


SPECIAL FEATURE

Resistance and Resilience: *The Nothing Factory* and the Workers' Self-Management of Fateleva

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Introduction

This article is about the resistance and resilience of workers when confronted with the likelihood of losing their jobs and seeing the factory where they worked close down. It discusses this topic by concentrating on the particular and singular case of workers' self-management of Fateleva – Indústria de Elevadores, a firm that specialized in the production and maintenance of elevators, located in the northern part of Lisbon Metropolitan Region, Portugal. It was occupied by its workers in the context of the Carnation Revolution (1974–1976) and then self-managed until its closure in 2016.

The first section offers a brief analysis of the film partly inspired by that experience, *The Nothing Factory* (*A Fábrica de Nada*, 2017), directed by Pedro Pinho. I use this cinematic work as a doorway to address the historical events connected with the self-managed company and to analyze the narrative and political choices associated with the fictionalization and cinematization of working people's lived experience. Walter Benjamin contends that film art is a privileged means of representing material existence.¹ In the same vein, this film is concerned with the concrete aspects of an attempt to shut down a factory and how workers organized to stop it, providing different approaches to and perspectives on the challenges that workers face today in Europe. *The Nothing Factory* reveals a larger context of deindustrialization and offshoring, especially of heavy and manufacturing industry, and shifts in the international division of labor. For Portugal, the capitalist integration of the European Union has meant dependency from the stronger and more developed European economies and the reduction of its productive capacity.

Yet the actual events and self-management experience that inspired *The Nothing Factory* are somehow attenuated and disregarded. The film's factual basis becomes a tenuous background as the narrative is transferred from the revolutionary period between 1974 and 1976 to the financial crisis of 2007–2008, followed by the European debt crisis in the 2010s. That being so, the second section presents a contextual and chronological history of the workers' self-management experience of Fateleva and relates it to topics of labor organization, trade unions, work and financial management, capitalist market control, and working-class history. This section relies on background research, but it is mostly based on long interviews with three

owner-workers and one employed worker, who is also a trade union leader, as well as business archival documents such as minutes of meetings, contracts, and judicial agreements. The methodological approach draws on the documents to ascertain if the testimonies conformed to facts. When a claim about the firm was unsubstantiated or inconclusively substantiated, it was excluded as evidence.

This article aims at unearthing the history of Fortis Ascensores, later Fateleva, from a subsidiary of the American giant Otis Elevator Company to a self-managed company up to its extinction in 2017, after the dissolution and liquidation had started in the previous year.² I argue that examining both contexts—the contemporary period in which the film is set and the revolutionary period in which the workers' self-management started—opens new possibilities for understanding the history of the working class in Portugal. Critically examining the film and Fateleva's history reveals how Portuguese workers have dealt with the threat of unemployment and obsolescence, from 1974 to the present.

A Cinematic Doorway to History

The Nothing Factory is a fiction, but the production company behind it, Terratrema Filmes, had specialized in documentary cinema before making the film. It is no surprise then that the story of this docudrama is inspired by true events and even borrows some of its real protagonists: the self-management experience of Fateleva from 1975 to 2016, after it ceased to be a subsidiary of the Otis Elevator Company. The screenplay was based on an idea by playwright Jorge Silva Melo, inspired by the play *The Nothing Factory* (*De Nietsfabriek*), written by Judith Herzberg in 1997. The film had an international impact that results from its topical themes and broad resonance. It was shown in film festivals in Africa, North and South America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The worldwide screening of *The Nothing Factory* generated praiseful reviews and enthusiastic discussions, and it resulted in prestigious awards such as the FIPRESCI Award, given by the International Federation of Film Critics at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.³

The film's narrative takes place in the industrial area of Alverca do Ribatejo, Vila Franca de Xira, in the larger metropolitan area of Lisbon. Factory workers realize the administration had machines and raw materials removed during the night. For this reason, they decide to organize in order to prevent the closure of the factory and the displacement of production. The new administration tries to negotiate terminations and, in the process, retaliates against the workers for refusing to comply, forcing them to remain in their jobs with nothing to do. The solution may be the collective and planned self-management by workers. This fiction incorporates documentary components that allow the film to confront a landscape of removal or reduction of the industrial capacity in Portugal. It pays attention to the closed firms, the abandoned buildings, and the destroyed lives that inhabit this landscape. It tells us about people who tried to save their jobs, their strong will as well as the difficulties they had to tackle.

More precisely, the fragmented structure of *The Nothing Factory* puts the very order of cinema in crisis, as if the adversities it portrays—the capitalist cyclical crises, in the form of financial and debt problems, and the austerity of the neoliberal

response to them—contaminate its form. It is this structure that explains the film's nearly three-hour run time and makes it a puzzle in which different pieces form a kind of whole. This assemblage of parts is similar to the product of a factory of everything or a factory where everything is connected, perhaps even fitted. In the following analysis, I divide the aspects of this assemblage into three parts.

First, the assorted nature of the film is evident in its cinematic style, particularly the cinematography, staging, and performance. Most staged scenes involve the characters played by the cartoonist and musician José Smith Vargas and actress Carla Galvão. They make up a working-class couple, an industrial worker and a manicurist, tested by adversity and whose relationship is deteriorating as a result. Almost the entire cast were nonprofessionals. Combining professional and nonprofessional actors has been a staple of films about the labor movement. *Salt of the Earth* (1954), about a strenuous strike by Mexican American miners in New Mexico, based on the fifteen-month-long workers' struggle against the labor abuses of the Empire Zinc Company in 1951, is a prominent example.⁴ In *The Nothing Factory*, the employment of mainly nonprofessional actors also reflects a deliberate political and artistic choice, close to direct cinema, a method of documentary filmmaking that emerged in the United States and Canada in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Direct cinema sought to capture subjects as directly as possible. Its filmmakers reduced equipment and crews to a minimum, used handheld cameras, and attempted to make themselves unobtrusive; the shooting was barely planned, allowing life to unfold before the camera. This filmmaking method has been used in fiction films as well to give authenticity to dramatic scenes. The improvised scenes in *The Nothing Factory*, captured in grainy and unpolished images, are close to direct cinema. The energy that stems from these features is intensified by the workers playing themselves, reliving and recreating their own lives.

Second, the piecing together of discourse from factory workers and intellectuals is another aspect of the assemblage operations in the film. On the one hand, the interviews with some of the workers provide remarks on working life and what they see as the negative direction of the country. The musical numbers in which they participate complement these reflections and celebrate their collective and cooperative work with creativity. They are directed by Argentinian filmmaker Danièle Incalcaterra, the director of *Fasinpat (Fábrica sin patrón)* (2004), a documentary about the Zanon ceramics factory in Argentine Patagonia where workers opposed the boss's layoff plan in 2001, taking over the manufacturing facility and controlling production. On the other hand, the intellectual discussions, with different references and points of view, sometimes seem completely distant from the workers' reality that the film shows, but they still contribute to the film's composite structure. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a structural issue stands out within these varied perspectives. It is a matter that we also find in Karl Marx's thoughts about capitalism: the constant struggle for the social emancipation of productive activities, freeing them from the need for wage labor as well as the turning of labor power into a commodity.⁵

Third, the remaining part is composed of moments of conviviality such as concerts and meals, which place the workers' drama within a social network of solidarity. More than links between what may appear to be more important scenes, the raw qualities of these moments, once again close to direct cinema, are essential in

portraying the everyday experiences of the Portuguese working class. Combining all of these parts, the film reinvents the tradition of social cinema, merging the authenticity of direct cinema with the estrangement effects of Brechtian aesthetics in its intellectual discussions and musical numbers. As Iván Villarrea Álvarez notes:

The development of the plot, in which every new situation causes doubts among the characters, entails a gradual transformation in the film's style that echoes the filmmaker's own doubts about how to represent this conflict and its effects on the characters.⁶

It is no wonder that *The Nothing Factory* has been studied for the ways in which it looks critically at Europe from the margins, revealing the contradictions of global capitalism and neo-liberalism, and the complications in creating meaningful narratives in contemporary European film.⁷ The aspects that the film foregrounds must be valued, but the factual background becomes concealed by them. Subsequent and perceptive analyses of the film mention this background only in passing.⁸ Clearly, this has to do with the legitimate option of shifting the historical period from the mid 1970s to the mid 2010s, which allows the film to reflect on current and timely issues. As we shall see, the long experience of self-management of Fateleva also gives us resources to think about the present moment.

Because of the limited interest and engagement of *The Nothing Factory* with the real events behind it, it is helpful to contrast it with another film: *The Take* (2004), a Canadian documentary directed by Avi Lewis and written by Naomi Klein. *The Take* follows a group of workers in Buenos Aires, Argentina, who take control of a closed Forja auto-plant where they once worked. They turn it into a worker cooperative in response to the economic crises in Argentina between 1998 and 2002, during which businesses closed, unemployment rose, and poverty grew. This was part of a larger and energetic movement against the “fatalism of the economy and the ideology of neoliberal capitalism” in the Argentinian capital. It proved that cooperatives could have sustainable business models that recovered companies regarded by their former capitalist owners as having no prospects or future.⁹ In contrast with *The Take*, *The Nothing Factory* does not give too much importance to self-management itself. The Portuguese film calls to this experience and shows its potential, but in order to find out more and write a history of this process throughout four decades, I had to read preserved documents and interview some of the Fateleva workers.

A Singular Self-Management Experience

The following history of Fateleva and its self-management experience is mainly the product of two long interviews with three owner-workers: Tristão Soares, João Mendes, and Vicente Valentim. They often spoke fluidly over each other and therefore it was difficult to isolate their individual discourses and comments, except for some of Soares's remarks. Consequently, what follows is based on what the three told me, supported by dozens of documents that were part of the company's archive, now stored in Soares's home.¹⁰ I also talked to another worker, Rogério Silva, who entered the company in 1989 and stayed until the end in 2016. During this period,

he became a trade union leader and a member of the National Council of the General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers - Intersindical (CGTP-IN) and its executive board as well as the secretary-coordinator of the Inter-Union Federation of Metallurgical, Chemical, Electrical, Pharmaceutical, Cellulose, Paper, Graphics, Press, Energy and Mining Industries (FIEQUIMETAL). The three owner-workers were also unionized. Silva's perspective is relevant for two reasons: first, in contrast with Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, he was not an owner-worker, but an employed worker; second, he paid more attention to the role of the trade union in the firm. The importance of the union is also confirmed by documentation, particularly notices of union meetings with agendas and their subsequent minutes. In *The Nothing Factory*, a union representative shows up in the beginning after the workers decide to take action, but he seems like a foreign element, as if the workers are not actually unionized. He explains to the workers that they must come to work and that, if they do not keep their work schedule, the administration can use that as a reason for rightful termination. The idea of mounting pickets to keep an eye on the factory and protect their jobs originates from this conversation. Yet it is the group of workers that express concern about the union "when the administration arrives," because it "might give them the wrong idea." Then the union disappears. Despite the film's inattentive treatment, issues around the roles that labor organizations and the state play in encouraging or hindering workers' control of firms are of major importance.¹¹

The trade union, the South and Islands Electrical Industries Union (SIESI), that intervened in Fateleva's labor reality was created in 1940 as the National Electricians Union. Today, the archives of the SIESI hold important documents like the first agreement and regulations signed between the workers' commission and the general administration in 1974.¹² This document was the first step toward the workers' self-management. Immediately after the April Revolution, a workers' commission was organized at Fortis Ascensores, part of the Otis Elevator Company. This commission later co-existed with a union commission, both negotiating wage raises and other demands of workers with the administration, and later was extinguished.

A union delegate from the General Union of Workers (UGT) was active in Fateleva from the 1980s onward, but with little influence. Created in 1978 by members of the Socialist Party (PS) and Social Democratic Party (PSD) and following a reformist, non-contestatory tendency, the UGT is affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation, and the European Trade Union Confederation, to which the CGTP-IN also belongs. UGT has half the number of members of the CGTP-IN—400,000 against 800,000—and consequently its social influence pales in comparison. It "was very strong among white-collar workers, but weak in [the] industry."¹³ It does not present itself as having a working-class nature, and it does not organize for transformative action through mass mobilization and strong-willed protest. It intervenes mainly in a consultant capacity and, for this reason, the UGT delegate at Fateleva was mainly an agreeable voice, according to Soares, Mendes, and Valentim.¹⁴

The SIESI had good relations with the company's administration and new rights and benefits were always negotiated with the trade union. Because of the lack of serious labor conflict, the trade union was not preponderant, but was always present. The fact is that the connection between the workers and the SIESI was not absent of

contradictions, Silva notes.¹⁵ The union organized highly-attended workers' meetings to discuss the national context and labor demands, such as the raising of wages. An agreement was reached every year. In any case, whenever CGTP-IN organized a national protest that included sectorial strikes, this brought about difficult discussions. The workers who were the legal owners of the company, Soares, Mendes, Valentim, and others, "questioned themselves that if they were on strike, they would be striking against themselves." According to them, this apparent problem was easily solved by appealing to their class solidarity as industrial workers. The three owner-workers confirmed these discussions in interview.¹⁶ There was a minority of workers, particularly those who were hired after 1988, who did not have this problem because they were not owners, even though they effectively participated in self-management. Owner-workers and employed workers were all members of trade unions. When the CGTP-IN would call for a general strike—e.g., as they did on March 28, 1988, against the "labor package" of the right-wing government, or on December 20, 2002, to try to prevent the approval of a new Labor Code, which had the participation of 1.7 million workers—"no one missed the call."¹⁷ The perception was that a general strike, a rare and impactful form of struggle, had clearer political and social aims that were widespread. Discussions about labor organizing and protest within Fateleva reflect the different phases of the company's history. At the beginning of the self-management phase, all workers were owners, but from 1988 on this was not the case.

The history of the workers' self-management of the company begins in the revolutionary period. In 1975, Otis decided to leave the company and Portugal, but this seemed to be based more on fearing the political outcome of the revolution rather than an economic rationale.¹⁸ There was no movement on the part of the workers to take hold of the company and remove Otis as the owners. Yet this kind of resolution from multinational corporations was frequent and led to the occupation and self-management of hundreds of companies in Portugal during this period. After the Otis administration left, the workers slept in the factory and prevented any attempt to remove machinery from the premises. They organized and kept the company running. Relevant to Otis's choice may have been the fact that it was acquired by United Technologies in the United States in 1976, becoming a wholly owned subsidiary that was restructured in the process.

In the background of these events was the 25th of April Revolution that overthrew fascism in 1974. It started as a coup by antifascist army officers, but quickly became a revolt of the Portuguese people. This mass democratic uprising is also called the Carnation Revolution because it is associated with the red carnations placed into the barrels of soldiers' rifles and tanks. It was a peaceful revolution in Portugal, although not in the Portuguese African colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, where a war for national liberation was being fought. It introduced advanced workers' rights: a national minimum wage, a Christmas bonus, vacation entitlement, paid vacation, the right to work and to dignity on the job with collective bargaining, prohibition of dismissals without just cause, equal pay, the right to strike, and trade union freedom. It also led to changes in the relations of production by liquidating monopolist groups in strategic branches of the economy through nationalization and by abolishing large-scale land ownership in the south through an agrarian

reform that ended unemployment and improved living conditions for southern rural workers. The CGTP-IN—formed in 1970 as Intersindical by Communist, Catholic and other progressive trade union leaders—played a crucial role in securing these rights, after it had been an indispensable organization in the fight for democracy and freedom of association.¹⁹ Such changes were accompanied by experiences of workers' self-management and worker cooperatives.

In 1988, by force of law, the company was turned into as S.A., an anonymous society, the equivalent of a public limited company in UK company law and a public company in US corporate law. This meant that shared ownership by the workers was still possible, but this new legal imposition also opened the door to acquisitions of shares by other people, which determined that self-management was no longer in the hands of workers and could be blocked or hindered. Be that as it may, most of the workers retained the majority of shares. The change demanded by law occurred on September 28, 1988; the Fortis Colective (Colectivo Fortis) was constituted by the 190 workers who had worked with Otis and replaced Tecnieleva. It was only later that year that the company was to be completely in the hands of the owner-workers, when Otis, through a representative in Portugal, agreed to the transfer the last of its shares.²⁰ With this transaction, the company's name was shortened to Fortis.

As in other cases, self-management removed hierarchies, but not "the technical division of work."²¹ This is certainly true of what happened in Fortis. There were still workers in charge of other workers due to their professional experience in assembly, welding, painting, and other production processes. It was a national company that had built and maintained a reputation of producing high-quality products and providing excellent maintenance and repair services. At one point in the 1990s, it was the market leader in the elevator business. It held a 70 percent share in the national market, including the Portuguese islands in the North Atlantic Ocean, Azores and Madeira.²² During the 1990s the company had more activity and orders, with higher profits, but it was also the time that the company started to face some difficulties associated with arrival of strong competition. Fortis worked mostly with the German multinational Thyssenkrupp Elevators in Spain. As a sign of troubles to come, Thyssenkrupp successfully bought the part of Fortis that provided technical assistance in 1993, known as Tecnieleva and formed in 1984. Anticipating the upcoming pressure, the management commission, supported by the workers' commission, used the money that resulted from this sale (290 000 000 escudos, around 1 450 000 euros) and some reserve funds (110 000 000 escudos, around 550 000 euros) to increase the company's share capital in the same year, from 20 000 000 escudos (around 100 000 euros) to 420 000 000 escudos (around 2 100 000 euros). This huge increase of capital by twenty-one times as demonstrative of the need to strengthen the company's financial and investment capacity at this stage. In 1994, the firm's name was finally changed to Fateleva - Indústria de Elevadores (Fateleva - Indústria de Elevadores).

In the beginning of the 2000s, the SIESI was called to a meeting with the company administration because they wanted to share the profits between the workers. Some profits were to be reinvested in modernizing the factory in order to keep up with the industry standards in manufacturing, at times supported by the Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (IAPMEI) and short-term bank loans. A big

percentage of those profits was to be distributed among the owner-workers, but some of them had retired, and the administration said that “the workers here now are producing the wealth,” suggesting that these should benefit more than just the retired workers.²³ For the trade union that was not the only problem. It called attention to the small group of workers who were not shareholders and therefore were excluded from the profit sharing. The SIESI proposal was simple: the attribution of one extra monthly salary to each worker, owners or not. The administration accepted the proposal and from then on, every year, the workers received a 15th monthly salary in May, in addition to the regular twelve monthly salaries, the Christmas bonus, and the vacation subsidy. Because of this agreement the wages of these highly skilled workers were well above average within the industrial sub-sector of vertical transportation in Portugal. Some of their very advanced benefits came with self-management and lasted because of it, namely ninety days of fully paid sick leave, a marriage financial aid, and a birth subsidy in addition to social security allowances.²⁴ Some of these benefits were already in the 1974 agreement and were also implemented in the Thyssenkrupp factories opened in Portugal, after the multinational bought the technical assistance and repair resources from Fortis in the previous decade. The more than two hundred workers who were transferred to Thyssenkrupp kept all their rights and benefits. Some of these were eroded with time and the workers did not have the strength to secure them, but some remain in effect—such as paid leave on one’s birthday.

The company did not go bankrupt, but it had to be closed in 2016 and liquidated in 2017. In the early 1990s, it had about four hundred workers, but when it closed this number was reduced to around twenty. It was “asphyxiated by the internal EU market,” Silva concludes.²⁵ The balance sheets and reports show that the internal market in Portugal had been shrinking since the first years of the 2000s. Exporting, particularly to Spain, and diversifying the production output of metal equipment in addition to elevators, contributed to keeping the company in operation. Yet Fateleva’s access to the market of elevator components was in rapid decline. The firm proved that it could compete up to a point, without forgoing the labor and social aspects of its business activity. Big corporations like Thyssenkrupp, the American Otis, the Swiss Schindler, and the German manufacturer Schmitt + Sohn were allowed the power to “rapidly crush all small businesses: they set prices and conditions” that small to medium companies such as Fateleva could not compete with.²⁶ The first year with negative results was 2013: Sales had dropped by 36 percent and ordered products had inferior profit margins. The results in the following years were all negative, despite the efforts to find alternative markets and additional clients. The closing became inevitable. Comportel, a Portuguese company founded in 1961 that specialized in elevator assistance, was bought by Otis in 1988 and with these purchases and closings the big corporations in the sector consolidated their market dominance. Soares, one of the original workers who organized the self-management, told the history of a failed purchase that showed the power of big corporations in the global capitalist market. When the Fortis assistance services were put up for sale for financial reasons in the 1980s, several companies seemed interested. One of them was Atlas, a Brazilian company created in 1935 that made a down payment of 4 000 000 escudos (around 20 000 euros). However, it gave up on the purchase. “At the time, it was known that the Americans

from Otis had threatened Atlas. If they came to Europe, they would go to Brazil with Otis,” Soares told me.²⁷ No documents support this story, of course, but the fact is that Atlas never operated in Europe and it was purchased by Schindler in 1999, becoming Atlas Schindler.

The position of the union commission in 2016 was that the company was still a viable business, if it further diversified its clients and reduced its dependence on Thyssenkrupp as its major client. In case there was no turning back, it asked for talks with Thyssenkrupp to propose that the German multinational recruit the maximum of highly-skilled workers from Fateleva, which is what happened afterward. The goods that Fateleva produced are now made mainly in Spain. The closeness and bond between workers meant that “no one was left behind” and when one of them had personal or family problems that reflected on their work and productivity, they were helped by their colleagues.^{28,29} The management was so efficient that all outstanding payments and workers’ benefits were paid and the company had no debts to social security or taxes to pay. There was even some money left was channeled to nonprofit, charitable organizations.³⁰

Conclusion: Fateleva in Portuguese Labor History

When Fortis came to be managed by its workers in 1975, the experience was far from unique, and the revolutionary impulse was still very much alive. As Américo Nunes describes in detail, “In January 1977, there were 1000 self-managed companies and 890 cooperatives, with a total of 35 thousand workers.”³¹ It is important here to distinguish workers’ self-management from worker cooperatives. The first is a form of organizational management based on self-directed processes of the workforce. The latter is an autonomous association of workers into a jointly owned enterprise. So, cooperatives entail self-management, but self-management does not require that the enterprise is a cooperative. In the Portuguese revolutionary period, most of the self-managed companies had been abandoned and workers’ control “was assumed provisionally until the intervention of the State, through the appointment of administrations. The companies only continued to be managed by the workers when the intervention did not take place.”³² A credential for the workers’ committee was issued by the Ministry of Labor, but most self-managed companies did not get this credential because the dominant shareholders contested some of the processes. In cases when the equity situation allowed it or contracts were made with the previous owners, cooperatives were set up. That was not case with Fortis. It was not turned into a cooperative; instead the original workers became shareholders of the company.

The extinction of Fateleva demonstrates that workers’ self-management faces many problems within the contemporary global economy. In late capitalism, with massive concentration, maximization of profits, and aggressive competition, such a company is very difficult to maintain and can only rely on a network of solidary and cooperating companies, which did not exist in Portugal or Europe. The history of the firm shows that its success between the 1980s and the mid 1990s benefited from the fact that the operations of multinational companies in the sector of elevator manufacturing and maintenance in Portugal were limited in size at the time. The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 and effective in 1993, favored the capitalist

integration of the member-states of the European Union with Germany and France dominating the process. Against the background of the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the post-Socialist states in Eastern Europe, this treaty accelerated the implementation of neoliberal policies and restrained economic and social cohesion.³³ It opened the doors to the progressive but strong capture of production and trade sectors by large transnational corporations. The elevator sector was no exception.

Be that as it may, Fateleva was a remarkable experience in Portuguese labor and working-class history if we factor in its longevity over forty years. The history of the company narrated above brings to light some of the factors that explain this long existence: the significant number of old and new clients, the skills and innovation of the workforce, and the fact that it produced elevators and provided maintenance services simultaneously. Moreover, its singularity informs us about the conflicting political context following the revolutionary period, and at odds with it, which did not allow for these experiences to flourish as they did in Argentina.

As my analysis has demonstrated, *The Nothing Factory* is not interested in presenting Fateleva's history, particularly the revolutionary context that led to its ownership changes. The firm's specific process becomes simply a narrative reference or basis for the film. However, that does not mean that *The Nothing Factory* is uninterested in the process through which workers come to self-manage the company where they work. In fact, this concern is manifest and central in the docudrama. Arguably, this interest is the reason why it generated curiosity about Fateleva in newspaper articles and critical discussions, especially when it first premiered. It also raised the possibility of workers' self-management in a new historical context. The contemporary framing of *The Nothing Factory* introduces a shift between two momentous periods for the working class in Portugal: the revolutionary period that was favorable to its demands and the contemporary period marked by the austerity of neoliberal public policies that largely targeted workers. The film "establishes a link between the past and present challenges of the workers' struggle while testing different strategies to update the tradition of social cinema."³⁴ The temporal shift is not a way to disconnect the film from Portuguese social history. Instead, it allows it to dig into the circumstances that led to the liquidation of Fateleva in the contemporary period. At the same time, and in midst of doubt and uncertainty, it poses workers' self-management as an option at a time when that possibility seems almost unimaginable. *The Nothing Factory* sees its task as imagining this possibility in cinematic terms, expanding the political imagination of labor action.

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Notes

1. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 247, n. 11.
2. Proceeding no. 1/2016 (Ata n.º 1/2016), recording the information and negotiation meeting between the Liquidation Committee, the General-Directorate for Employment and Labor Relations (DGERT), and the SIESI union commission, signed by the three parties, April 15, 2016.
3. See Dennis Lim, "Keeping at It," *Film Comment* 53, no. 4 (July–August 2017): 62–63.
4. *Salt of the Earth* was made and attacked at the height of McCarthyism and the witch hunt in Hollywood by the House Un-American Activities Committee. "It was revived in the 1960s by both radical and feminist

groups as an alternative to conservative American trade unionism and male-dominated left/liberal politics”; Tom Zaniello, *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films about Labor*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), 329. It then became a staple of working-class cinema in the US. For the director’s account of the film, see Herbert Biberman, *Salt of the Earth* (Boston: Beacon, 1965).

5. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A New Abridgement*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. David McLellan (Oxford, 1995), 108–14.

6. Iván Villarrea Álvarez, “It Could Happen to You: Empathy and Empowerment in Iberian Austerity Cinema,” in *Cinema of Crisis: Film and Contemporary Europe*, ed. Thomas Austin and Angelos Koutsourakis (Edinburgh, 2020), 154.

7. Mariana Liz, “Thinking Europe from the Margins and Through Marginal Cinema: The Case of *The Nothing Factory* (Pinho, 2017),” *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 18, no. 1 (January 2020): 131–44.

8. Patricia Sequeira Brás, “Post-Fordism in *Active Life*, *Industrial Revolution* and *The Nothing Factory*,” in *Cinema of Crisis: Film and Contemporary Europe*, ed. Thomas Austin and Angelos Koutsourakis (Edinburgh, 2020), 87.

9. See Esteban Magnani, *The Silent Change: Recovered Businesses in Argentina*, trans. Steve Herrick (Buenos Aires, 2009); Andrés Ruggeri (coord.), *Informe del IV relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina. 2014: las empresas recuperadas en el período 2010-2013* (Buenos Aires, 2014), 7 (trans. mine).

10. One of the most informative documents is an analysis and evaluation of the legal history of the company to settle issues of rights to common property, produced by an economist and a lawyer: José Ilídio Mendes and Cláudia Dengucho, “Fateleva: Synthesis” (“Fateleva: Síntese”), 22 April 2004.

11. See György Széll, Paul Blyton, Chris Cornforth, eds., *The State, Trade Unions and Self-Management: Issues of Competence and Control* (Berlin, 2015).

12. Elevadores Otis - Fortis Ascensores, “Internal Regulation - Agreed between the Workers’ Commission and the General Administration” (“Regulamento Interno – Acordado entre a Comissão de Trabalhadores e a Direção Geral”), 1 September 1974.

13. Sigfrido M. Ramírez Pérez, “Iberian Trade Unions and the ETUC: From the Periphery to the Centre,” in *National Trade Unions and the ETUC: A History of Unity and Diversity*, ed. Andrea Ciampani and Pierre Tilly (Brussels, 2017), 146.

14. Tristão Soares, João Mendes, and Vicente Valentim, interview by author, Setúbal, 13 April 2021.

15. Silva, interview.

16. Silva, interview.

17. Silva, interview.

18. Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, interview.

19. See Daniel Cabrita and José Ernesto Cartaxo, “A Formação da Intersindical,” in *Contributos para a História do Movimento Operário e Sindical, Volume I: Das Raízes até 1977*, coord. Manuel Carvalho da Silva (Lisbon, 2011), 117–56.

20. Deed of Transfer of Shares and Amendment of Pact (Escritura de Cessões de Quotas e Alteração de Pacto) between Otis - Elevator Company, New Jersey, and Fateleva’s Shareholders, 1st Civil Law Notary in Almada, 28 September 1988.

21. Janez Prasnikar, *Workers’ Participation and Self-management in Developing Countries* (London, 2020), 3.

22. Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, interview.

23. Silva, interview.

24. Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, interview.

25. Silva, interview.

26. Silva, interview.

27. Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, interview.

28. Proceeding no. 1/2016.

29. Silva, interview.

30. Proceeding no. 1/2016; Silva, interview; Soares, Mendes, and Valentim, interview.

31. Américo Nunes, “A Intersindical na Revolução de Abril,” in *Contributos para a História do Movimento Operário e Sindical, Volume I: Das Raízes até 1977*, coord. Manuel Carvalho da Silva (Lisbon: CGTP-IN and IBJC, 2011), 232 (trans. mine).

32. Ibid.

33. See Hubert Buch-Hansen and Angela Wigger, “Revisiting 50 Years of Market-Making: The Neoliberal Transformation of European Competition Policy,” *Review of International Political Economy* 17, no. 1 (February 2010): 20–44.

34. Álvarez, “It Could Happen to You,” 154.