

THE FEMALE BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF VISUAL PLEASURE AND PATRIARCHAL SUBMISSION IN THE DOCUMENTARIES OF THE SPANISH, ITALIAN AND FRENCH MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE*

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INTRODUCTION

Like all artistic discourses, cinema is to a large extent a reflection of the societies that produce it. It is therefore unsurprising that the female characters in some of the documentaries produced by the ministries of agriculture of Spain, Italy and France from the 1930s to the 1970s inherited and reflected the prevailing ideological norms of their time. As a result, these characters were depicted in ways that went far beyond the purpose of these documentaries to instruct their viewers in agricultural matters, as will be explored below.

These depictions will be analysed from the perspective of different historical and political national contexts that naturally affected the construction of these film productions, which means that first of all these contexts need to be defined, if only succinctly. In Spain, the Ministry of Agriculture created a Department of Cinematography for educational purposes in 1940, which

would later be reinforced by the creation of the Agricultural Extension Service in 1955. Affiliated with the latter were names such as the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches, some of whose productions will be discussed in this analysis. In Italy, the agrarian documentaries produced by government institutions were the work of *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (Istituto Luce)*,¹ some of which were *cinegiornali* produced by its agrarian service, *Cinemateca Agrícola* (1927-1945), while others were short films and newsreels created by the ICOM Institute (1938-1965). The productions of both countries exhibit certain parallels that can be explained by the characteristics of the political regimes behind them, i.e., Mussolini's Fascism in Italy and Franco's National Catholicism in Spain, the latter feeding on the former. Although founded several years apart, both were totalitarian systems that depended on the control and manipulation of information and the use of certain platforms to disseminate their propagan-

da. In France, on the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture's Cinematheque was created at the beginning of the 20th century with the aim of training the rural population in the latest agricultural techniques using motion pictures. However, it was not until the interwar period that a concerted policy resulted in an action plan that led to the mass production of more appealing scientific and fiction films with the help of agronomist-directors. Thus, in 1947 a new stage began for the French ministry's film library under the direction of Armand Deleule-Chartier, some of whose works will be considered here in comparison with the productions of the other two countries.

Having offered this brief outline of the historical context of production, it is worth highlighting from the outset that although the Spanish documentaries shared a similar propagandistic quality with their Italian counterparts, in terms of formal aspects they have more in common with the aesthetic approaches of the French. This connection may be explained by a particular similarity in the resources that the Spanish and French ministries of agriculture relied on, both having created a film department directed by agronomists. The agricultural information contained in the audiovisual productions made in France and Spain was simpler, which facilitated an exchange of ideas between the two countries, while in Italy these agricultural productions must be identified from out of the many different types of films made under the auspices of the *Istituto Luce*.

However, the use made in the films of women in general, and of women's bodies in particular, represents a point of connection between the productions of all three countries that merits special attention, especially in light of certain postulates that would be developed in feminist film theory years later. It must be acknowledged that although they belong to the documentary genre in the sense that concerns us here, the films selected to test our hypothesis function much like fiction films because in their attempt to sell a certain pro-

duct or convince their audience of a certain idea, they emphasise the pleasure of the male voyeur, whom they aim to persuade by means of erotically charged female figures on screen, despite the insistence of fascist regimes on sexual repression.

THE WOMAN'S BODY IN FEMINIST THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION

The numerous reflections of feminist critical theory that have been articulated in Europe and the United States, mainly since the 1960s, all have the common objective of criticising certain discursive practices, albeit from ideological perspectives that do not always coincide.² Beyond this basic idea, it is clear that different ways of tackling this object of study were developed on either side of the Atlantic, although both movements drew on and influenced each other, as will be shown below.

The current of Anglo-American criticism focusing on images of women has turned out to be one of the most prolific approaches in terms of the number of publications it has produced. In the field of literary studies, the analysis of female characters, their construction and the function they served was the main focus of this current until 1975.³ The propositions of this approach were also applied to cinematic discourse, resulting in some key contributions to feminist film theory, such as the work of Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis. However, these studies were heavily influenced by the same concepts underpinning the development of the French current of feminism, i.e., Freudian psychoanalysis and its application to discourse by Jacques Lacan and other authors. It is worth offering an outline of some of the considerations proposed by authors such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, which are closely connected to ideas expressed during those same years by Mulvey and Lauretis, as the corpus selected for this study will be analysed and interpreted from this theoretical perspective.

Notwithstanding their various differences, some of the most prominent names in French feminism are united by the debt they owe to Lacan and his interpretation of Freud, as well as their paradoxical resistance to the “feminist” label. Cixous, who shares with Julia Kristeva⁴ and Luce Irigaray a concern with the relationship between women and (literary) language, was a major figure in the intellectual debate of the 1970s in France. One of the most widely embraced concepts posited by Cixous is the notion of “macho binary thought” (Moi, 1999: 114), a system of binary oppositions founded on the basic male/female dichotomy, where the male is associated with activity, culture, intelligence and knowledge, while the female is related to passivity, nature, sensitivity and pathos (Cixous and Clement, 1975: 114-115). This scheme of opposites, which needs to be dismantled, constitutes a value system where the positive is always the masculine, the speaker, the protagonist, while the negative, the absent, the Other, is feminine.

Luce Irigaray, who shares Cixous’s philosophical principles, was expelled from Lacan’s *École freudienne* after defending her doctoral thesis, *Spéculum de l’autre femme* (1974), a complex work that was intensely criticised by the Lacanians and became the subject of heated debate among feminists. The thesis offers a rereading of the Freudian theory of femininity followed by a review of Western philosophers, from Plato to Hegel, concluding that the woman in our culture has served as the negative side of the male subject. This means that the woman has never held the status of subject, but rather has been relegated to the category of object, in relation to which the body plays a key role.⁵

Lacan and especially Freud are also key influences behind the concepts posited in Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). At the same time that French feminism was producing its most influential texts, Mulvey, using less cryptic language, drew on psychoanaly-

sis to expose the mechanisms that operate in cinematographic imagery at the service of patriarchy. To this end, she explored two key psychological processes—Freud’s notion of scopophilia and Lacan’s conception of narcissism—to reveal the use of the woman as a source of visual pleasure. This use, in cinema and in other forms of artistic expression, is governed by the same patriarchal principle that shapes society, by virtue of which the masculine is an active character in opposition to the passivity associated with the feminine—an idea that connects with Cixous’s “macho binary system”. Moreover, Mulvey describes women as prisoners of a patriarchal order due to an unconscious structured in language that needs to be combated, a notion evoking the perspective of Luce Irigaray:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as the bearer, not maker, of meaning. (Mulvey, 1989: 15)

Cinema is thus an ideal instrument of representation to validate the socially established sexual difference that uses the female body to feed an erotic gaze that inevitably leads to pleasure, which is masculine. This process reduces women to an object of exhibition: passive, malleable and at the service of purposes consistent with the patriarchal structure. In other words, “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1989: 19). It thus seems clear that cinema exploits the benefits offered by the potential to satisfy the primordial desire of the enjoyable gaze, and the perfect object for this is the female body, which Mulvey argues constitutes an erotic contemplation that is always active.

The theories used to inform our analysis of the corpus of the selected documentaries may benefit from the support of a few ideas posited by Teresa de Lauretis in her text *Alice Doesn't* (1984), a collection of essays written between 1979 and 1983 (according to the author's preface). Like the other theorists considered above, De Lauretis does not renounce the structure offered by psychoanalysis to consider the representation of women and their role in discourses. Based on the premise that a woman⁶ is *what-man-is-not* (nature, mother, the site of sexuality and male desire and, of course, an object of exchange), the theorist exposes the use of the female body in cinematic discourse founded on a narrative that ensures the spectator's identification with the film, and therefore its interpretation, to achieve one of the core objectives of patriarchy: to keep women in the place assigned to them. Moreover, the mental processes that operate between spectator and film facilitate not only women's consent to this function but also their approval of it, as the aim is to seduce women into identifying with femininity understood in patriarchal terms. Thus, based on Lévi-Strauss's perspective on the woman, De Lauretis argues that

women are doubly negated as subjects: first, because they are defined as vehicles of men's communication—signs of their language, carriers of their children; second, because women's sexuality is reduced to the "natural" function of childbearing, somewhere in between the fertility of nature and the productivity of a machine. Desire, like symbolization, is a property of men, property in both senses of the word: something men own, possess, and something that inheres in men, like a quality. (De Lauretis 1984: 37)

The considerations outlined above explains the development of a cinematic discourse that reduces women to the sexual while at the same time repressing their sexuality in order to produce certain ideological effects that are at the service of patriarchy. In this way, they shed light on the

use that the documentaries analysed in this article make of women in general, and of the female body in particular.

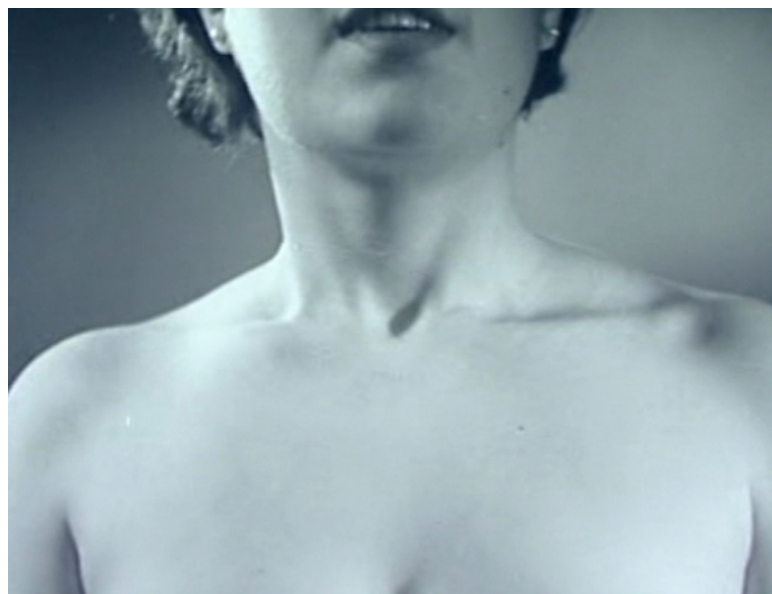
IN SPAIN

Prominent among the films in the archives of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture is the work of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and of José Neches. Their respective filmographies are explored in this section because together they represent one of the most productive periods of the ministry's documentary film production, and one of the most prolific in relation to agrarian documentary in Spain. Both filmmakers stand out for their interest in cinema as a medium of expression, but also as a genre for information and education that bore something of an ideological burden—especially for Villa-Alcázar, who was sympathetic to the ideology promulgated by the Franco regime.⁷ It is worth noting that the expository documentaries—according to the documentary categories proposed by Nichols (1997: 65)—of both Villa-Alcázar and Neches (who sometimes strays into the realm of fiction) convey a clear interest in representing women, and yet, the female is a constant in almost all of them. In the case of Villa-Alcázar's filmography, two very different ways of representing women are evident: the first of these is inscribed in the anthropological context documented in the film, while the second involves the selection of women for their beauty to feature in one of the parables told in his productions. In the latter case, in line with Mulvey's argument (1989: 19-20), Jesús González de la Riva uses the female body as a tool for the satisfaction of desire that finds its ultimate meaning in the pleasure of the gaze. It is not surprising that some of his films were mutilated by the censors for this very reason. An example can be found the first version of *Charla cinematográfica sobre la siembra* [Film Talk on Sowing] (1934), which is practically identical, as Fernando Camarero points out, to the 1941 film

Charla cinematográfica sobre las semillas [Film Talk on Seeds] (Camarero, 2014: 52). The one difference is that in a scene explaining how the soil needs to be oxygenated before being tilled, the sensual image of the half-naked torso of a woman with her lips slightly parted in the first version [STILL FRAME 1] is replaced with a shot of a broad-chested young man who short-circuits the voyeur's gaze in the second version.

However, the censors did not dissuade Villa-Alcázar from trying to spice up his films with female bodies that function as passive objects of desire, an idea that connects with the “macho binary thought” suggested by Cixous. Displays of beauty in his films are sometimes combined with a depiction of the women concerned as simpletons, accentuating the idea of patriarchal control. For example, in *Tabaco en España* (1944), although the appearance of a young blonde woman reflects the standard image of the desirable female in photography and classical cinema, her attitude and the words of the narrator himself⁸ transform this sensual, captivating woman into an insipid individual who embodies the beloved wife, virtuous daughter, or patient girlfriend, in keeping with “prudishness and strict social control over women for the sake of preserving their purity and the honour of men” (Nash, 2015: 197). It is thus unsurprising that some of these films should feature isolated women's bodies that fit the more traditional female stereotype promoted by the women's branch of the Spanish Falange, *Sección Femenina*.⁹ For example, *Naranjas, limones y pomelos* [Oranges, Lemons and Grapefruits] (1945) contains footage of a group of young women in uniform who, under the pretext of sporting events, are being prepared to become effective homemakers. Their healthy bodies are placed at the service of the patriarchy, thereby contributing to the physical and moral reconstruction of the country in accordance with the idea of female submission described by De Lauretis (1992: 35).

In other cases, Villa-Alcázar chooses to use the woman's body as a means of persuasion to convince the viewer of the benefits of a certain agricultural product. For example, *Jerez-Xérex-Sherry* (1943) presents the idealised faces of three girls who represent beauty, distinction and mischief, functioning as metaphors for the three wines produced in the region: *amontillado*, *fino* and *manzanilla*. Pedro Poyato has described this sequence as a “proto-advertisement where, like television ads would do decades later, the image of a woman is used to put a ‘friendly’ face on the object advertised (in this case, the wine)” (Poyato, 2013: 51).



Charla cinematográfica sobre la siembra [Film Talk on Sowing] (Marquis of Villa-Alcázar, 1934)

In the case of José Neches, a portrayal of women that conforms to the stereotypes of patriarchal femininity described by De Lauretis is evident right from his first film, *Cortijo Andaluz* [Andalusian Farmhouse] (1945). This idea is expressed using clichéd images of Andalusian women whose bodies proclaim *female sensitivity*, surrounded by lush flowerbeds. The young maids pick the flowers to take to the young ladies of the estate—but, adds the voice-over, “not before they place the reddest ones in their own hair.” This association of the flower with female beauty and



Una manzana para usted [An Apple for You] (José Neches, 1970)

vitality reappears in the filmmaker's second-last documentary, titled *Flores* (1975). Indeed, in the prologue and epilogue that frame the film, a simile is established between women and flowers that once again uses this delicate object of nature is used as a metaphor for female beauty and purity, underscored by the narrator himself when he observes that "this is what flowers are like: fresh, lush, full of colour and joy, to accompany her every day of her life just as they have done in the most important moments of her existence."¹⁰ Another dimension of femininity, understood in patriarchal terms, is put at the service of the desiring gaze in *Una manzana para usted* [An Apple for You] (1970) when a flirtatious, anthropomorphic cartoon apple with the body of a curvaceous woman shows off her "charms" and "benefits" [STILL FRAME 2]. This depiction constitutes a transposition of the feminine, which, as De Lauretis suggests (1992: 37), turns the woman into a vehicle for male communication. The sexy woman/apple is an eroticised sign that incites the spectator, as what Mulvey would call an "active"

being, to partake of the forbidden fruit. In this way, the woman is turned into an object that is *edible*, in more than one sense, an idea discernible from the film's title. The female body materialises for the enjoyment of the male in an apple that metaphorically embodies original sin, for which the female is ultimately responsible. As Wittig suggests with reference to classical cinema (although this idea can easily be extrapolated to the documentaries studied here), "[o]nly they are sex, the sex, and sex they have been made in their minds, bodies, acts, gestures [...]. Indeed, the category of sex holds tightly to women" (Wittig, 1992: 8).¹¹

A similar case can be found in *Las horas de la tierra* [The Hours of the Land] (1965), a film intended to explain the work of the government's agrarian extension and home economics agents, in which "the boundaries of the documentary are as uncertain and as nebulous as those of fiction" (Melendo, 2019: 1081). In this film, desire is represented by a female body, depicted in the form of an allegory of spring apparently dreamed by the male protagonist, who becomes completely engrossed in the image of the woman, as seems

Las horas de la tierra [The Hours of the Land] (José Neches, 1965)



to be the (male) enunciator who oversees the action,¹² both of them revelling in the pleasure of the gaze.

IN ITALY

One of the problems posed by the analysis of the Italian films selected for this study is the limited presence of women in the documentaries of the *Istituto Luce*. As Carlota Coronado has pointed out, “[f]or a woman to be the protagonist of a newsreel, she had to be a prolific mother, the widow of a man who died fighting for the fatherland, or the Queen of Italy. Their obligations revolved mainly around motherhood and other activities associated with housewives” (Coronado, 2009: 15). With the process of “fascistising” Italian society, a project was launched that pivoted around the family as that society’s central pillar, and consequently the woman had to play her part in this nucleus, in her two roles as wife and mother. These self-sacrificing women therefore appeared in the newsreels of the *Istituto Luce*, subordinated either to their husbands or to the Fascist regime. As Coronado argues, “the information in films associates women primarily with motherhood, but always as a secondary protagonist, behind the children, who are the ones of real interest to the newsreels and the propaganda, and who are featured in most of the shots, especially the close-ups” (Coronado, 2009: 18). In the case of rural sphere, our focus of interest is mainly on the *massaia rurale*, the perfect peasant housewife engaged in activities befitting her gender, and who serves as a symbol of fertility, as this is the image of the woman that would be disseminated by the *Istituto Luce*, while women working outside the home were ignored.

At the same time it is important to acknowledge, as Linda Garosi observes, that

in the beginning at the *Istituto Luce*, its *cinegiornali* and its short documentary films were quite similar, especially considering that until the introduction of sound the names of the directors of the docu-

mentaries did not appear in the credits [...]. Whatever the type of news that the *cinegiornali* disseminated, they did so using a visually recognisable model and narrative structure that had already been established by the late 1920s and early 1930s, and that remained unchanged over the years (Garosi, 2021: 247).

Of the few documentaries dedicated to the *massaia*, three from different eras have been selected for study, all of which exemplify the position argued here. In all three films, housewives are portrayed as bodies that feed male fantasies and highlight the weakness of women by depicting them as selfless and submissive housewives who are dependent on men. In the first, *Massaie rurali nella Casa del fascio incontrano Maria Josè* [Rural Housewives in the Farmhouse Meet Mario Jose] (1937), a voiceover describes the gathering of more than 50,000 *massaie rurali*, presided over by the Princess of Piedmont, while the careful use of editing constructs a female ideal through the division of young faces and bodies that are viewed through the lens of a patriarchal ideology: bodies that appear waving and shouting enthusiastically, or engaging in the folk dances commonly danced by these young women. The second newsreel, *Moda per la massaie* [Fashion for the Housewife] (1957), is based exclusively on the use of the woman’s body, which is put on display for male approval and to reflect male power. In this way, the idea of control is conveyed to the spectator, even in the way the housewife is required to dress when performing household chores. Even in the *mise-en-scène*, the objects they carry as they parade by become symbols of their submissive status and their slavery. Finally, in *Un concerto per la massaie* [A Concert for the Housewife] (1967), the use of the woman as an object of desire and persuasion is evident in the lack of a relationship between the product being advertised (a pot) and the image being used to promote it. In this way, the woman, exposed to the verdict of a male jury, is used as a captive object dissociated from the item advertised.

IN FRANCE

Although since 1912, under the direction of Jean Claude Bernard, the French government had a desire to use cinema to document its agrarian propaganda, it would only be with Armand Deleule (Chartier) at the helm of the Ministry of Agriculture's cinematographic service from 1946 to 1983, that remarkable creative advances would be made in the conservation and dissemination of the country's agrarian documentary heritage. Over the course of four decades, Chartier shot numerous short and medium-length films on rural life in different parts of France,¹⁴ "works that explored the topic of agriculture accordingly, while also developing a stylised image of rural society in keeping with the values defended in the institutional message that—we must not forget—justified the very existence of these films, and that Chartier made his own" (Luque, 2022: 28). This premise explains the selection of the documentaries that were selected for this work.

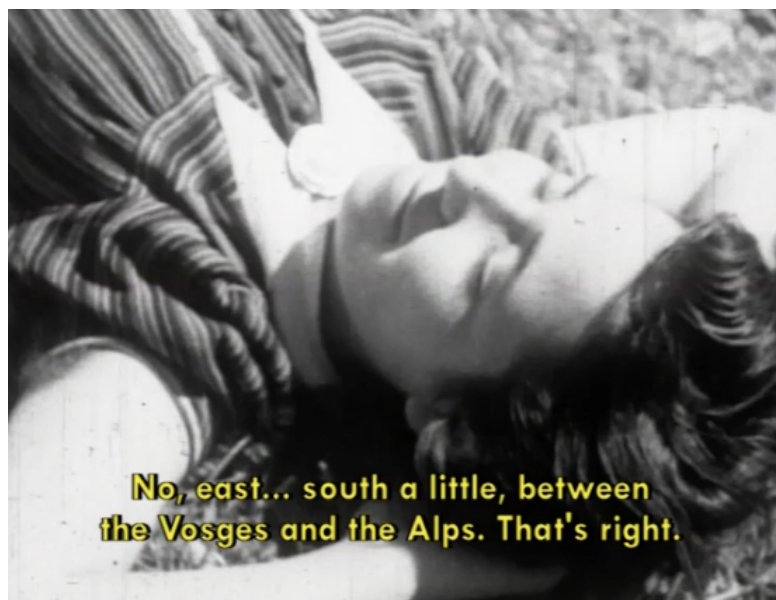
The first short film worthy of attention is titled *Sonnailles et chaudrons de cuivre* [Copper Coins and Cauldrons] (1948). This film, co-directed by Chartier with Edmond Floury, presents how one of the most prized products in the country's gastronomy (cheese) is made in the Franche-Comté region near the Swiss border, with an ethnographic and purely didactic approach. Like other works by the French filmmaker, this film begins with the depiction of a kind of rural arcadia and an "idealisation of peasant life that tends to exaggerate the harmony between the human being and the natural space that serves as his livelihood and living habitat, translating into a lyrical vision of the landscape that would be decisive to the visual identity of the director's filmography" (Luque, 2022: 35). Importantly, at the very centre of this idyllic space is the woman as object. The film starts with a pan shot of a landscape cloaked in clouds, "but full of dreams", the narrator tells us, in which the flowers, the grazing cows, and the



Un concerto per la massaie [A Concert for the Housewife] (Istituto Luce, 1967)

country maids are all brought together poetically through the use of editing and voiceover. The young shepherdesses rest on the soft grass that the cattle graze on while different shots capture the smoothness of their sunlit skin, their legs, their arms, and the occasional prolonged close-up of one or another of their faces, while the narrator encourages the viewer to discover this bucolic region [STILL FRAME 5]. The female body is thus associated with nature and sensitivity, traits typical of women according to the binary system of Cixous and Clement (1975: 114-115).

The second of the productions analysed here, *Fructidor ou le parfait photographe* [Fructidor, or the Perfect Photographer] (1961) is a film about photography presented as a work of fiction, along the lines of some of Neches's documentaries, with a metalinguistic discourse that adopts a comedic tone.¹³ The protagonist is a photographer who, accompanied by three professional models (in the American style, he explains), sets out to extol the virtues of the fruit produced in France's different regions. Throughout the film, this peculiar character who serves as an intradiegetic narrator explains his experience on this journey around the country and the relationship he develops with the three mannequins, whom he describes in this way: "This type of girl is carefree, I knew it. Everybody



Sonnailles et chaudrons de cuivre [Copper Coins and Cauldrons] (Armand Chartier, 1948)



Fructidor ou le parfait photographe [Fructidor, or the Perfect Photographer] (Armand Chartier, 1961)

has to be treated according to their particular merits [...]. My silly cover girls were having fun." These empty bodies signify sexual objects placed under photographic and cinematographic gazes, both of which are male. The film includes a twist in this regard, however, as among the local peasants there is one who steals the heart of our protagonist

(or unleashes his primal desires), and who is visually portrayed as a carnal animal that must be tamed by the man. The description makes this clear: "Suddenly, a wild woman appeared out of nowhere [...]. I took her aside and told her like a robot: you are beautiful, as beautiful as the vines you appeared out of and the sun that made you. I am ambitious and you will be my creation" [STILL FRAME 6]. As Mulvey (1992: 25) suggests, the woman is thus constructed on the basis of a traditional exhibitionist conception that has a strong erotic impact on the film's protagonist, but also on the spectator. The traits that characterise this female figure invite the man to gaze upon her from the outset, but also to subjugate her and mould her with his camera.

CONCLUSIONS

As noted in the introduction to this study, cinema is a medium that serves as a reflection of the societies that produce it. Thus, the agrarian documentaries produced by the Spanish, Italian and French ministries of agriculture provide an opportunity to examine how women and their bodies are portrayed in these productions, particularly given that the primary purposes of these films are pedagogical and informational, but also to communicate the propaganda of all the European institutions behind them. The analysis of these films has facilitated the application of feminist theoretical perspectives that highlight the representation of the female body in works like these, which have served as a sample to shed light on the main question posed by this study. The results reveal that in all cases there is a clear effort to disseminate and promote rural values, albeit from clearly different ideological perspectives.¹⁴ Women in general, and their bodies in particular, are used as eroticised ob-

jects, exposed and subjugated to the laws of a patriarchal gaze that determines the value of their existence in the world and represses their sexuality. A process of idealisation of women—involving the use of various strategies, such as persuasive advertising, parables and metaphor—conveys an image of the feminine that accords with androcentric values predetermined by the institutional gaze, but also by the traditional patriarchal society of which they are a reflection. ■

NOTES

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1 The *Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa)* is the oldest public institution dedicated to the dissemination of films for educational and informational purposes in the world (1924). A key propaganda instrument of Italian Fascism, it evolved from a private company created in Rome in 1920 and was transformed into a public limited company a few years later thanks to capital from different public agencies.

2 Toril Moi's book *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985) continues to be very useful as an introduction to the main contributions of feminist theorists in France and the English-speaking world. Although it is focused on literary discourse, its theoretical reflections can be extended to other artistic forms.

3 It is worth noting the famous collection of essays *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, published by Susan Koppelman Cornillon in 1972, which contains 21 studies of works by 19th- and 20th-century authors, both male and female, exposing and criticising the unreal female characters contained in all of them.

4 It should be clarified that Julia Kristeva refused to define “woman” because she believed that this concept existed only as a product of patriarchy, and she never developed a theory on femininity, although she did on marginalisation. According to her theoretical position, women were merely one of various groups of marginalised beings. However, these starting points and lines of thought have not prevented her contributions to French feminist theory from being of capital importance.

5 Based on the observation that women have been denied the status of subjects, Irigaray argues that this position could be attained through the construction of a discourse characterised by a new way of communicating, i.e., a specific language that the theorist calls *le parler femme*.

6 Teresa de Lauretis distinguishes *woman* from *women*. The first term refers to a fictitious construction that dominates Western cultures, while the second alludes to real historical beings: “The relation between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses [...] is arbitrary and symbolic; that is to say, culturally set up. The manner and the effects of that set-up are what the book intends to explore” (De Lauretis, 1984: 5-6).

7 See Gómez-Tarín and Parejo, 2013; Melendo, 2017: 477-508; Ortega, 2017.

8 “Tobacco: custom, vice or fashion; since Spain brought it from America, its wisps of smoke have accompanied the golden dreams of men [...]”

- 9 According to Pilar Primo de Rivera, women “had to be suitably dressed, that is, with sleeves that are long or to the elbow, with no cleavage showing, with loose skirts that did not reveal any details of her body or garner undue attention. Her clothes could not be short, and certainly not transparent. Young women could not go out alone or be accompanied by men who were not family members” (quoted in Nicolás, 2005: 19).
- 10 Some previous studies have explored the relationship between women and flowers in the documentaries of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches (Melendo, 2018: 315-338; Melendo, 2020: 69-87).
- 11 In April 1979, Wittig delivered her essay “The Straight Mind” as a keynote address at a lecture series held at Barnard College under the title *The Scholar and the Feminist Conference, The Future of Difference*. The quotation here is taken from the publication of her essay in her collection *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992).
- 12 “This enunciating gaze captures the young woman and the Agricultural Extension agent in a highly unique shot suggesting the use of an *iris aperture*—which might literally be the lens of the camera, thus underlining its presence—to frame the two characters. In this way, the film acknowledges the presence of the cinematic narrator, who is inscribed in the story based on a purely formal technique” (Melendo, 2019: 1085).
- 13 Fernando Luque notes that “reflecting its administrative work, the SCMA [French Ministry of Agriculture Cinematographic Service] would recruit a large group of directors distinguished in the documentary medium, such as Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Benoît Lévy, or Chartier himself, who would join other young novices and occasional contributors, such as Alain Resnais and Eric Rohmer (*Fermière à Montfaucon*, 1968), both key figures in the modern French cinema of the period” (Luque, 2022: 27).
- 14 The Spanish and Italian examples convey a vision of the countryside typical of totalitarian regimes, under the auspices of National Catholicism and Fascism, respectively, while in Chartier’s filmography a reality prevails that had to do with France’s secular republican values.

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THE FEMALE BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF VISUAL PLEASURE AND PATRIARCHAL SUBMISSION IN THE DOCUMENTARIES OF THE SPANISH, ITALIAN AND FRENCH MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the use made of women in general, and the female body in particular, in documentaries produced by the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, Italy and France from the 1930s to the 1970s. To this end, the study begins with a brief outline of the historical context of production of these documentaries, as well as the compositional relationships that can be identified between them. Then, as a theoretical-methodological approach, the contributions of feminist film theory articulated in Europe and the United States in the last third of the past century are considered. Among other objectives, feminist theorists sought to expose a series of discursive practices placed at the service of a system in which the woman fulfils the role of object. The application of these approaches to a select corpus of documentaries demonstrates the existence of a number of audiovisual productions containing compositional elements that stress the pleasure of the male voyeur, who is captivated by the erotic charge vested in the female figures on screen, while validating sexual difference and denying the woman the status of subject.

Key words

Rural Cinema; Agrarian Documentary; Female Body; Feminist Theory; Subject.

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EL CUERPO FEMENINO COMO INSTRUMENTO DE PLACER VISUAL Y SUMISIÓN PATRIARCAL EN LOS DOCUMENTALES DE LOS MINISTERIOS DE AGRICULTURA ESPAÑOL, ITALIANO Y FRANCÉS

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo dar cuenta del uso que se hizo de la figura femenina, en general, y del cuerpo de la mujer, en particular, por parte de los documentales producidos por los ministerios de agricultura de España, Italia y Francia desde los años treinta hasta los setenta del siglo XX. Para ello se habrá de establecer, en primer lugar, el contexto histórico de producción de estos documentales, de forma somera, y las relaciones compositivas que se vislumbran entre ellos. Seguidamente, como planteamiento teórico-metodológico, se considerarán las aportaciones de la teoría feminista cinematográfica desarrolladas en Europa y Estados Unidos en el último tercio del siglo pasado que perseguían, entre otros objetivos, el señalamiento culposo de unas prácticas discursivas al servicio de un sistema donde la mujer cumple la función de objeto. El aterrizaje de estos planteamientos en un corpus de documentales seleccionados evidenciará la eficacia de unos productos audiovisuales cuyas pautas de composición enfatizan el placer del voyeur masculino, que habrá de quedar persuadido a través de la carga erótica con la que se revisten las figuras femeninas en pantalla, al tiempo que validan la diferencia sexual y niegan a la mujer la categoría de sujeto.

Palabras clave

Cine rural; documental agrario; cuerpo femenino, Teoría feminista, sujeto

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