

DIALOGUE

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**RE-EXAMINING  
THE IMAGES AND  
RETHINKING  
THE SPORT**

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A Conversation With

**NATALIA ARROYO**



# RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT: A CONVERSATION WITH NATALIA ARROYO

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In the iconography of football, images of euphoria coexist with those of defeat; those of celebration with those of loss; the image of the goal with that of the save. Every image has its opposite. One of football's most painful images is that of the injury, whether caused by an opponent during a match or as a result of an accident during training. Such an image determined a crucial moment in Natalia Arroyo's history. After playing in the lower divisions for FC Barcelona and on Real Club Deportivo Espanyol's first team, her career as a professional footballer was cut short by injury in 2008. One career ended, but very soon another began, as a journalist.

Arroyo is a unique figure in the world of football: once a player and then a journalist, she is now head coach for the Real Sociedad women's team. She has also previously coached the Catalonia region's women's team. These multiple careers have

given her a comprehensive understanding of the world of women's sport, as she has had the chance to observe it both from within and from without. After studying audiovisual communication at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Arroyo worked for several years as a journalist for media outlets including the newspaper *Diari Ara*, making her one of the leading authorities on women's football and its relationship with images. Arroyo made herself available for this interview at the beginning of Real Sociedad's pre-season, finding time in her working schedule to provide in-depth answers to the questions we asked her.

This interview was conducted on Thursday, 20 July 2023, via a video call between Donostia and Barcelona. This was within days of the commencement in Australia and New Zealand of the World Cup, which the Spanish women's team would end up winning. What happened on

the dais at the medal ceremony for that title, and subsequently in press conferences and communique, effectively confirmed the truth of a whole range of protests that Spanish female footballers have been making more or less directly now for years (or even decades). The interview with Arroyo presented here took place before these events, so obviously there is no reference to them. Nevertheless, many of Arroyo's comments reflect the debates that have intensified in response to the actions of the former President of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales. We believe this makes her observations all the more interesting, given that they are not a reaction to the current media attention but the product of a thoughtful perspective, developed over many years, that connects past and present in an extraordinarily lucid way.

In 2022, Columna published Arroyo's book *Dones de futbol*, which outlines the history of football played by women. The book begins by constructing a narrative based on the notion of

the pioneer, a term that has been attributed to women footballers for many years, given that football played by women always seemed to be in its first stages (not due to a lack of success or audience, as Jean Williams [2007: 111] has shown, but due to prohibitions imposed by men). It is a term that has even been attributed to Arroyo herself, both on the pitch and off it as a journalist, and it serves as an excellent example of the aforementioned relationship between past and present (historical problems and new horizons). Both in her book and throughout this interview, Arroyo explains how this history has been changing, so that thanks to those very same pioneers, victories both small and large have been achieved in terms of working conditions in the sport, but also in terms of the public sphere and the media, through new images and new ways of relating to the image. It is a battle and a shared desire that Arroyo is passing onto the next generation through her passion for the game. ■

**What type of films or audiovisual products do you think had a major impact on your way of understanding and experiencing sport before you knew you would become a footballer?**

I have a hard time coming up with films. Instead, I think of series like *Captain Tusbasa* (TV Tokyo, 1983-1986). On the other hand, in my professional experience, the really important influence was the sports broadcasts. I do remember watching channels like TV3 or any channel that presented sports. I was especially interested in football because it was also broadcast free to air. For example, I recall the broadcasts of the *Barça* (FC Barcelona) matches that featured the image of Jordi Culé (a caricaturesque cartoon character representing a Barcelona fan) and that the commenting was a lot of fun. As a spectator, I watched on two levels, corresponding to my two professional sides: first, I tried to imitate some of the players' technical plays, and second, I tried to imitate what the pitch-side reporters were doing. This extended to other sports broadcasts, like the Barcelona Open and French Open tennis tournaments, with Carlos Moyá or Sergi Bruguera, and the handball broadcasts in the days of Enric Masip and Andrii Xepkin. I spent the whole weekend watching sports. As for films, it wasn't until I was an adult that I first became aware of some titles that conveyed a really negative image of women in sport.

**Was there a change in your relationship with images of sport when you began working as a coach? In other words, what are the most substantial differences you find between the broadcasts of the matches for the general public and the images you use professionally to work on technical or tactical issues?**

There are differences. The standard broadcasts of men's professional football are the sports broadcasts with the most resources. For example, they have cameras that can move at different speeds around the pitch, and drones and other devices that provide a really complete view of the match.

The company Mediapro, for example, has a tactical camera system set up in the stadium that can capture an amazing 360-degree image, with a level of tracking that can offer a coach's view, which is not the same as the view of a spectator who is watching the match at home and wants just the opposite, closer shots, more detail. That's why for the broadcasts of the big matches they use a movie camera that can zoom in on the details. This is totally different from what has always been used in women's sports, where for a long time the broadcasts of a sport like football, with its huge field and so many people running around (unlike a pavilion or a straight line like you have in swimming), have relied on only three or four cameras. As a coach, the footage of women's football that I was using before I worked for a first division team, which is where I have the privilege to be working now, was TV broadcast footage. TV broadcasts are often used as a tactical support because there aren't enough resources to send an analyst to other stadiums. The objective would be to stop using the TV footage because they're different communication and visual styles, but if the resources are limited you have to develop a different way of looking at the same images; the view is the same, but it offers different perspectives.

**For player motivation, do you use live action footage?**

We use footage most of all for tactical purposes: video clips that we've been able to get of the opposing team and sequences of our own matches to be able to correct mistakes or go over combination plays. We do the same with the footage we record every day at the training sessions, whether with ordinary cameras on tripods (depending on the pitch where we're training) or with 360-degree technology that takes a more oval recording. That type of image does have a use in day-to-day training, at different times in the week and with different focuses. On the other hand, I haven't used motivational images in recent seasons, whe-

ther based on films or on photographs that review what we've done during the year. With the Spanish selection, for example, I have used them, also on the request of the players: I remember one season when two of the captains wanted to do a montage, and they asked for my permission and in the end we worked on it together. I think they have an impact, but sometimes it can be excessive; it's important not to overwhelm them. These days, my use of video is more technical, based more on tactics. As I have a team with different language levels, I know that asking them to think about a match by talking to them alone doesn't work as well as supporting the talk with all the technology I have at my disposal. There is always a screen behind my messaging: sometimes I use something more organised in PowerPoint form, going slide by slide, but other times I prefer to do it in a bit more of a raw way so that I can monitor the energy the players have, and still other times I simply use the traditional whiteboard with magnets. I change it up to avoid the coldness that digital technology can have these days. Felt tip pens, whiteboards and flash cards keep things from getting too technological and alienating the players. I'm going back to notebooks and paper instead of using a digital notepad. You've caught me in a bit of a technological crisis [laughs].

**There is obviously a generational difference with some of your players. What changes do you see to the type of audiovisual technology they use today? For example, do you think their viewing is more fragmented, like in the typical videos of highlights?**

I'm wrestling with this because in fact I have a pretty young team, as most of the players were born after the year 2000. They're young, you see them with their phones every day, and we always have the dilemma of whether we should make everything shorter, get to the point more quickly, because sometimes their attention span gives out. I learned this in the days when I was working

for the newspaper *Diari Ara*: they say that people do a lot of skim reading, or they only read the headlines. But I think that right now everyone is thinking that maybe it isn't too much for people, that maybe we've crossed the line a bit and people actually want fuller, longer and more detailed texts, because they get tired of the superficiality of everything being so fragmented. Just today, the talk we had [on the Real Sociedad training grounds] was about the platforms that we're going to use so that the players have all the resources on hand throughout the season: from accessing the schedule for the week to playing back any videos we've worked on as a reminder. One of the changes we've introduced this year is that everything will be more optimised for mobile phones, which is the main device they view things on. Generally speaking, I would say that the players use technology a lot, but generally in a fragmented rather than an organised way. That's why it is important to find ways of connecting the materials we offer them when they're going to view them on their own. Sometimes it's hard to get them to focus on reviewing plays where not much seems to happen; in those cases, I do think it is more effective to watch the videos with them, together. If you show them the videos more as part of a conversation, you do capture their attention for as long as you want. But on their own they need a lot of action, as if it was the first episode of a series on Netflix, where if there aren't five romantic encounters, three deaths and two explosions it's a waste of time [laughs]. Obviously, I'm generalising; there's a lot of variety and football demands variety. Sometimes it demands something really light so that they can view it when they feel like it, and other times I do think they like to be guided, to follow a story. Because otherwise all this content with everything so fast, flashing past in ten seconds, with the audio at full volume and Spotify too, it doesn't work... Again, it's the technological crisis we were talking about before, getting the players to understand that there are certain recordings

that still have to be that way, and that they aren't outdated. Football matches still last ninety minutes. I don't think it's necessary to replay the match from beginning to end, all together, like they used to do with me. These days you choose and you edit, you review the plays that are interesting and you complement them with slides, spotlights, footage from training, and that's how you prepare it.

**How do you address issues of self-representation and media presence? We are emerging from a paradigm of objectification or sexualisation of the bodies of sportswomen, which is changing. Do you work in any way on the use of social media?**

I feel that the younger generations have naturalised this issue. My generation dealt with these changes with difficulties and by overdoing it: we exposed ourselves when we started using social media, sometimes too much. These days, as female footballers and sportswomen have a much clearer professional future, as they know that if they take the right steps, that professional future could become a reality, they take conscious control of their social media use. It's a control that comes from the players themselves, from their ability to understand that the "social media" tool is almost more useful for professional development than it is for interacting. The communication department at Real Sociedad does give them guidance, so that they're aware of what things are not in keeping with the image of a player for this club (supporting them with common sense), but I also see them getting plenty of guidance from their agents. The trial-error system that others used before has made them more aware of the image they have. And they know that they can work for advertising brands, which represents an important source of income or of cachet for them.

In terms of the question of objectification, they choose it freely. They choose it based on a pride in their own bodies, which is a very American thing. In the United States, the girls have no qualms about appearing on magazine covers showing off

a very developed body: if I'm a cyclist, I show my legs; if I'm a swimmer, I show my muscles. I think in Europe and in Spain that it's been much harder for us to associate female athletes with this power of the body. The new generations know that part of what they do in their profession gives them a body that is viewed very positively by society and that is really normalised for them: I show what I want to show; I roll up my pants if I want to, and I choose the photo that shows off the body that this sport has given me. The biggest victory is that *they* choose what they want to show, in terms of both their bodies and their private lives. From my point of view, this reflects a command, a control and an empowerment very much in keeping with the new generations: they dare to say things that previous generations found it very hard to do. The same is true of sexual orientation: they've broken a whole range of taboos and barriers. Before, you had to decide whether to publicly declare non-normative sexuality or not; now, in most cases, what they want to declare is understood based on what they post or don't post. Although sometimes we think they're slaves to social media, I think they handle their time pretty well and they have more control than it might seem.

**Non-heteronormative relationships continue to be a very strong taboo in men's football. On the other hand, in women's football, they are completely naturalised. What do you think is the reason for this difference?**

I find that a complex question to answer; let me see if I can put my ideas in order. In the context of my experience, in sport or major sports, everything that is given priority is founded on male standards. As much as we are moving towards greater gender openness, in sport we're stuck in the binary. The rules of competitive sport, of win or lose, where you have to have certain athletic abilities, have led us to think that you need to be strong, aggressive, almost cruel to the person opposite you. It is a set of traditionally male quali-

ties that have connected with one type of woman more than others. I have always been interested in these kinds of questions. How could we rethink sport so that its codes reflect more female qualities? Why is it that the sports where homosexuality has been able to be expressed publicly are the more artistic, more supposedly feminine ones?

There are a lot of studies that have identified that many girls during childhood and adolescence don't feel comfortable with the win-or-lose philosophy, that they want to do other things, collective things, with a different kind of scoring that is not about beating an opponent. I think that this does separate people and it may then lead to a specific sexual orientation (or not). Obviously, I'm not going to get into questions about gender construction, because that is a very complex debate. But I have often reflected on why women's football has an apparently higher percentage of gay people than other social contexts. Homosexuality seems much more normalised among women who play sport: it is normalised for them that anyone can be anyone and be with anyone. I think that socially too it should be becoming normalised, as sport begins to abandon that traditional view where success is associated with winning, with being the most aggressive or the strongest. As long as we continue to associate success with those kinds of qualities, it will be hard for men to think that *being a man* can mean being really free in your sexual orientation, because of all the codes surrounding sport. Sport should be simply another vehicle of society, and not a vehicle for the expression of masculinity based on strength or individual success. I don't think I've answered the question [laughs].

**One very positive aspect that is very noticeable at a women's football match is that there is much less distance between the players and the fans, more closeness in the sense that the status barrier between elite athletes and the people is not so visible. Do you think that has to do with**

**questions of money or media coverage? Could women's sport represent a different, less elitist model?**

For me it all comes down to money, like the differences in pay, when one group gets paid more than the rest and that gives them the capacity to be closer or more isolated. Although this could be extrapolated to other areas; for example, right now we are in the middle of an electoral campaign [for the Spanish general elections of 2023], and when people ask the politicians, they don't know the cost of a tub of yoghurt, a kilo of squash, a month's rent or a ride on public transport. Sportswomen lead everyday lives very similar to most people in the street: they don't have luxury cars, they might even take the bus, and when they travel they don't go in first class, much less on a private jet. Under those financial conditions, women players know that they can't retire after a good twelve years in the sport, so they combine it with studies, so that when they retire from the sport they can take up another profession. This probably brings you closer to a normal person, someone who isn't just a successful football star.

I don't know where the transformation of women's sport will take us, as in some cases it will become elite, with big salaries and a need for protection. I'm thinking, for example of Alexia Putellas: if every time she has gone to the beach this summer she has had five *paparazzi* around her, I don't know how much she's going to have to "bunker down", or whether she'll be able to keep up that closeness that is of course a really nice thing to have. There are a lot of cases of sportswomen who understand that that's where their strength lies, in not isolating themselves from the people, in understanding that sport is the fans, the kids and the families who follow you and look up to you, because if you get mad at a match and don't sign an autograph, what kind of athlete are you really? I think that in this respect women players, perhaps due to a lack of role models, still feel a sense of responsibility. I don't know whether we're going

to maintain it when the financial barrier goes up. But I do notice their awareness of their status as role models, and that they don't want to be distant role models; they want to make the girls happy. However, there can also be cases where people get confused, stepping over the line, because they don't know how to recognise when they're invading a famous person's privacy. Perhaps there will soon be major sportswomen who will have to start protecting themselves a little because that closeness will start to have a negative impact on their private lives. But I still see a different awareness, without so much separation between the pitch and the stands, with a different kind of audience because the sport they watch and enjoy has more intimacy, more sportsmanship, and that makes the player want to stop and express her gratitude. Women in sport are still very grateful for this, while men in sport have normalised it to the point that it doesn't excite them so much anymore.

**When you mention Alexia Putellas, it brings to our minds a very iconic image of her: the moment when she is celebrating at Camp Nou stadium, and a fan passes her a drum that she starts playing on. The history of football is filled with iconic images, both technical feats and others that have nothing to do with the game, which construct the history of the sport. What images are essential for you in the case of women's football?**

Obviously, a photo or a video doesn't make an athlete, but they do contribute. When I was working for *Diari Ara*, when there was a big sports victory that made the front pages and was featured in the TV news, like a gold at the Olympics, we always wondered what effect that image would have. Are there more women swimmers because there is a Mireia Belmonte? Are more people interested in synchronised swimming because suddenly they've discovered a sport that didn't receive any media coverage in the past four years? The answer is almost always yes, at least at the level of coaching licences, as the evidence

shows in the case of swimming. So, visibility and presence in traditional media and social media is essential. For many years, shows with big audiences like *Deportes Cuatro* usually only talked about women's sport when there were conflicts or controversies. If the only thing about women's football that gets media coverage is that we're fighting over the contract, that we're on strike, or that the Spanish Football Federation is fed up with the CSD [Spain's National Sports Council] or with Liga F [the professional league for women's football], that creates a negative image. On the other hand, if you're seeing games, goals and sport, that creates a different image, a positive one. I remember that a friend of mine created a YouTube channel where he posted images of international women's football, at a time when there was no access at all: in 2013, in the final for the Copa de la Reina [a national women's football tournament], Alexia Putellas scored a goal, and he posted it on YouTube and it got more than a million views. That goal was a unique moment. Finally, the press is able to recognise these kinds of images. They show goals and great plays and not things like "the goalkeeper is fat and can't save anything" or "a great goal because of an error by a player who made a very bad mistake." I think that now there is a good enough level and reporters have the ability or the sensitivity to choose.

Obviously, there are also images that have had an impact on whole generations, like Brandi Chastain's celebration at the World Cup in the United States in 1999, which I think is one of the 100 most important images in the history of sport. She wrote a book titled *It's Not About the Bra* (2005). Again, in this sense the Americans have no inhibitions: with all the excitement of winning a World Cup in front of 90,000 people, she slides to her knees on the grass and takes off her shirt with no qualms. These are powerful iconic moments that travel around the world. Like Alexia's celebration, similar to Lionel Messi's at Camp Nou... They are images that the media replay so often that in the

end they become icons of the sport. The one of Chastain is one of the images that have had the biggest impact on me, but that penalty shoot-out had other great moments too. Any of Megan Rapinoe's celebrations at the World Cup as well. The problem is the images that we haven't been able to see, what we haven't heard about, what hasn't reached us because we haven't been told, and that is sad. But this image that did reach us has been able to last for nearly 25 years. I think that these kinds of images can't be manufactured. They have to happen spontaneously, with the good fortune that a camera is there at that moment taking the picture. Today, social media platforms allow their dissemination without depending on the editor of a newspaper or some director of a TV network with an outdated mentality; it depends on us, with the ability to retweet it and coordinate it. What is a shame is all the undoubtedly amazing images that haven't reached us because the system prevented them from being seen.

**Sport is like other fields of activity in that it has certain visual motifs or shared, recurrent forms of representation in countless images that convey particular messages. What for you would be the most important visual motifs in the world of football? Do you think that football played by women is changing those motifs in some way?**

When I was working for the newspaper, when we had to choose the photo that would accompany a football article, the photographers nearly always chose celebrations. Obviously, in a sport that doesn't have very high scores, goals are extremely important, along with the celebrations of them. In fact, many of the examples of what we were talking about before are celebrations or victories. The images of celebrations give rise to imitations: there are boys and girls who repeat or imitate the gestures of their role models when they play football. Scoring a goal is one of those visual motifs; another is the coin toss, with the referees and the team captains; or the players' huddle and the coach's pep

talk, with or without shouting. More recently, in video images, increasing importance is being given to fouls: from excessive somersaults to foul itself to show whether the player has suffered a lot of harm or not, or even the moment when a player helps their opponent up off the ground. There are other sports that have been better at highlighting that kind of sportsmanship, that respect for the refereeing. I think that in football, fouls are still associated more with protesting than with apologising, with confronting the referee instead of worrying about the person lying on the ground in pain. Fouls could become a key factor for thinking about the kind of sport we want: a sport that is all about faking and protesting, or a sport that is about helping the players who fell back up to their feet.

**From a coach's perspective, what motifs do you think are most important?**

I think that this is something that is being rediscovered now, precisely because people are thinking about how the new generations watch sports today, and especially sports with long matches like football. A match lasts nearly two hours. How many people are still capable of watching it all in one sitting and how many people do we need to engage in a different way? Between matches, what information do fans want? The normal routine? The training was on schedule, nobody has been injured, nobody is at risk of being benched... It's sort of superfluous information. If the clubs don't offer different content, revealing everything that goes on inside them, I think it will affect their reputation, because a lot happens from one Sunday to the next. We're beginning to reveal all these things, with Amazon documentaries (like the Joanna Pardos series *Alexia, Labor Omnia Vincit*, released in 2022), or the Netflix docuseries about the US team, *Under Pressure: The U.S. Women's World Cup Team* (Rebecca Gitlitz, 2023). As a coach, I think we have to be open to it, even if the camera makes us uncomfortable. There are moments when you want the team to be relaxed, and

of course the camera bothers them, but we need to normalise what goes on between matches. At present, there aren't many examples.

The best documentaries, or the ones that have had the most impact on me, are the American ones, and that's a shame because they come with a particular kind of mentality and discourse: sometimes I ask the people in the US that I'm in touch with, are all of them born as Al Pacino? [laughs]. Do they all have the ability to make a speech in front of who knows how many people without getting nervous? Here in Europe, my impression is that we're more modest. At Real Sociedad we don't find that everything that portrays the day-to-day happenings inside the club generates much interest. In my context, for example, I get asked about the day-to-day stuff, because they have no idea what it's like to arrive at the stadium two hours beforehand, or to check in together at a hotel, or the talks with the players. Probably in the media-centred world in which we live, we're going to have to open up and there won't be much privacy, but the results could be interesting. Maybe women's football could take the step before men's football in certain things that the boys aren't bold enough to do, such as the microphone that female coaches carry, or the interviews at half time. In the United States, they did an experiment where the assistant coach would provide continuous commentary on the match. These are new formulas to try to engage new audiences. I don't know whether we have to be experimental or wait for the ones who have theoretically always led the way to be experimental. It's hard, but I think it's a good challenge to attract attention outside the traditional format and the ninety minutes.

**Taking into account your work as a communicator and a journalist for various media outlets, what are your points of reference? In your case, you worked primarily as a tactical analyst.**

As a player and as a reporter I haven't followed a very clear path: I've taken ideas from a wide varie-

ty of sources. I have done it all very much my own way. In fact, when I was starting out as a reporter, in theory I didn't have to do tactical analysis because my job was as a pitch-side commentator. What happened was that I didn't do exactly what is expected of a standard pitch-side commentator, perhaps because I didn't know what that was. Do I only have to comment on whether there is a big crowd or not? Or on whether the coach gets up off the bench? I didn't know. So suddenly I would say: "did you see that last play?" And I had the good fortune of being with people who were able to recognise that I was better at that. Only over time have I realised the influence that certain people have had on me: that first coach who did something I liked, or Pere Escobar's broadcasts on TV3. But I didn't study them in depth. I've been very haphazard in that sense. I didn't have any famous female analysts as role models, but I discovered them later, people like Julia Luna. I didn't want to be the first or to do it like others had. Now I do see people who maybe have paid attention to my style, and it even startles me, because I was just doing what I felt comfortable doing, talking about what I wanted to talk about, or even thinking about what could be done differently: what I didn't want to do, what I didn't want to be commenting on. On a journalistic level, maybe I only had one mission: to avoid saying certain things like "the girls", or "Barça's women's team". I've been very self-aware in terms of this use of language or vocabulary, and also in terms of certain types of messaging: not being just about drama, not being just about tragedy, but being about results and sport... talking from a sporting perspective.

**On that point, what do you think of the term "women's football"?**

When I did the book *Dones de futbol* [Women of Football] (2022), one of the things I fought for was that the subject was not women's football, but football played by women. That was a battle that I used to have constantly with the different as-

sistant managers and editors at the newspaper: if I put “a goal by Alexia gives *Barça* the win”, they would say to me “which *Barça*?” Well, the fact is that Alexia only plays on one *Barça* team, so there’s no need to say “*Barça* women’s team”. I’d hoped by now that we’d be rid of this excessive sensitivity, but no, we have to keep fighting for our rights. The main problem is that nobody talks about “men’s football”; the women are the only ones who get the extra word, as if sport *per se* was only played by men. If we could normalise the use of the term “men’s sports”, I think that would be fantastic. But when “women’s” is used as if to say that football played by women is less than football, it drives me mad. That’s when my personality would come out a bit... I was younger, and I would fight with the editors on the newspaper until I realised they might just kick me out [laughs]. Yes, I’ve been obsessed with it, it’s a little cause I have, although I’m not the most radical person. But I think there are certain things that are changing and being normalised.

**To conclude, mixed teams are a recurring and controversial question in discussions of gender parity and media representation. Although the notion of gender itself is extremely complex, in other professional contexts men and women work together on the same teams. However, in sport, there is often a very marked segregation of male and female genders, with different competitive categories (hormone levels to regulate or classify players, etc.). On the level of representation and audiences, do you think this has consequences? For example, do you foresee mixed football competitions at the elite level, where instead of separating genders, men and women are combined and playing together?**

I think it’s far into the future. In some things, sport can be a pioneer, because it can break new ground and it is a vehicle for making certain things visible, but most of the time it’s a few steps behind other fields. And society... Look at the de-

bate we’re having right now about who will win or lose the elections. We’re at a moment when it seems we’re going so far backwards that it seems futuristic to me, when on top of it all there are so many conflicts and battles that have to do... with neckties ... for lack of a better example. As we’re still operating like that, the question of mixed teams seems to me like science fiction, or football fiction. Having said that, I think it’s a very relevant debate for ensuring that in the separation that we currently have, the differences that exist are experienced naturally, because on the physical level above all there are differences, in the sense that there are spectators who may enjoy a sport because it’s fast-paced or not, and they respond to the stimuli that they’re used to. In mixed sport, there would be something very positive to explore, that would no doubt eliminate some of the things that frustrate the boys and the girls in the sport. There are still debates today over whether the goalkeeper should be smaller in football played by women. Perhaps those debates would disappear if we mixed them up. On a mixed team, if I’m not such a strong striker I pass it to you and you shoot, but I can do something else that maybe you can’t. We support one another instead of trying to prove who is better. We’re still operating on that level, so it might well be a great solution, but I think it is a step that will come a long way after a series of things that society has to sort out first, beginning with whether you can change the information on your ID card, the right to get married, or which lavatory I should use if there are two little drawings representing genders. We still have a long way to go.

Given how things are now, in some cases it will seem like a problem, because suddenly there will be an athlete in circumstances that will give them a big advantage over the rest. We have to keep discovering this; there have to be a few first times. If we go back to the origins of football, there have been a lot of things that were forbidden, and it was necessary to fight to make them possi-

ble, beginning with having a competition or having certain minimum standards, or not playing for 35 minutes on a half-sized pitch. It's the evolution from imposing to eliminating restrictions. For example, we had a player in the women's first division, Barbra Banda, who has been accused of having testosterone levels that were too high, so we don't know whether they'll let her play in the World Cup. Until we get this sorted out, mixed teams will only happen in experimental contexts or in sports that already have a mixed tradition. I think it will come, even if it is only in a parallel competition, but we're so much in our infancy in other aspects that it seems to me to be football-fiction. Perhaps we'll never even see it, but we'll put it down on paper and we'll do what we can so that future generations can be closer to that possibility, if it's what they want. ■

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## RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT: A CONVERSATION WITH NATALIA ARROYO

### Abstract

Natalia Arroyo is a coach, journalist and former footballer. She trained in FC Barcelona's lower tiers and played on RCD Espanyol's first team and for FC Levante Las Planas. She combined playing sport with studying a bachelor's degree in audiovisual communication and has worked as a writer for the newspaper *Diari Ara* and as a match commentator for the networks Bein Sports, Gol and Movistar La Liga. She currently coaches Real Sociedad in Spain's Women's First Division.

### Key words

Image; Sport; Women; Audiovisual; Football; Communication.

### Authors

Violeta Kovacsics holds a PhD in Communication. She is a film critic and a lecturer at Escuela Superior de Cine y Audiovisuales de Cataluña (ESCAC) and Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. She has contributed to several collective works, and she coordinated the book *Very Funny Things. Nueva Comedia Americana* (Festival de Donostia, 2012), as well authoring *50 maneras de morir. Cine negro y poética de la fatalidad* (UOC, 2022). She was on the selection committee and responsible for the journal and catalogue for the Sitges-Festival Internacional de Cinema Fantàstic de Catalunya, and she is a programming advisor for the Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival. She is also a regular contributor to the program *La finestra indiscreta* on Catalunya Ràdio and to the journal *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine*, as a member of the editorial board. She was the first woman to chair the Asociación Catalana de Crítica y Escritura Cinematográfica (ACCEC).

Manuel Garin is a professor in aesthetics and audiovisual narrative at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. He is the author of the book *El gag visual. De Buster Keaton a Super Mario* (Cátedra, 2014), and has worked as a visiting researcher at Tokyo University of the Arts, University of Southern California and Columbia University, where he pursued the digital humanities projects *Gameplaygag: Between Silent Film and New Media* and *A Hundred Busters: Keaton Across the Arts*. His research on cinema, history and audiovisual culture has been published in scholarly journals such as *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies* and *Communication & Society*, in cultural criticism magazines such as *La Maleta de Portbou*, *Contrapicado* and *Cultura/s*, and in books by publishers such as the MIT Press, Routledge, Oxford University Press and Palgrave. He is currently directing a research project on image, sport and historical memory in Spain, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

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## REMIRAR LAS IMÁGENES Y REVISAR EL DEPORTE. DIÁLOGO CON NATALIA ARROYO

### Resumen

Natalia Arroyo es entrenadora, periodista y exfutbolista. Se formó en las categorías inferiores del Fútbol Club Barcelona y jugó en el primer equipo del R. C. D. Espanyol y en el Levante Las Planas. Compaginó el deporte con una licenciatura en Comunicación Audiovisual y ha sido redactora en el *Diari Ara* y comentarista de partidos para Bein Sports, Gol y Movistar La Liga. Actualmente dirige a la Real Sociedad en la Primera División Femenina de España.

### Palabras clave

Imagen; Deporte; Mujeres; Audiovisual; Fútbol; Comunicación.

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Manuel Garin es profesor de estética y narrativa audiovisual en la Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona. Autor del libro *El gag visual. De Buster Keaton a Super Mario* (Cátedra, 2014), ha sido investigador visitante en la Tokyo University of The Arts, la University of Southern California y Columbia University, donde desarrolló los proyectos de humanidades digitales *Gameplaygag. Between Silent Film and New Media* y *A Hundred Busters: Keaton Across The Arts*. Sus investigaciones sobre cine, historia y cultura audiovisual se han publicado en revistas académicas como *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies* o *Communication & Society*, en revistas de crítica cultural como *La Maleta de Portbou*, *Contrapicado* o *Cultura/s*, y en libros de editoriales como The MIT Press, Routledge, Oxford University Press o Palgrave. Actualmente dirige un proyecto de investigación sobre imagen, deporte y memoria histórica en España, financiado por el MICINN.

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