LUMINA
Revista do Programa de Pós-graduação em Comunicação
Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora / UFJF
e-ISSN 1981-4070

# Vesper Film Club:

## A film club experience in Cariri, Ceará

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## Abstract

This article presents the Cineclube Vésper, an initiative of the Sétima Film Study Group. This case study is an integral part of a larger research project that addresses the presence of film clubs in the Cariri region of Ceará and relates them to the emancipatory nature offered by the cinematic spectation they promote. The study also offers an overview of film club practice in the region as a reaffirmation of the importance of a cinematographic culture that promotes the emancipation of thought from the seventh art and critical audience development. We also provide a brief account of the emergence of Grupo Sétima, a collective that mobilizes film events in Cariri, and the configuration of Cineclube Vésper is described in order to situate it as a local film club initiative committed to promoting debates at the end of films and offering sessions accessible in Libras in a public space such as the CCBNB — Cariri auditorium. Supported by studies on film clubs and critical audience development, we sought to include the Cineclube Vésper initiative in the context of studies on film clubs, film culture, and the act of going to the movies.

## Keywords

Film clubs; film club pratices; film culture; film spectatorship; audience building.

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# Cineclube Vésper:

## uma experiência de cineclubismo no Cariri cearense

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## Resumo

Este artigo traz uma apresentação do Cineclube Vésper, iniciativa do Grupo de Estudos Sétima de Cinema. Este estudo de caso é parte integrante de uma pesquisa maior que aborda a presença de cineclubes na região do Cariri cearense e os relaciona ao caráter emancipatório oferecido pela espectação cinematográfica que promovem. O estudo também oferece um panorama da prática cineclubista na região como reafirmação da importância de uma cultura cinematográfica que promova a emancipação do pensamento a partir da sétima arte e formação crítica de público. Trazemos também um breve relato do surgimento do Grupo Sétima, coletivo mobilizador de eventos de cinema no Cariri, assim como a configuração do Cineclube Vésper é descrita de modo a situá-la enquanto iniciativa cineclubista local comprometida em promover debates ao final dos filmes e oferecer sessões com acessibilidade em Libras em um espaço público como o auditório do CCBNB — Cariri. Apoiados em estudos sobre cineclubismo e formação crítica do público, buscamos incluir a iniciativa do Cineclube Vésper no cenário de estudos sobre cineclubes, cultura cinematográfica e sobre o ato de ir ao cinema.

## Palavras-chave

cineclube; práticas cineclubistas; cultura cinematográfica; espectação cinematográfica; formação de público.

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# Cineclub Vésper:

## una experiencia de cineclube en la región de Cariri, Ceará

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e Gilles Vianna Alves Diniz[3]

## Resumen

Este artículo presenta el Cineclube Vésper, una iniciativa del Grupo de Estudio Cinematográfico Sétima. Este estudio de caso es parte integral de un proyecto de investigación más amplio que aborda la presencia de cineclubs en la región del Cariri de Ceará y los relaciona con la naturaleza emancipadora ofrecida por la espectación cinematográfica que promueven. El estudio también ofrece una visión general de la práctica de los cineclubes en la región como una reafirmación de la importancia de una cultura cinematográfica que promueve la emancipación del pensamiento del séptimo arte y el desarrollo del público crítico. También ofrecemos un breve relato del surgimiento de Grupo Sétima, colectivo que moviliza eventos cinematográficos en Cariri, y la configuración del Cineclube Vésper se describe con el fin de situarlo como una iniciativa de club de cine local comprometida a promover debates al final de las películas y ofrecer sesiones accesibles en libras en un espacio público como el auditorio CCBNB — Cariri. Con el apoyo de estudios sobre cines y desarrollo del público crítico, buscamos incluir la iniciativa Cineclube Vésper en el contexto de los estudios sobre cines, cultura cinematográfica y el acto de ir al cine.

## Palabras clave

Cineclube; prácticas cineclubistas; cultura cinematográfica; espectacíon de cine; formacíon de público.

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# Introduction

Several cinephilia elements, such as film clubs (and other screening venues), film magazines, review blogs, and collectors of archives and histories regarding old street-level cinemas help to better understand the local film culture. According to Pereira (2017), the term "film culture" refers

> [...] to the development of specific tastes and skills regarding language, history, and film technique, built upon an overview of filmographies [...] in this model, having a cinematic culture entails, acquiring the fundamentals of cinematic language and building a repertoire of both films and books for the fan and especially for the cinephile involved in film clubs. (Pereira, 2017, p. 16).

The film club ventures help preserving both the film culture and local audiences' development through cinema-related activities related to cinema such as film screenings, festivals, study groups, awards, and magazine publications. Film clubs are also understood as collective expressions of cinephilia, as this term refers to the affection for cinema culture. Their origin in Brazil dates back to the *Chaplin Club* foundation in June 1928, in Rio de Janeiro. However, groups of cinephiles already gathered in meetings held in the city a decade earlier to watch and discuss films (Butruce, 2003). The *Chaplin Club* had its own publication, the magazine *O Fan*, which released nine volumes over nearly two years, as well as fostered a film criticism culture and promoted magazines associated with film clubs.

This article is an analysis of the role played by *Cineclube Vésper* (2024–2025) in the film club scene in the Cariri region. The project was launched by the *Sétima Study Group*. This collective was dedicated to promote the film culture in Cariri, mainly in Juazeiro do Norte City, Ceará State, Brazil.

The interest in investigating the cinephile culture in Juazeiro do Norte, expressed through its film clubs, triggered the will to conduct this study. The herein introduced discussion is part of an ongoing Master's research project aimed at analyzing three film club ventures in Juazeiro do Norte City. However, we chose to herein describe a case study about a film club that was not addressed in the Master's dissertation, but that was observed throughout the research process. The case of this film club's activities likewise supports the local film culture for mobilizing a collective.

A perspective explored in Melo's (2019) studies on the collaborative activities of experimental groups and film clubs in Bahia was the very basis to approach our case study. It was achieved by taking into consideration film clubs as spaces fostering film culture and providing "not only the opportunity to access a diverse filmography, but also a space for training critics, filmmakers, producers, and technicians" (Melo, 2019, p. 632).

This is a study substantiated by participatory observation carried out at

*Cineclube Vésper* focused on assessing aspects such as programming, screening venue, and curatorial practices, as well as their impact on audiences. This article introduces *Cineclube Vésper* in the broader research context applied to film club activities in Juazeiro do Norte City, which are the subject of an ongoing dissertation. We provide a brief account of the film club experience observed during *Cineclube Vésper's* activities from October 2024 to July 2025. In addition to attend project pre-production meetings and selected screenings in order to understand the film club's dynamics, we analyzed promotional materials, the project proposal approved under the public funding call, photographic records, and other documents available online, including news articles, interviews, and social media posts.

We highlight the *Sétima* Study Group's activities in the local cinephile scene, as it promoted film discussions and study sessions in the same venue where it hosted screenings for its own film club. This group is often simply referred to as "*Sétima*" and was launched in 2012 by Professor and film-discussion facilitator Elvis Pinheiro [1]. It has organized several film screening events in Juazeiro do Norte. In 2024, this collective formed its first film club funded by incentives from *Paulo Gustavo Law*, created to support the cultural sector affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Cineclube Vésper* activities provides a glimpse, although a limited one, into how local film club practices affect attendees' experiences by fostering a more autonomous and critical gaze through cinema. It is necessary situating our *Cineclube Vésper* account within the current status of research on film club. This is so, given the emergence of film club initiatives in Juazeiro do Norte, and their role in promoting and supporting the local film culture by creating spaces for both discussion (perceptions and reflections triggered by films) and criticism (reviews and references) as collective expressions of thoughts.

We assessed the *Cineclube Vésper* case as a means of understanding the cultural impact of film club activities on their attendees by introducing it as an example of public policy aimed at outspreading audiovisual practices based on a local reach.

## The emancipatory potential of film spectatorship

We can identify several studies whose scope most closely aligns with our research among research assessing the emancipatory potential of cinema clubs and film clubs, including those by Sales (2014), Carvalho (2021), Gaze (2021), and Costa (2024). Our theoretical framework is also substantiated by Alves' (2010) discussions on film club culture and on the cinema experience explored by Baecque (2010), bell hooks [2] (2023), and Morin (2025).

In her article '*As práticas do Clube de Cinema de Assis como fortalecimento da cultura cinematográfica no interior*' (2014), Sales presents a localized study on the film club culture in Assis City, São Paulo State, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Similar to

Juazeiro do Norte, Assis, which is located 400 km from the state capital, São Paulo, has a history of movie theaters. Nevertheless, according to the author, "the purpose of a commercial movie theater differs from that of a cinema club" (Sales, 2014, p. 5). This is so, because in a cinema club the relationship between spectators and films goes beyond the act of watching movies. Besides highlighting the aesthetic, cultural, social, and political debates taking place in film clubs, Sales' study discusses the efforts by organizers to get the films and assesses how this process led to a network of contacts between film clubs and distributors.

According to Carvalho, in his article '*Cineclube como narrativa de resistência, prática de reflexão e crítica cinematográfica na/para a Contemporaneidade*' (2021), the "film club culture is a democratic, educational, and political arena and, therefore, a formative one, which stands in opposition to authoritarian narratives" (2021, p. 91). As the author explains, film club practices emerged from a context featured by the pursuit of cinematic pluralism, resisting cultural colonialism, and restructuring the cinematic language. This scenario can be observed in the curatorial approach adopted by *Cineclube Vésper* organizers, as they gathered a whole collection of films addressing minority groups or suggesting new ways of perceiving reality, including both Brazilian and foreign productions from Germany, France, and the United States. Although the earliest film clubs were spaces largely limited to a bourgeois class of intellectuals and filmmakers, Carvalho (2021, p. 91) explains that these activities played a key role in emancipatory education, as they were spaces of resistance where "the practice of film criticism took place, broadening spectators' interpretive understanding" (Carvalho, 2021, p. 92).

Gaze investigated film club practices in Espírito Santo State from the perspective of cultural reception and its role in fostering audiences' critical development. He emphasized that films are not mere commercial goods, but also contemporary sociocultural expressions (Gaze, 2021, p. 3). Gaze explained that "habits and tastes associated with film consumption directly shape individuals' formation as citizens" (2021, p. 3) and restated the relevance of policies aimed at democratizing audiovisual access: "film club initiatives are capable of bringing together the ideal conditions for creating an audience with the potential to culturally engage with audiovisual productions as critical spectators" (2021, p. 4).

Costa (2024), in turn, provided an important classification of film clubs by defining collective film clubs as follows:

> Although collectivity is a common film club culture feature, in general, this category encompasses film clubs organized across the shared aspirations of a group of people who are not affiliated a priori with any institution other than the venue hosting their screenings (although some collective film clubs do receive institutional support). Their establishment is not grounded in a formal legal structure; that is, they do not have a legal status at the time of their creation (Costa, 2024, p. 126).

We can understand how *Sétima* Group is organized based on this classification. As Costa explains, the group can be understood as follows: "rather than a group of friends gathering around an idea, it is an idea that brings together a group of people who may eventually become friends. The formative bond precedes the affective bond. The community forms around film screenings, rather than the other way around" (Costa, 2024, p. 127).

Alves (2010) explains that the film club culture has become one of the most important cultural movements of our time. Film club practices go beyond the mere screening of films, so they "can effectively become a cultural movement capable of shaping not merely an 'audience,' but human subjects committed to the historical transformation of the bourgeois society" (2010, p. 7).

We can argue that audiovisual images must be present in contemporary critical formation processes given that audiovisual images have become the most important element in processes to make human being subjective and (de)subjective in the 21st century (Alves, 2010, p. 11). They establish connections, generate meanings and interpretations, and revisit preconceived concepts. Although the capitalist order has appropriated audiovisual images as instruments for the alienation of the masses (Alves, 2010, p. 11), from the human emancipation perspective, these images can also subvert, reclaim, and re-signify the multiple ways reality is interpreted through. This process generates meaning for spectators through the connections established by the audiovisual language. According to bell hooks (2023, p. 18), cinema offers a reimagined, reinvented version of reality and, although it may seem familiar to us, it presents a universe different from the real world.

The film club practice is not a mere leisure activity, but a social practice applied by social collectives to appropriate audiovisual images. This is a cultural radicalism form opening spaces for debate, social interaction, reflection, and for the symbolic, linguistic, and conceptual re-signification of the screened audiovisual images (Alves, 2010, p. 12). Audiovisual images re-signification is not a neutral process; it depends on an ideological work that takes different worldviews into account. This statement is clarified below by our assessment of the heterogeneous audience of the herein analyzed film club.

Melo (2019, p. 634) drew on Baecque's studies from 1944 to 1968 available in his book *Cinefilia* (2010) to emphasize that a cultural-historical perspective, and an in-depth study on a specific group or activity, in addition to the relevance of diverse documentary sources. It is essential to contextualize the social space and historical period the research is situated in. His emphasis explains our goal: situating our participatory observation of the assessed film club in loco, in the Cariri region.

Morin (2025) argues that we can attribute aspects of our own psychic lives, such as absences, desires, anxieties, and fears, during film viewing, to fictional characters,

places, and situations (projection). This argument was another contribution to the understanding of cinema's emancipatory potential. At the same time, we recognize aspects of ourselves in the characters, attitudes, or situations portrayed in the fictional narrative we are watching (identification). These processes are characteristic of human beings when it comes to the ways they act and relate to themselves, to others, and to culture. This feature dates back to the formation of the earliest mythologies. Alves (2010, p. 12) states that the process to re-signify a film also helps demystifying the human social life insofar as it extends beyond the screen, i.e., beyond the film itself. Furthermore, it establishes a relationship with the spectator, since "to reflect means 'to turn back upon oneself,' which is the etymological meaning of the Latin word *reflexione* [...] the movement of 'critical reflection' in the intellectual and moral sense constitutes the true meaning of human development as a species" (2010, p. 12).

A film screening at a film club enables spectators to engage in further discussions and allows time for debates and for sharing their impressions. Besides discussing the film's subject matter, attendees can also address the film's aesthetic choices and specific cinematic language elements like the prevalence of particular shot types or camera movements. Cinematic spectatorship has a collective dimension in the film clubs, since a group of people watches the same film, in the same place, and over the same period of time (the film's duration). This collective dimension is further expanded through discussions and experience sharing emerging from the lived experience.

## Film culture in Juazeiro do Norte: from the old street-front cinemas to current film clubs

Movie theaters in the Cariri region, Ceará State, mainly in its three most populous cities: Crato, Juazeiro do Norte, and Barbalha, played a significant role in shaping the local film culture, especially when these venues were active, back in the mid-1960s and 1970s (Junior, 2020, p. 29). As discussed in Mapurunga's study "*O culto ao cinema de arte na geração de sessenta em Fortaleza*" (2009), the 1960s marked a time of strong cinephile expression in the state capital. According to Butruce (2003, p. 119), up to the mid-1970s, many film clubs across Brazil received films due to substantial support from the *Cinemateca Brasileira*. At that time, several movie theaters operated simultaneously throughout Cariri, including *Cine Moderno, Cine Rádio Araripe, Cine Educadora, Cine São José, and Cine Casino Sul-Americano*, in Crato; *Cine Eldorado* and *Cine Plaza*, in Juazeiro do Norte; and Cinema Neroli, in Barbalha (Rodrigues, 2017).

Movie theaters were particularly popular during the 1970s in Juazeiro do Norte, which remains an important destination for religious, cultural, and artistic tourism, and for a significant influx of pilgrims seeking Padre Cícero's legacy [3]. The 1970s were a time of substantial film production in the Cariri region (Camurça, 2019, p.

45). However, many traditional street-front movie theaters stopped operating by the late 1990s, as they gradually closed their doors due to the new technologies and film consumption modes, such as VCRs and DVDs.

These social, urban, and technological changes contributed to the local audiovisual exhibition market decline, particularly after TVs arrived in the state's inlands. Back then, many street-front movie theaters closed and were converted into shops, bars, religious temples, or parking lots, and the film screenings left to exhibition rooms in shopping mall cinemas. Juazeiro do Norte followed the same pattern; the city's last street-front movie theater, Cine Eldorado, remained in operation until 1997. In its final years, it screened *pornochanchadas*, which is a Brazilian genre of erotic comedy films. The venue closed and was turned into a parking lot after the death of its projectionist, Antonio Severino (Rodrigues, 2017).

However, in 1997, another local film culture milestone was reached due to the opening of a multiplex at Cariri Shopping (currently named Cariri Garden Shopping [4]), at the city entrance, away from the downtown area. The multiplex installed a fully equipped exhibition space in comparison to the previously available movie theaters in the city, featuring air conditioning, upholstered seats, and modern projection and sound equipment. Cariri Shopping underwent a major renovation in 2011 when it expanded its premises and increased the number of cinema screens. The new cinema opened the following year, in 2012. It currently holds six screening rooms and is operated by *Orient Cinemas*. For many years, until the city's first film club was established in 2003, the Cariri Shopping multiplex was the most frequently visited public venue for film screenings, although some *pornochanchadas* continued to be shown in the old street-front movie theaters before they all eventually closed.

Film discussion facilitator Elvis Pinheiro was invited by the SESC Juazeiro Unit management, in 2003, to curate a film screening program and give rise to *Cineclube Paradiso*, which was the first documented film club venture in the region. Despite its brief existence, the project paved the way for numerous subsequent initiatives, both institutionally affiliated and independent. Juazeiro do Norte's film culture began forming an audience used to film club screenings due to *Cineclube Paradiso* and the work by Elvis Pinheiro. He also developed several film club initiatives in the region, including *Sessão de Arte* (2005–2007), *Cine Café* (2009–), *Cinematógrapho* (2009–2016), and *Cinemarana* (2010–2016). He discusses the film club's curatorial approach regarding the cinema at the shopping mall during the interview.

> Because it is located in a shopping mall, the cinema treats the films it screens as products with price tags and expiration dates. People enter the theater as they would enter the food court and consume a film with the same lack of consideration with which they eat a sandwich, have an ice cream, or drink a soft drink, expecting the same level of satisfaction they demand from clothing or food stores. The problem, therefore, is not the type of film screened, but the relationship that

> an audience, necessarily positioned as consumers, establishes with the screening venue. That theater is not allowed to show films that might displease families, children, teenagers, heterosexual couples, or older people. It will not risk alienating its clientele. A bad film will always be one regarded as 'slow,' 'difficult,' 'boring,' 'controversial,' or 'dirty.' It is wonderful that this kind of cinema exists, because the seats are very comfortable, the sound and image quality are excellent, and there are many outstanding films that deserve to be seen with such high-quality equipment. The theaters I oversee cannot compete with it. I will continue asking people to turn off their cell phones, acting as a sort of usher by asking for silence, and screening independent films regardless of whether most viewers approve of them. We need movie theaters where all images can be made available to the public (Interview provided by Elvis Pinheiro, 2014).

As Gaze (2021) explains, an audience segment prefers attending film clubs, whether, because of both the films screened (generally foreign and independent productions) or the opportunity to share their impressions with other spectators after the screening. It is worth noting that the cinema at Cariri Garden Shopping does not always offer a schedule accessible to all audience profiles. Subtitled screenings may end after the departure time of the last trip offered by the region's only public transportation provider, which leaves ride-hailing apps as the only alternative for those without their own vehicles. Local film clubs offer a more accessible alternative for those who depend on public transportation, as they do not charge admission and hold screenings that begin and end earlier than those at the shopping mall cinema. Screenings do not extend beyond the cultural center's closing time of 09:00 p.m at film club events held at *Banco do Nordeste Cultural Center* (Centro Cultural Banco do Nordeste – CCBNB Cariri).

According to Melo (2019, p. 633), film club activities were long regarded as "one of the primary pathways into cinema". These spaces serve as welcoming environments for reflection and debate, besides providing access to film traditions beyond Hollywood, which, based on his study, dominate the Brazilian movie theaters. In addition to promoting cinematic diversity, film clubs in Juazeiro do Norte operate across a whole variety of settings ranging from institutional to university-based venues and from collective to individual initiatives. They are located in both central and peripheral areas. As Melo further observes,

> Although the general definition of film club culture is informed by the classical French model, concrete experiences show that cinema clubs and film clubs have organized themselves in highly distinctive ways, depending on the possibilities and circumstances specific to each location (Melo, 2019, p. 633).

*Cineclube Vésper* exhibited a dynamic shaped by several factors, namely: the host institution location (CCBNB Cariri) in downtown Juazeiro do Norte, the film selection and curatorial approach, and the post-screening discussions, during which spectators formulate their reflections based on the films they have watched.

We provide this brief account of its activities in an attempt to understand how this film club helped strengthening the film culture in Juazeiro do Norte. Pereira (2014) explains that film clubs, developed as networks of sociability, connected to urban spaces undergoing successive expansion and decline times, reinforced the auditorium on the seventh floor of CCBNB Cariri as a venue for alternative film screenings within the operation time set by the funding call under the Paulo Gustavo Law. It happened whether because of both political persecution or lack of public funding the *Cineclube Vésper*. It also reinforced other cinema-related activities held in there, such as the study sessions organized by *Sétima Group* and *Cine Café*, which take place on Saturday evenings.

These alternative screening venues in Juazeiro do Norte and in the wider Cariri region, different from the shopping mall cinema, hold cultural and social significance. Their importance is restated by the region's history of substantial film production during the 1970s and 1980s. It was addressed in the work of successive generations of local filmmakers, including Rosemberg Cariry [5], Jefferson de Albuquerque Jr. [6], and Nívia Uchôa [7], and highlighted by the former presence of street-front movie theaters, as aforementioned. The region is also home to local production companies like *Fulô Filmes* [8] and *Caldeirão Filmes* [9].

Despite the closure of street-front movie theaters, the opening of multiplex cinemas in shopping malls, and the emergence of new film consumption forms, the film club culture has endured. The development of a cinephile audience in Juazeiro do Norte owes much to initiatives organized by the Sétima Group. This group has been dedicated to audience development and cinema promotion through film programs and audiovisual gatherings, as well as to the publication of a local film criticism magazine, *Sétima*, for forteen years.

## A brief history of the Sétima film collective

The first meeting of the *Film Studies Group: History, Theory, and Criticism*, took place on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 16, 2012 in the rehearsal room of the *Patativa do Assaré Theater* at the SESC Juazeiro Unit. *Revista Sétima* is a film criticism and review magazine conceived to prompt the group named *Grupo de Estudos Sétima de Cinema* launched on September 11, 2013. This process formalized both the film criticism publication and the study group, as documented in its founding minutes, officially registered in 2017.

Nearly one hundred people gathered in the theater at the group's inception. They were eager to study cinema, and to read Jean-Claude Bernardet's '*O que é Cinema?*' (2014) together. The initial discussion focused on arguing whether cinema was the art of the real. Another group embarked on the same challenge at the day after the study group was established at SESC Juazeiro: studying cinema during the

evening session at the *SESC Crato Unit*.

Shortly thereafter, the group dwindled, the evening class dispersed, and those who remained in joined the afternoon meetings, which continue to this day. Some members left the group for many reasons, with or without notice, while others departed upon realizing that it was neither a formal course nor a place where they would learn filmmaking. Instead, the group focused on reading and discussing foundational texts to develop an understanding of film criticism and film history, including *Cinefilia* (Baecque, 2010), *Cinema como fato social* (Turner, 1997), and *Lacrimae Rerum: Ensaios sobre cinema moderno* (Žižek, 2018). These readings, undertaken within the study group, enable participants to derive new meanings from audiovisual images.

Beyond its film studies activities, the *Sétima Group* can also be classified as a collective (Miglorin, 2012), since it not only gathers to read and discuss cinema, but also organizes film programs, festivals, and audiovisual events. It established itself as one of the region's leading cultural agents in film curation and mediation.

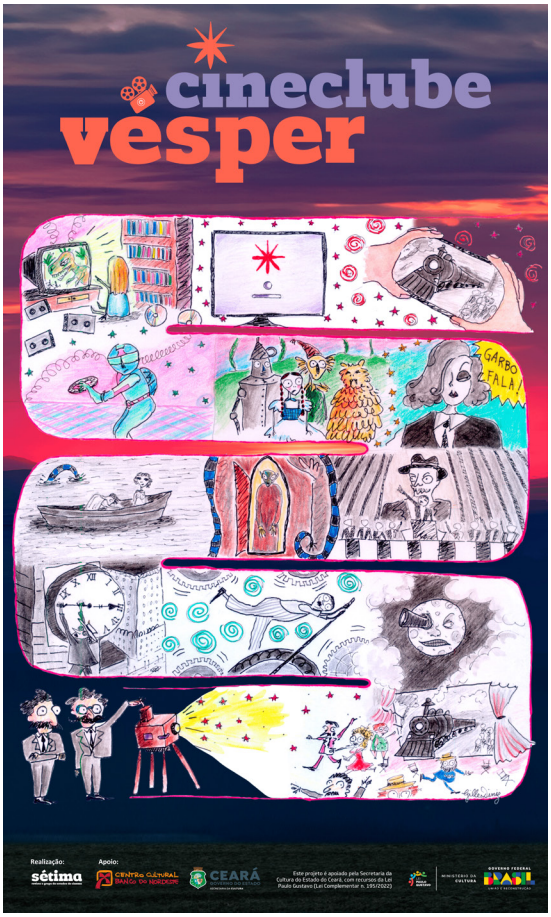
The group only received funding for Cineclube Vésper from a public grant program, in 2024. Over the preceding decade the Sétima collective had already organized several editions of Mostra 21, which is a film showcase created by the collective while it was still affiliated with SESC, as well as the Festival Varilux de Cinema Francês, in partnership with the Institut Français.

## Cineclube Vésper

Cineclube Vésper emerged from an on-going project in place since 2023. It represents the practical outcome of Sétima Group's film studies, as it provides an opportunity for group members to engage in film mediation and facilitate discussions about the screened film. The project proposal was drafted in late 2023, and aimed its submission to the public funding call for audiovisual projects in Ceará, under Paulo Gustavo Law, launched in early 2024.

*Cineclube Vésper* selected the films to be screened during its pre-production phase after a 12-month implementation time. In total, ten screening sessions featuring Brazilian and foreign films were held from October 2024 to July 2025. The total funding provided by Paulo Gustavo Law (2023) under the "Creation of Film Clubs" category amounted to BRL 36,000. This funding enabled the *Sétima Group* not only to remunerate its members for their film mediation activities throughout the project (although they had already been voluntarily organizing screening events as a collective), but also to hire Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) interpreters for the film club's sessions, as this measure was not previously adopted by any other initiative.

**Figura 1:** Poster advertising the *Vésper Film Club*




Fonte: *Sétima de Cinema* Study Group Collection, 2024


ISSN 1516-0785 | e-ISSN 1981-4070

**Figura 2:** Photo from February 19, 2025, Coneclub Vésper screening attended by a group of students



Fonte: Cineclub Vésper files (2025)

**Figura 3:** Photo from March 25, 2025, screening by Cineclub Vésper featuring LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) interprets



Fonte: Cineclub Vésper files (2025)

The opportunity to invest in exclusive promotional materials, such as water bottles, tote bags, and pins, which were raffled off at several screening sessions. is another essential benefit provided by the funding. The project's visual identity helped attracting larger audiences to the screenings, while the provision of Libras interpretation at half of the sessions brought in deaf audience members who had never before attended that venue.

The *Sétima Group* holds its meetings every Wednesday afternoon, the same day chosen for the film club's screening sessions. These meetings take place in the auditorium where the *Sétima de Cinema Study Group* gathers and where *Cine Café* is held on Saturdays.

A *logo*, posters, and promotional cards were designed for the film club, and a curatorial program was developed featuring Brazilian and foreign films, both classic and contemporary, across ten free screening sessions. Half of these sessions included Libras interpreters for deaf audience members. In addition to studying cinema every Wednesday (the day also chosen for the film club's screenings), *Sétima Study Group* extends its activities by presenting monthly films engaged with a range of contemporary issues.

The award-winning documentary *A paixão de J. L.* (2016) was the first film screened by the film club. It addresses the life and work of artist José Leonilson. The screening was followed by a discussion and a raffle of exclusive gifts created for the film club. Other titles screened by *Cineclube Vésper* included *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Maria Luiza* (2020), *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (Reiniger, 1926), and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). The films screened by the film club were acquired through different means: purchasing screening rights from the production company, obtaining public-domain works available online, and receiving films free of charge from their directors. The diversity of filmographies presented by *Cineclube Vésper* was also essential in helping viewers recognize differences between narratives originating in different national contexts, because, as Carvalho argues:

> Through the practice of cinephilia within the film club movement, it is possible to challenge the Hollywood model, which seeks to construct and outspread an American identity and, in doing so, it foreshadows the imposition of a standardized model of film production and distribution, thereby shaping the film culture industry. The film club movement challenges this process by establishing itself as a critical space for reflecting on such practices. Film club activities run counter to the outspread of the film industry's distribution model because, while the industry limits the access to cultural diversity, film clubs do the opposite by promoting a plurality of films (Carvalho, 2021, p. 92).

According to the participatory observation, the audience attendance at *Cineclube Vésper* was low during the first few months of the project. Publicizing the screenings remained a challenge, mainly because the film club's programming took place on week days, at a time that did not match students and workers' routines in

downtown Juazeiro do Norte. However, in the second half of the project, attendance increased, and included students from local public schools and college students. This observation was particularly clear on two occasions: (i) at the launching of the study group's collection of essays, *Teoria de Cinema: novos olhares*, funded by CCBNB; and (ii) at the final *Cineclube Vésper* screening, which featured the Ceará-produced film *Mais Pesado que o Céu* (2024) - recently released and not shown in the region's commercial cinema circuit.

Thus, we can understand the impact of the initiative launched by *Cineclube Vésper* in the city center as it broadened to public access to films beyond commercial venues only concentrated in its shopping mall, outside the downtown area. The differences in both the screening environment and the discussions held after each screening were the *Cineclube Vésper* aspects most often highlighted by attendees. Many attendees reported they had never before attended a film screening followed by a discussion, and this experience encouraged them to attend other sessions in the project.

*Cineclube Vésper* audiences repeatedly emphasized in their accounts during post-screening discussions that the film club offered a different viewing experience from that of a commercial movie theater, primarily because of the films selected, the absence of interference from mobile phone use during screenings, and the discussions held afterward. The emancipatory practices identified through participatory observation at *Cineclube Vésper* included the presence of topics related to social inequality, to life stories of minority groups, and sociopolitical transformations, in the films. These features distinguished the works screened from those in the commercial circuit, especially in the way they addressed discourses and narratives. Films such as *A Paixão de J. L.* and *Maria Luiza* prompted audience members during post-screening discussions to share their own life stories, as they recognized aspects of their personal trajectories in those portrayed on screen. This practice, as bell hooks explains to us:

> In addition to providing narratives that articulate specific discourses on race, sex, and class, films can also serve as a channel for shared experiences, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can engage in dialogue about controversial issues (hooks, 2023, p. 19-20).

The observed *Cineclube Vésper* audience was highly heterogeneous; there was a different audience at each screening. Nevertheless, attendees could often be featured as in the age group 17 to 40 years. Most attendees were self-employed professionals or college students. They either brought a guest or had accepted an invitation from someone who already attended the group's regular Saturday events.

It is important understanding these spaces not as mere entertainment venues, as commonly associated with the logic of the culture industry, but as places for intellectual engagement and experience sharing. They offer a film-viewing

experience that differs from that found in mainstream commercial movie theaters as they are situated within a dynamic urban context and territory. This difference can be identified in three key elements (Prado, 2013): (1) free admission, since non-profit practice is a guiding principle of film clubs; (2) commitment to ethics; and (3) freedom of thought. This last element, freedom of thought, appears to have the greatest impact on attendees, given that the post-screening discussion provides an opportunity to explore and understand the different ways the films affect viewers, as observed at other screening events organized by the *Sétima Group*.

During the discussions held after screenings at *Cineclube Vésper*, we observed not only the sharing of film's interpretations but also reflections on how a work can reshape viewers' worldview. Journalism student Yasmin Feitoza, aged 26, highlights the importance of discussing the Cineclube Vésper experience:

> I think Cineclube [Vésper] is also about learning to listen. More than simply talking about what I thought while watching the film, it's about listening to what someone else thought while watching it, so I can see how their perspective compares with my own (Interview provided by Yasmin Feitoza in July 01, 2026).

The provision of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) interpretation at half of the screening sessions was the most significant impact observed in *Cineclube Vésper's* as it enabled deaf community members to participate in the discussions. Two Libras interpreters were present at the screening of the documentary *Cabra marcado pra morrer* (1984), on March 25, 2025. Deaf audience members. who had never attended a film club before or visited the CCBNB venue, were able to share their experiences throughout the post-screening discussion. These attendees had similar profiles: Black women, over 40 years old, who had not pursued higher education. One of them, Divina Maria, aged 51, raised issues from *Cabra marcado pra morrer* that echoed her own life when commenting on the film:

> I would like to congratulate this project for inviting us. I was deeply moved. I know you have been conducting extensive research, right? This initiative is truly wonderful because it also provides us with information about our own language that we didn't have before, right? We were never allowed to express our opinions anywhere. We, too, experience this inequality. I have suffered, and continue to suffer, because I am a woman, because I am deaf, and because I am Black. But there is a group of people with economic power who are actually a minority, yet they hold power over others (Testimony by Divina Maria in the discussion on the movie Cabra marcado para morrer, in March 25, 2025).

Other deaf attendees also emphasized in their accounts the importance not only of an initiative offering free film screenings but also of one providing Libras interpreters, which enabled a larger number of deaf people to attend them. According to these viewers, engaging with films at the film club was also a learning experience.

After watching works such as *The Last Laugh* and *Cabra marcado pra morrer,* they gained access to filmographies and narratives different from those they typically consume due to lack of Libras accessibility. The learning experience "about their own language," as described by Divina Maria, can be interpreted in light of bell hooks's words:

> Most of us went to the movies to enter a world different from the one we know and in which we feel most comfortable. And although many people say they go to the movies for entertainment, the truth is that many of us—and I include myself in this—go to the movies to learn things. What we learn often transforms our lives in some way (hooks, 2023, p. 17).

Initiatives such as *Cineclube Vésper* only became possible through public funding provided under the Paulo Gustavo Law. Although film clubs are recognized under specific legislation [10] and defined by the Brazilian National Film Agency (Agência Nacional do Cinema – ANCINE) [11], most film clubs in the Cariri region still operate without any financial support. Besides establishing a regular free film screening program in the urban Juazeiro do Norte context, these spaces also make the cinematic experience a meaning-making process through the practice of watching films and discussing them, as hooks teaches us:

> In this era of cultural blending and hybridity, popular culture, particularly the world of film, constitutes a new frontier that offers us a sense of movement, of distancing ourselves from what is familiar so that we may venture into the world of others and beyond. This applies both to those who have little money or free time and to the rest of us. Films continue to be the perfect vehicle for introducing us to certain rites of passage that have become the standard experience of crossing boundaries for anyone who wishes to encounter difference and otherness without having to engage directly with 'the other' (hooks, 2023, p. 19).

By understanding cinema as a "machine of feeling" (2025, p. 132), Morin points to the ways cinema appropriates these psychic processes through the cinematic experience, while also asserting that this machine "chews up" for us what we are supposed to feel, thereby exposing the ambiguity inherent in the cinema experience. We believe that cinema's emancipatory potential lies in this very element due to the creation of time and space for collective discussion and reflection following a film screening, as it happens at a film club session.

Therefore, having an initiative such as *Cineclube Vésper*, as well as that of many other film clubs throughout the country, is a way to reinforce the relevance of collective initiatives acting as agents. These agents promote these emancipatory practices, foster reflection through the cinematic experience and encourage audiences to develop new interpretations of their own reality.

Encountering a movie through film viewing means being affected by emotional,

psychological, and social factors giving rise to a range of feelings, reflections, and thoughts. As bell hooks (2023) teaches us, this experience also entails learning and [re]cognition, since cinema, regardless of the time it is produced at, is always saying something, encouraging responses, and inviting thought.

Therefore, *Cineclube Vésper's* scope extends beyond audience development and the mere screening of films. The project emerged from the need for offering a cinematic viewing experience encouraging the development of a critical and autonomous audience. Over its year of screening activities, *Cineclube Vésper* brought to downtown Juazeiro do Norte an initiative committed to thematic diversity, as evidenced by the range of films screened, from foreign fiction films to Brazilian documentaries; to fostering the practice of discussing what had been viewed, which is an essential element of film club culture expressed through post-screening debates; and to accessibility achieved through free admission, film exhibition away from shopping malls, and the presence of Libras interpreters during both screenings and discussions..

## Final considerations

Based on the herein introduced brief case study we could better understand how film club practices can influence and, more importantly, foster social interaction and the development of critical thinking among attendees. The concept of film culture encompasses audience development in these screening spaces, namely: film clubs, which have been documented in several parts of the country and across different historical periods, at least since 1928, after the launching the *Chaplin Club* in Rio de Janeiro. The film club culture eventually reached locations beyond the Southeast region, including Cariri, which is the focus of this study, due to an organized system for distributing films to other parts of the country. We have shown that one of the main initiatives for alternative film screening in Juazeiro do Norte emerged from the creation of *Sétima Group*, which is a collective that organizes independent screenings as part of showcases and festivals, as well as of the study group meetings. In 2024, the group was granted with the approval for its first formally registered film club through a government funding call under the *Paulo Gustavo Law*.

*Cineclube Vésper* establishment was allowed by funding from this public call, which enabled investing in promotional activities and screenings accessible to deaf audiences through Libras interpretation. Although *Sétima Group* had already been operating on a voluntary basis, its first officially established film club, *Cineclube Vésper*, was only launched in 2024. This venture represents its first publicly funded audience development initiative in fourteen years. The partnership between the collective and *CCBNB Cariri* helped democratizing the access to Brazilian and foreign films through a free initiative featuring curated film selections and facilitated discussions

committed to fostering critical emancipation among audiences.

This experience highlights the social impact of film club practices. *Cineclube Vésper* holds its screenings on Wednesday afternoons, at *CCBNB Cariri*, in downtown Juazeiro do Norte. It shows how it has become a primary option for cinephiles seeking access to diverse filmographies and free film screenings. Despite the noticeable decline in street-front movie theaters throughout the 2000s, film clubs, such as *Cineclube Vésper*, still support audience development practices. In contrast to streaming platforms, some audiences choose to watch films at film clubs because these spaces enable the exchange of interpretations and social interaction among attendees. Thus, *Cineclube Vésper* activities reinforce the relevance of public policies supporting the audiovisual sector and the establishment of screening spaces offering accessible cinema committed to achieve critical engagement among audiences..

## Notas

[1] José Eldo Elvis Pinheiro Moraes (1978–) is a cultural producer, film curator, and film discussion facilitator. He has coordinated Cine Café (CCBNB Cariri, Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará) since 2010. He is a member of *Grupo de Estudos Sétima de Cinema* and editor of *Revista Sétima de Cinema*. He has also worked on the documentaries *Sales e Salas* (2016, producer), *Aos de hoje, aos de sempre* (2018, co-director), and *Do couro à palha: artesãos do João Cabral* (2019, co-director).

[2] bell hooks (1952–2021) was the pen name of writer, professor, and feminist activist Gloria Jean Watkins, who chose to write her name in lowercase letters to emphasize her ideas rather than her person. She wanted her work and messages, rather than her personal identity, to be the focus of attention. The use of lowercase letters was a way of challenging the notion of authorship as something grandiose or individualistic, in keeping with her critique of intellectual ego and the cult of personality.

[3] Cícero Romão Batista (1844–1934), better known as Padre Cícero, was a highly influential figure in the Cariri region, mainly in Juazeiro do Norte City, Ceará. Already revered as a saint within the popular Catholicism of Northeastern Brazil, Padre Cícero has drawn religious processions and pilgrimages since the 19th century. Admired by Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, known as Lampião, Padre Cícero earned respect and recognition throughout the Northeast, and people continue to travel to Juazeiro to visit his city. He was also the first mayor of Juazeiro do Norte, having allied himself with local oligarchs and established relationships that remain controversial to this day. Inaugurated in 1969, the 30-meter statue honoring Padre Cícero receives visitors throughout the year, with as many as 2.5 million pilgrims annually across four major pilgrimages. He is regarded as one of the most important figures in Northeastern Brazil (Veiga, 2024).

[4] Cariri Garden Shopping has six movie theaters, and tickets can be purchased at the ingresso.com website. A full-price ticket costs BRL 28.00. Located at Avenida Padre Cícero, 2555, in the Triângulo neighborhood of Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará, Cariri Garden Shopping has been operating in the region for 26 years.

[5] Rosemberg Cariry, the artistic name of Antônio Rosemberg de Moura, is a philosopher by training and a filmmaker by vocation. He was born in Farias Brito, Ceará, in 1953. He began his filmmaking career in 1975 in the city of Crato, Ceará, producing short documentaries about popular artists and artistic expressions in Ceará. In the 1980s, he made his first professional documentary films.

[6] Jefferson de Albuquerque Júnior has worked in Ceará's and Brazil's film industries for more than 40 years. He has contributed to 35 feature films as a set designer, art director, executive producer, production manager, and assistant director. These include Eles Não Usam Black-Tie (Leon Hirszman, 1981), Amantes da Chuva (Roberto Santos, 1980), Luzia Homem (Fábio Barreto, 1988), the miniseries O Pagador de Promessas (Dias Gomes and Tizuca Yamazaki, 1988), and Aos Ventos que Virão (Hermano Penna, 2013), among others. An active advocate for Brazilian audiovisual production, he was a member of the Embrafilme Restructuring Commission and served as president of the Brazilian Association of Documentary and Short Film Makers in both Ceará and Brasília, where he lived.

[7] Nívia Uchôa is a geographer, photographer, independent filmmaker, and activist with the Cariri Women's Front. She worked as a substitute professor at the Visual Arts Center of the Regional University of Cariri (URCA). She also worked as a photographer for the press office of the Government of the State of Ceará. She has documented northeastern Brazilian culture since 1993.

[8] Fulô Filmes is a cultural production company that produces independent films in the Cariri region of Ceará. It comprises producer Cheyenne Alencar, director Jaildo Oliveira, and composer Álisson Flor.

[9] Caldeirão Filmes is a film production company based in the Cariri region of Ceará, founded by filmmaker Ythallo Rodrigues and cinema professor and researcher Rodrigo Capistrano.

[10] The legislation governing film club activities is Law No. 6,536 of November 21, 1968.

[11] Film clubs are also regulated by Normative Instruction No. 63, issued on October 2, 2007, by the Brazilian National Film Agency (Agência Nacional do Cinema – ANCINE).

Article submitted on 06/24/2026 and accepted on 09/29/2026

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