup, the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974. It obviously became the popular anthem of the Revolution, the very symbol of democracy – and still is.

Zeca Afonso's leadership was never contested by colleagues and followers: he was really the icon of progressive political engagement in music. Personally, he never abandoned a demanding quality standard, and therefore he never considered the formal aspects of music only instrumental or peripheral to political message and campaigning. But several of his companions took a rather diverse pathway, focusing on 'cultural action', as the name of a newly created group so eloquently expressed: music as a means to reach people whose awareness one should raise. That *Grupo de Ação Cultural*, as such, and individual musical activists like José Mário Branco and Tino Flores disseminated some of the iconic songs of the Carnation Revolution, including the one that stated 'A song is a weapon/ And I didn't know./ It depends on the rage/ And the accuracy' (Grupo de Ação Cultural, 1975; see also Anacleto, 2021, and Castro, 2022). (Notably, Sérgio Godinho, being more of an activist than Zeca Afonso, maintained high-quality standards in lyrics and melody; artists like Fausto and José Mário Branco eventually moved onto this level of standards).

## 5. Silence and absence as part of a revolution

The interconnection of art and politics, the move from cultural institutions towards the public space, and the communion of artists with audiences seem to be the three main traits of the atmosphere of urgency and transformation that framed the aftermath of the Portuguese Revolution (the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974), in cultural terms. To some extent, it was a realisation of the programme Walter Benjamin had proposed, in the 1930s: a cultural revolution that questioned the (for him) bourgeois values of beauty, harmony, form and heritage; that took advantage of the 'era of technical reproducibility', thus enlarging the reach of art; that extended the perimeter of art to the so-called minor arts and crafts; that proposed a radical questioning of the social and cultural history and deemed the past through the revolutionary envisagement of present and future (see Benjamin 1992, 2017a, 2017b). The Adornians did exist, preferring to denounce the manipulatory effects of mass culture and advocating for a rigorist, high-brow stance; but they were a clear minority. Criticism was key, as it is in any revolution: but it was a social criticism of culture, in a Benjaminian way, not a cultural criticism of political domination, as the one proposed by Adorno (see Adorno 2003; DeNora 2003a: 1-34).

Criticism is always an ambivalent process. It highlights some aspects of reality, be it in a negative way – by questioning conventions, hierarchies, privileges, rules and rulers – be it in a positive way – for instance, by identifying and commending the creativity of folk people. But criticism also silences several aspects of reality, and this latter mechanism is as important as the former. This is particularly evident during revolutionary processes, when the silenced events cast a shadow on the prospects of change.

We have already suggested that the most significant experiences escaping the Salazarist control, in the 1960s and on the eve of the 1970s, were the emigration to European countries and the experiences of soldiers throughout the Colonial War. None of these facts was enunciated as a relevant theme for public debate during the revolutionary years of 1974-1976.

Novelist Olga Gonçalves was a quite unique case of literary inspiration rooted in the realities faced by the Portuguese in Germany and France (see Gonçalves 1975, 1978); we had to wait until the end of the 1970s and the 1980s to see Portuguese emigration celebrated and reconceptualised as 'Portuguese Communities' abroad (see Teixeira & Mendes 2020); and it was only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that a young Luso French film director, Ruben Alves (2013), addressed this phenomenon in a fresh, positive way, that motivated large audiences (*La cage dorée*). Until then, the predominant approach to emigration, within the Portuguese culture, was a

lament over such obvious manifestations of peripherality, poverty and nostalgia (*saudade*) representing exactly the past the revolution wished to overcome – and forget, if not deny.

On the other hand, it was a young novelist, António Lobo Antunes, himself a medical doctor enlisted as conscript into the Colonial War in Angola, that finally evoked in literary terms that terrible experience of hundreds of thousands of young males, and its long-lasting sequels when, demobilised, they returned to 'normal' life (see Antunes 1979a, 1979b, 1983). In 1981, a female writer, Wanda Ramos, evoked her experience in Angola, her motherland and the context of her failed marriage to a military (Ramos 1981). But it was only in 1988 that another female writer, Lídia Jorge, extensively described the experience of wartime from the perspective of women accompanying their husbands who were fighting in the North of Mozambique (Jorge 1988).

Additionally, an even thicker silence fell over the massive return of Portuguese families living in Angola and Mozambique following the end of the war and subsequent independencies (see Ribeiro 2004, Pires 1987). More than a half million men and women, of all age groups, many of them belonging to the lower and middle classes, hastily returned to a 'mainland' they had abandoned decades ago, or in which they had never been. Although, eventually, the integration of these 'returnees' into the Portuguese society was remarkably successful, and very positive for the territory, the local economy and social fabric, it was not incorporated or problematised by the cultural activism of the mid-1970s. Only in 2011, with the publication of a novel by Dulce Maria Cardoso, based on her own experience as a 'returnee', this silence ended (Cardoso 2011).

So, the vibrant and festive atmosphere of the Portuguese democratic transition proved to be uncomfortable to cope with events that were seen as traumatic, such as being forced to fight in a colonial war or to leave one's homeland in search of a better job, events that epitomized past misfortune. It also proved to be uneasy to face social groups that could negatively assess the Carnation Revolution, such as the 'returnees', and many emigrants influenced by the reports on alleged communist attacks against property and authority, conveyed by various international media. It was as if the democratic spirit was not prepared to absorb the complexities of non-black-and-white situations, to be polyhedral rather than two-sided.

Melancholy, a soft, silent pain, should mark the ambience of post-revolutionary years – namely from 1976, the year of the institutionalisation of the liberal democratic regime, to 1986, when the country joined the European Communities. This was a period of political instability, economic crises, and some setback in social rights. Regarding arts and culture, the heavy limits that socioeconomic conditions inflicted to the structuring of an art world in Portugal, the fragility and discontinuity of cultural

policies, the budgetary constraints of public funding, the low level of cultural consumption, the obstacles to the consolidation of art professions and institutions – all these factors converged to pale the image of the cultural revolution of the mid-1970s, and to crystalize the sense of disappointment, failure and revolutionary nostalgia that was so influential in plays, movies and music of the late 1970s and early 1980s (and we can also observe it in novels by Lobo Antunes and Lídia Jorge). And it is not a paradox that such a mood would prevent Portuguese artists and intellectuals from deepening the critical investigation into several crucial dimensions of the country's history, such as racism, colonisation, and migration. Beyond a formal, definitive condemnation (of the colonial rule, and its racist, imperial manifestations) or lament (for the massive Post-World War II emigration), there was little room to admit aspects and responsibilities that could not be immediately reduced to Salazar's decisions. A vast area of our history and social structure was left aside until very recently, when, namely under the pressure of Afrodescendants living in the Lisbon urban area, it finally became an issue, in politics, museums and monuments as well as in dance, music, films and plays.

## 6. Cultural change as a part of a revolution

Three arguments can be presented to explain this focus on the cultural features of the Carnation Revolution. First, we are celebrating (in 2024-2026) its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and this alone would justify such an option. But second, the transformation that occurred in the mid-1970s was the great disjuncture, the breakaway that opened room for the development of a Portuguese art world: a set of cultural institutions, venues and practices that still is the one we live in, nowadays. If one does not understand the turning point of the 1970s, one cannot apprehend the subsequent dynamism and evolution of Portuguese culture and arts. Suffice it to note some of the most relevant moments in popular urban culture, from the 1980s onwards, such as the emergence of the so-called Portuguese rock; the influence of punk music; the re-discovery of folk forms, urban like Lisboa's *fado*, or rural like the Alentejo's *cante*; the industry of concerts and summer festivals; the international affirmation of Portuguese cinema; the New Dance movement; the expansion of photography, urban art, comics, short movies, animated feature films, documentaries, interdisciplinary performances, and other forms traditionally neglected. All of these were offspring of the radical changes that were ignited by the democratic transition in all dimensions of culture and arts: from 1976 until our time, higher levels of education and the generalisation of university training among youth; the enlargement of audiences and the increase in mass consumption of entertainment goods and services; the implementation of cultural policies, establishing the role of

state, regions and municipalities in providing a public sector and funding for heritage and arts; the formation of a national network of cultural facilities; the rise of an independent sector, rather marginal and fragile, but existing and influential; the increment of art schools, at secondary and tertiary level, and a new dynamics of professionalisation; the succession of different generations of artists and cultural mediators, and the consequent enrichment of the cultural field; and the process of internationalisation, both in what regards the openness of Portuguese institutions and players to the European and world system, and in what concerns the power of attracting, to our venues, students and professionals coming from abroad, namely from other Portuguese-speaking countries. In my opinion, an analysis of all these trends that skipped the careful consideration of the founding moment of the Carnation Revolution would not be as comprehensive as it could be.

And yet the third argument is the one I prefer, to justify this brief remembrance of the cultural transformation of the 1970s. I do think that the cultural scene of those days can serve as a useful background in dialogue with which one can actually design a research program on current cultural dynamics. The dynamics we can observe in European and North American countries, but also throughout many other regions of the world, as a lot of research on music, cinema and audiovisual is making clear.

How is it that the consideration of the evolution launched by the Carnation Revolution and the democratic transition, in Portugal, can help us review our modelling and outline a deeper research program on the juvenile, urban, popular culture of current societies?

My answer will be a twofold one. On the one hand, by providing a dense empirical case, in which some of the most important drivers of a new interrelationship of art and society, acting intensively and simultaneously, can be observed. We can thus find and test, concentrated in time and space, the conspicuous interplay of multiple variables from which we can draw pertinent postulates and hypotheses to new research: a heuristic usefulness, then. On the other hand, by calling for a scientific attitude that combines intellectual engagement with analytical distance in addressing the complex dialectics embedded in the work of artists on history and politics: an ethical input, if we may say so.

## 7. Political process and cultural transformation

Let us, then, reap some red carnations to smell the scent of cultural transformation – and its pertinence for our own epoch and context. At least three distinct avenues could be explored: culture as social practice; art and community; art and transgression.

One of the most powerful drivers in the Portuguese cultural scene of the mid-1970s was the radical enlargement of the meaning of culture, and the attempt to overthrow the barriers that usually separated arts and everyday life. The purpose was to enrich the cognitive and symbolic toolkit of ordinary people, empowering their agency. Particular attention was therefore given not only to the accessibility of goods and services institutionally encoded as cultural artifacts, but also, and mainly, to every person's ability to absorb, redefine and re-use those artifacts (also by means of decoding and recoding them, as Stuart Hall 2006 has underlined) as his or her personal resources into action. 'A song is a weapon', as stated in the famous song composed and sung by José Mário Branco, that has been already quoted.

Overcoming the boundaries between formal art consumption and the whole of social practice, cultural symbols and materials could be 'afforded' as ingredients, resources of people's agency – exactly as Tia DeNora highlighted, in her research on music-in-action (DeNora 2003a, 2011); and as the instruments and processes of 'mediation' (in Hennion's sense, 1993) became critical for such an accomplishment. The sociology of culture can see here a vast source of inspiration to research on social uses of arts and culture – on the way actors affiliated to different classes, peer groups, generations, genders, territories, incorporate symbols and forms into their own identity, self-presentation, lifestyle, expectations. In that sense, popular music (such as, for the youngsters, pop, rock, punk, hip hop, funk, R & B, and so on) is probably the most critical vector of group identification, in our societies (see, for instance, Featherstone 1991, Gomes 2012, Guerra 2013).

If we now return to the Portuguese experience of the mid-1970s, another feature must be emphasised: the process of cultural education and improvement was not conceived, in those times of vibe and vertigo, as solely or fundamentally individual. On the contrary, the keywords were 'group', 'class', 'collective'. Heritage belonging to everyone, everyone being both entitled to access it and responsible for preserving it, and as the same could be said about contemporary arts, conceived mainly as public goods (in the economic sense, non-exclusive and non-rival), culture was seen as a formidable means to *make community* (e.g., social conscience, national identity, *res publica*). However, the reverse was also true: according to the Portuguese activists of the 1970s, the sense of community should prevail, either within the art world or in its relationship with audiences and the public sphere, since the construction of a new, democratic, liberated and liberating cultural scene was a collective task, only collectively achievable.

Meanwhile, this community-oriented stance had to be articulated with the individual dimension inherent to creating and performing: writing a book, imagining a scenario, writing a lyrics or composing a melody, interpreting a character, singing for

an audience, filming, painting, dancing, always involve a radical singularity, a sense of originality and authorship. Even on the consumption side, such an individualisation is conspicuous, since (as Lahire 2004 pointed out), each individual set of cultural practices, being the result of multiple, socially determined, patterns of education, taste, and choice, may represent a rather heterogeneous, unique, assemblage. The 'society of individuals' described by Norbert Elias appears in a particular and particularly effective way in the arena of cultural production and consumption, which is a powerful driver of the 'individualisation process', the modern construction of the reflexive self and his or her identity (see Elias 1993, Giddens 1991).

This is, indeed, another large avenue for sociological research: how, in a certain context, given concrete circumstances of time and space, the artwork performs a role in group formation and inscribes itself in a scene partially defined by artists themselves. Again, popular music is perhaps the clearest example: sharing information, attending a concert, belonging to a fan club, wearing similar clothes and using similar ornaments, publishing a fanzine, all have to do with socialisation and group identity, as with aesthetic experience. And since new technologies of information and communication, along with international mobility, enable us to overcome physical distance, the 'local' group formed around a given art or pattern of consumption can unite people located in different countries and continents, and can include millions of individuals, in a post-national, cosmopolitan way (see Appadurai 1996). Whatever the level and scale you choose for your analysis, a properly sociological approach to arts and culture must consider not only their role in the wider configurations of social practice (the first avenue suggested by the consideration of the Portuguese case I tried to describe here); but it has also to reflect the different forces of individualism and affiliation – and, in the latter, to ponder the interplay of ingroup and outgroup (identities can be competitive), of group and society at large (many identities are defined against social order or 'the system' of social rules and institutions). Therefore, it is extremely important to focus on what 'your' really means, in the 'do it yourself' strategies that are so pervasive in the youngsters' cultural reception and production: is it yourself, individually, or your group, your band, your fan club, your usual audience, your community of values and activism?

A third direction of sociological research that I think the Portuguese case suggests in a very sharp manner is the exploration of the complex ties between, on the one hand, artistic language and form, and, on the other hand, the social, political and cultural establishment. Artists frequently solve this question by means of a *doxa*: one that postulates the transgressive nature of *any* work of art and deems any further investigation as unnecessary. Creativity would be the twin sister of rebellion, claiming the autonomy of a person, small group or specific cultural

scene vis-à-vis social order, common sense, hierarchical institutions, patterned behaviours, the Flaubertian ‘received ideas’, and other real or imagined symbols of conformity and establishment.

And indeed, this is one of the main reasons for the recurrent prominence of intellectuals and artists in revolutionary conjunctures, like the Portuguese one in the mid-1970s: their status, attitude and language are particularly functional to rationalize disruption and radical change. Furthermore, as Bourdieu (1992) explained, there is an objective affinity between the subaltern position of the cultural field within the structure of power and the political interests of non-hegemonic classes. As many studies on, for instance, the rap or the punk scenes in authoritarian regimes have shown, popular music can put in place a very potent artillery against oppression, censorship, and social control, because of its embeddedness in youth, because of the way it mobilises lyrics, melody, public gathering, and body language, and mainly because of its underground, anti-systemic orientation. Cultural liberation and political confrontation can easily stand shoulder to shoulder.

Still, change means something more than protest, outcry or even destruction: it also means trying to set up alternatives, and ultimately impose new structures, rules, and institutions. Again, this dialectic is crucial for sociologists of culture, since it raises issues that extend far beyond the schematic contrast of canon and novelty, core and periphery, industry and craftsmanship, social integration and tribal identities.

First, at a certain threshold, musicians or filmmakers ought to contact and eventually cope with the prevailing, national or international, system of cultural production and distribution. The way they do it (or refuse to do it) defines decisive aspects of their career as artists. Private or public organisations, media and the entertainment industry, cultural facilities, capital and technology, and the core institutions of any art world are always, directly or indirectly, playing a role, even in scenes clearly referred to the underground paradigm of cultural fabric. Namely in pop, rock, and indie music, one must consider the ability of the cultural establishment to harness and co-opt personalities, goods, services, symbols and habits emerging from its margins – even monetizing them, taking them as sources for significative profit. As labels, ‘anarchy’, ‘revolution’, ‘transgression’, ‘non-conformity’, can be instrumental for enlarging general audiences or reaching specific segments, and the gap between marketing language and real substance should not be ignored.

Second, the focus on attitude, celebrating any kind of defiant gesture vis-à-vis any kind of ‘system’, and claiming that dissidence is a value regardless of its fundamentals, content, or purpose, can be the shortest route to a catch-all libertarianism, where far-right, far-left and neither-right-nor-left movements can all find support and complicity. In several moments in the history of Western popular culture, the

grandiosity and hypervisibility of political proclamations for freedom, anarchy, and against any public authority, have hidden very old-fashioned stances, for instance in terms of gender relations, sexuality or even ethnicity. Suffice it to note the continuous hegemony of white men in the rock scenes, the strong influence of the patriarchal representation of family and community, the apology of violence; or, in the case of the Portuguese conjuncture of the mid-1970s, the fact that there was no female protagonist of the 'music of intervention', that is, the one engaged in a politically progressive social transformation. Moreover, the nihilistic perspective that motivated a large number of young Europeans involved in cultural underground scenes, throughout the post-1960s decades, was not very far away from some of the sentiments that eventually fuelled the rise, among young men, of the right-wing extremist opposition to liberal democracy, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The criticism of 'mainstream' can indeed provide a common ground to different variants of radicalisation, ideological fundamentalism, and political extremism. Labelling something as libertarian and underground is by no means a criterion to stop our own analytical inquiry into its characteristics and orientations, and the way it relates to social trajectories marked by the hegemony of youth, physical looks and stamina, or the pervasiveness of alcohol and drugs, not to mention the rules of industry and a particularly demanding star-system.

## 8. Conclusion: on distance and proximity

This is exactly the juncture at which the ethical input I anticipated, earlier in the chapter, can prove useful. Emotionally, it is hard to avoid a sympathetic, celebratory tone in addressing processes like the 1974 Revolution in Portugal, and the subsequent cultural transformation. In a certain way, red carnations, its symbols, could be seen as roses (commonly considered as symbols of purity and love) with the politically proper colours. It is impossible not to be grasped by all the liberation energy then provided: political, economic, sexual, cultural liberation from old habits, dictatorial rules, isolation, and social oppression. Only a torrential stream could extinguish the thirst accumulated for decades of the authoritarian regime, as Sérgio Godinho (1974) stated in a famous song, *Liberdade*. And, indeed, one can emphasise the desire of individual liberation (alone or, mainly, within a group or a generation) as a crucial characteristic of many music scenes. However, as Hannah Arendt (1963) once explained, liberation and liberty are quite different things: some of the most influential revolutions modernity has experienced were effective movements of liberation that did not evolve towards open societies and free regimes. That is why (speaking for a brief moment in normative terms) we need, in democracy, not one but two crit-

icisms: the revolutionary questioning of rules and institutions; and the democratic interpellation of the revolutionary pathos and its outcomes.

I close the bracket, as this is an academic essay. Based on sociological theory, it can be said, and must be said, that distance and proximity are both crucial. If the Weberian *Verstehen* – the ability to understand a social configuration of meaning in its own terms – is really a prerequisite for all sociology of arts and culture (not to mention all sociology), the same applies to the analytical distancing that allows us to highlight the shadows and look for the latent, invisible, oblivious components of that configuration. As the Portuguese Carnation Revolution exemplifies so clearly (even being one of the most inclusive and peaceful revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), there are always areas of silence (as we saw, all that could put into question the narrative of revolutionary unity and progressivism, such as emigration, the lived experience of the Colonial War, or the dramatic, hasty return of Portuguese from Africa). Inevitably, there are lunar surfaces, repressed facts, ignored issues that any inquiry worthy of its name must investigate, in order to reach a comprehensive panorama.

The proximity between researchers and subjects of research, in the sociology of arts and culture, is quite usual, and in many ways beneficial. As a matter of fact, artists and mediators can be seen as subjects in the two senses of the word: as realities to be known and as cognitive actors, as observed and as observers. The proximity is still heightened when we go into the dynamic territory of independent art, underground culture, and practices of cultural affordance, linking so closely art and self-identity. The research program on the ‘do it yourself culture’ and punk scenes is a sound testimony (see, for instance, Bennett & Guerra 2019a). Indeed, as I tried to suggest elsewhere (Silva 2021), it seems impossible to consider literature and arts as simply Durkheimian ‘facts’, or Marxian ‘superstructures’; they are an integral *part* of any inquiry aimed at understanding them, being simultaneously analysed and analysts.

Distance still is essential, and the dialectic between proximity and distance is a *sine qua non* condition for intellectual achievement. The principles and tools of social science instate a distance regarding the issues to be considered, and this favours a holistic, multifactorial analysis that illuminates different domains and encompasses a multiplicity of players and variables. Gaining distance helps objectivity and comprehensiveness.

There are two types of distance. One leads to arrogance. Drawn from either a positivist or a militant perspective, it assumes the asymmetry between the Comtean or Hegelian interpreter and the subject of interpretation. It is, therefore, a distance that goes from an upper point (the observer) to a lower point (the observed). The only way to surpass it would be, as Walter Benjamin argued, to practice a critical assessment of

the latter, one that should eventually surpass its 'archaic' elements, save the 'future carriers', and transform them into useful materials for our current intellectual and political initiative (Benjamin 2017b). 'Revolution', 'modernity', 'transgression', 'radicality', 'postmodernity', 'counter-hegemony', or any other label you prefer to apply, would be the criterion for a judgement that always considers the observed as the one to be assessed.

The other type of distance, the one I think we need, leads to intellectual humility. In a sense, it is the other face of proximity, on the same coin. Here, distance does not imply superiority, but simply otherness. We observe from different perspectives, we elaborate from different axiomatics, we use different tools: we, the scientists and researchers organized in academic communities; we, the artists, mediators, activists, consumers that form a cultural scene. The difference will always, to some extent, exist – there is a certain hiatus between the respective purposes and languages, a gap that cannot be annulled, as the two spheres cannot be dissolved one into the other. Fortunately. But that same difference asks for intercommunication, translation mechanisms, crossings and intersections, even common grounds, based on inter-questioning, reciprocity, mutual enrichment, the humble and open-minded attitude of he or she that realizes the bounded nature of her repertory and assumes the need to contact other repertories.

That is really the 'Angelus Novus' (Benjamin 2017b) we must refer to, in my view. One that cannot be redeemed by any obsolete ideation of history as a linear, progressive evolution, who is always dragged by the windstorm of current times. But with no academic or ideological legitimacy to judge, only to approach, to interpret the Other – to offer an attempted, provisional, reversible overview of vibrant realities and endless processes, those we accurately name arts and culture.



