L'ATALANTE

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CINEMATOGRÁFICOS



DIALOGUE
FROM SOCIAL REALISM TO FILMIC FABLE:
NEW APPROACHES TO SPANISH AGRARIAN
DOCUMENTARIES

DIALOGUE WITH FERNANDO GÓMEZ LUNA (DIS)AGREEMENTS
THE ARCHIVE AND THE
AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY
MEMORY

MASTHEAD

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FORMS AND DISCOURSES OF THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY IN EUROPE: AN EXAMINATION*

FERNANDO LUQUE GUTIÉRREZ
PASCALE THIBAUDEAU

A point in common typically shared by studies on rural cinema is the initial consideration of the cinematic device itself as an essentially urban invention, a spectacle "by and for the city" (González Requena, 1988: 13). Conceived in the context of an industrial, machinist fervour, filmmaking is almost by ontological definition alien to the traditionalist idiosyncrasies of the rural world. This means that an external gaze was responsible for formalising the first cinematic representations of the rural from its particular perspective, constructing it as a world outside of and opposite to its own:

Cinema with rural or peasant themes is always articulated [...] from an urban perspective, directed from the city by city people, and translating the value systems, [...] choosing what should be shown, organising the mise-en-scène, and orchestrating the narrative. (González Requena, op. cit.: 14)

Although Requena's assertion merits some qualification, it points to a question that is essential to the formulation of any possible definition of rural cinema and its historical or stylistic de-

velopment over time: what it is exactly that has polarised the approach of the multiple gazes that since then have constructed the representation of rural worlds, both in relation to the "geographical landscape, and to the specific modes of occupying it, including its cultural relationships and ways of life" (Gómez, 2010: 20).

The early consolidation of narrative cinema would reinforce the subordination of these geographical and social landscapes to a primordially dramatic function, giving rise to a prevailing trend that established the rural sphere as a setting associated with a range of themes and motifs defined by their contrast to the urban sphere. However, this same foundational period was also marked by another noteworthy depiction of the rural world that departed from the dominant narrative approach to explore it as an object of interdisciplinary study. This documentary approach pursued objectives that were specifically agrarian, scientific or ethnographic, or that were associated with any other branch of knowledge that identified the

complex rural reality as a space for knowledge and learning, resulting in a rich body of films that has traditionally been overshadowed by the historiographical significance of the narrative depiction.

Fortunately, over the years there has been a proliferation of initiatives seeking to rectify this deficit by identifying and analysing an indispensable set of productions that offer a more multifaceted image of the rural world in film. In the process, they have highlighted the need to "expand the limits of that history with a holistic understanding that transcends commercial and mainstream cinema to advocate for the inclusion of an increasingly pluralistic range of audiovisual productions in terms of formats, aims, genres, media, audiences and areas of distribution" (Sánchez Noriega, 2021: 10).

In its exploration of this line of research, this monograph focuses on one of the most well-established trajectories of the European rural documentary: a type of expository filmmaking whose primary frame of action defines it as a pedagogical tool at the service of the comprehensive agrarian reforms promoted since the early 20th century by ministries of agriculture and other institutions directly involved in the sector. In this context, the "agrarian documentary" is characterised by its transmission of scientific and technical knowledge to train rural workers in the various stages of the farming process, but also by its development of a propagandistic discourse varying in explicitness depending on the country, the ideological bias, and the objectives of the administrative body that financed and distributed the films.

Thanks to the joint work of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Spanish Film Library (Filmoteca Española) and various universities, notable achievements have been made in recent years in the recovery, restoration and dissemination of historically significant agricultural documentaries, such as the films of Pascual Carrión, the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches Nicolás. These foundations have facilitated the development of

specialised R&D projects in the field, such as those directed since 2013 by Pedro Poyato and Ana Melendo at Universidad de Córdoba: La obra del marqués de Villa-Alcázar (1934-1966), un eslabón necesario en la historia del documental cinematográfico en España [The Work of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar (1934-1966): A Vital Link in Spanish Documentary Film History]; and La contribución de José Neches al documental agrario español del Franquismo (1945-1976) [José Neches' Contribution to Spanish Agrarian Documentaries under Fascism (1945-1976)], both of which have identified thematic and formal similarities to films made in other important centres of production, such as France and Italy, thereby establishing a good starting point for the general contextualisation of this type of film within the trajectories that have defined European cinema (Hennebelle and Oms. 1990) in contrast to the dominant American filmmaking tradition.

With this objective, within the framework of the recent R&D project titled Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudios comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultural de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1970) [Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: Comparative Studies of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1970)], this issue of L'Atalante is intended as a forum for the interdisciplinary study of the production of these documentaries during a turbulent period marked by major wars and social and political conflicts, but also by cinematic conflicts, as these films were created during the peak of the realist movements in European cinema in its evolution towards modernist film.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY: SPAIN, FRANCE, ITALY

The roots of this agrarian cinema can be traced back to the interests in cinematography of a diverse group of scholars working in various disci-

plines at the beginning of the 20th century, who advocated for the application of the new medium of motion pictures to their respective fields of research. Naturalists such as Francis Martin Duncan in Great Britain (The Unseen World, 1903). microbiologists such as Jean Comandon in France (Germination du pollen, 1911), and agronomists such as Spain's Leandro Navarro (Fumigación de los olivos por medio del gas cianhídrico, 1912-14 [The Fumigation of Olive Trees Using Hydrocyanic Gas, 1912-14]) were among the pioneers of a type of pedagogical documentary that applied incipient filming and editing techniques to the communication of specialised scientific knowledge (Camarero Rioja, 2013: 13-15). The films they made served as a complement to academic lectures, as they were screened at seminars and conferences where they fulfilled their main purpose of informing the spectator-students for whom they were intended.

Microcinematographic techniques and the manipulation of time through the use of fast or slow motion and animated time-lapse structures were consolidated as educational resources capable of revealing the truth about natural processes, overcoming the limitations of the naked eye while enhancing the scopic magnetism of the image itself as a spectacle of attraction. Films thus demonstrated a versatility that would fascinate many "accidental" directors, including the aforementioned Leandro Navarro, an agronomist by profession, whose 1915 essay titled "La enseñanza agronómica y el cinematógrafo" [Agronomic Teaching and the Cinematographer] argued for their incorporation into the academic discipline in these terms:

[...] they have impressed me much more deeply than those frightening cinematic dramas that regularly enthral the masses, considering that I was watching the exact reproduction of something very real and unquestionably exciting, uprooted from Nature through the constant effort of lovers of knowledge [...] managing to draw the attention of all men of science, and even the curiosity of many others (in Camarero Rioja, op. cit.: 22).

Indeed, Navarro's filmography established a solid connection with the various categories of the agrarian documentary, which only had to adapt the foundations laid by the scientific pioneers to the specific features of the rural context. An example of this transition is the aforementioned Fumigación de los olivos por medio del gas cianhídrico, 1912-14 (Camarero Rioja, op. cit.: 24), a film whose microscopic images obtained in the laboratory are clearly articulated with others obtained in the empirical reality of the rural world that document technical work in the field. The latter are images captured in the empirical reality of a rural context that is benefiting from a particular scientific advance (in this case, the phytosanitary treatment of olive groves) which adds a certain anthropological value to the underlying didactic dimension. In Spain, this type of agrarian pedagogical filmmaking would be continued by Pascual Carrión in his work for the Alfonso XII Agricultural Institute and the General Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry between 1927 and 1929 (García Bartolomé, 2007: 33), formalising an approach to documentaries in this country that tied in with a general trend driven by the general agrarian

Image I. Didactic details in the films of Leandro Navarro (Fumigación de los olivos por medio del gas cianhídrico, 1912)



reforms that transformed the European countryside during the turbulent years of the mid-20th century.

In France, there is a record of an institutional session organised in 1920 by the Undersecretariat of State in collaboration with the Institut Agronomique de Paris for the public screening of agrarian education films dating back to 1912, the date of the first compilation of rural short films directed by Jean-Claude Bernard under the common title Film national de la machine agricole française. As Duvigneau and Duvigneau observe, the informational notice published for the event highlighted the educational nature of films that were able "to explain to a captivated audience the evolution of nature, from the growth of plants to the development and destruction of pests [...] through modern methods of cultivation" (1996: 190).

The French government's interest in films of this kind would result in the allocation of a budget in 1923 for the establishment of a permanent film service attached to the French Ministry of Agriculture, as well as an agrarian film library that by 1931 would contain more than 300 specialised films (Duvigneau and Duvigneau, 1996: 191). However, the definitive impetus for the consolidation of the well-known Service Cinématographique du Ministère de l'Agriculture (SCMA) would come in the mid-1940s under the direction of Armand Chartier, the cinematographic pseudonym for the water and forest agronomist Armand Deleule. Chartier was the senior official who would oversee the reconstruction of the depleted ministerial service after the war and the German occupation (Vanhée, 2022: 40), recovering the institution's public and didactic tradition through great achievements given its budgetary and cinematographic resources, with a solid technical and creative team that included other important documentary filmmakers in French cinema, such as Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Jean-Benoît Lévy.

Although the work of France's SCMA served as one of the main points of reference for agrarian

ALTHOUGH THE WORK OF FRANCE'S SCMA SERVED AS ONE OF THE MAIN POINTS OF REFERENCE FOR AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES AND THE INTEGRATION OF STYLISTIC AND NARRATIVE ELEMENTS INTO THEIR PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY IN THE HEYDAY OF THE INSTITUTION UNDER CHARTIER (1946-1983), THERE WERE OTHER IMPORTANT SITES OF PRODUCTION IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT. NOTABLE AMONG THESE WAS ITALY

documentaries and the integration of stylistic and narrative elements into their pedagogical resources, especially in the heyday of the institution under Chartier (1946-1983), there were other important sites of production in the European context. Notable among these was Italy, where there were also early filmmaking initiatives aimed at agrarian education, one of the most prominent, as pointed out by Mino Argientieri and Deborah Toschi (in Garosi, 2021: 241), being the educational activities of the Istituto Nazionale Cerere. This institute was created in 1919 by Mario Casalini to provide agrarian training in the rural sector, and its film production formed part of the methodology of the itinerant agricultural lecturers who were sent all over rural Italy. The Cerere's success would lead to the incorporation of its film production structures into the agrarian section of the powerful Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa), one of the main educational and propaganda agencies under the authority of Mussolini's fascist government, as well as the definitive creation of the Cinemateca Agraria (Agrarian Film Library) in 1926 (Garosi, op. cit.: 240).

Directed by Alberto Conti until the end of the 1930s, this Italian film library would be responsible for balancing its didactic function with a propagandistic role through a filmography intended

to establish the regime's strategic lines of action in the rural sector. The subsidised production of agrarian documentaries always promoted a changing set of ideas that would establish the functions of the rural world and its corresponding systems of production and territorial control within the framework of the State. Even titles as technical and apparently neutral as Coltivazione del grano nelle aziende semiestensive, 1926 [Wheat Cultivation on Semi-extensive Farms, 1926] and La cerealicoltura nell'Italia meridionale, 1926 [Cereal Cultivation in Southern Italy, 1926] unequivocally reveal their (re)educational objective, including ideological inculcation, with the dissemination of a fascist conception of the rural world that upholds its traditionalism while at the same time exalting the industrialisation of it productive structures.

From this perspective, the Spanish example cited here provides a particularly clear illustration of the malleability of the ideological discourse associated with the didactic forms of the agrarian documentary (García Bartolomé, 2007: 34-36; Poyato, 2016: 211-225). The model established by Leandro Navarro and subsequently tailored to the rural sphere by Pascual Carrión would end up being adapted to the Republican ideology of the first Central Agricultural Cinematography Service (SCCA), established in 1933 and attached to the Ministry of Agriculture. Similarly, after the war it would be adapted to Francoist ideology, under the control of the Agricultural Extension Service (SEA), successor to the SCCA, and other institutions involved in the rural sector, such as the National Rural Land Consolidation and Planning Service and the National Institute of Industry (INI). This ideological journey is evident in the work of the renowned Marquis of Villa-Alcázar, whose long career would span both political eras, and in the contrast between the work of Carlos Velo during the Spanish Republic and that of another leading figure in this area, José Neches, in line with the National Catholic ideology of the dictatorship: consider, for example, the collectivist



Image 2. El cortijo andaluz (José Neches, 1945)

ideal expressed in Velo's Almadrabas (Carlos Velo, 1934), with its depiction of the different phases of industrial tuna production, as opposed to Neche's exaltation of religious, family and classist values in his representation of production on a country estate in *El Cortijo Andaluz* (José Neches, 1945).

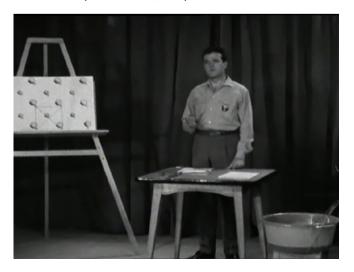
In any case, the historical development of the institutional agrarian documentary turned it into a detailed chronicler of the different lines of action proposed to tackle the big challenges that shaped the transformation of the rural world over the course of the century, reflecting the urgent modernisation of the first decades, the reconfigurations occurring in times of war, the mechanisation process and the fight against the rural depopulation caused by mass migration to the big cities, and today's concerns about the sustainability of the environment and its resources. The result is a compendium of documentaries recording not only the socio-political history of the rural sphere, but also its technological, pedagogical and ethnographic aspects, endowing it with great value for the many disciplines interested in studying it. And it is important to remember that this value also includes the purely cinematographic aspects of the agrarian documentary, in terms of the filmic forms constituting the different aesthetic and semantic systems mobilised in the fulfilment of its objectives.

THE FORMS OF THE RURAL DOCUMENTARY AND THEIR VARIATIONS

In accordance with the above, the basic definition of the agrarian documentary hinges on three identifying factors: their production systems, their primary functions and their potential audiences. As they were created to support initiatives aimed at managing the rural sector in its respective national or community frameworks, these films eschewed commercial or artistic objectives in favour of pedagogical and communicative aims in the context of the strategic rural development plans of which they formed a part. This, in turn, explains the unique nature of their screening venues, provisionally set up in educational centres or at trade union or cooperative headquarters, always in direct proximity to rural population centres where the guidelines of the corresponding authority would have to be implemented.

Taking a step further, we can also sum up the main themes and discursive purposes ascribed to this type of agrarian cinema based on the articulation of the instruction of rural workers with the promotion of an image of rurality dependent on the ideological filter through which it was produced. However, this initial identification needs

Image 3. Mise-en-scène of the classroom in Cuidado con los combustibles (José Neches, 1964)



to be balanced with a consideration of the formal aspects that define the audiovisual expression of the particular technical and ideological message being transmitted to its intended audience.

In accordance with the lines of research outlined above, we can find a starting point for this definition in the traditional forms of the expository mode described by Bill Nichols in his well-known and widely studied classification of documentary films (1997: 68-71). In this mode, we are addressed directly by an omniscient enunciative figure vested with an unquestionable epistemological authority, engaging us with knowledge about the empirical world based on a purportedly objective truth.

On this basis, the simplest forms of the expository agrarian documentary can be described as an adaptation of the news report and the scholarly lecture. The first group would include the rural cinegiornali (newsreels) of Italy's Istitute Luce, such as A Roma le prove di una nuova tractorice agricola [Testing a New Tractor in Rome] (A /A0737, 1931), and certain films by José Neches in Spain, such as Feria Internacional de Maguinaria Agrícola, Fima S. XX [International Farm Machinery Fair] (SEA, 1967), aimed at documenting a current event in the sector without taking a didactic approach per se. Conversely, examples such as Plantación de frutales [Fruit Plantation] (José Neches, SEA, 1964), and Cuidado con los combustibles [Be Careful with Fuels] (Neches, SEA, 1964) are staged as lectures given by a teacher who addresses a heterogeneous audience off-camera, with the editing limited to the segmentation of the general space in order to draw the spectator's gaze closer to the different points of interest indicated by the specialist during the lecture.

In both cases, the formal simplicity rigorously complies with the informational and educational purposes of the institutions. However, as recent studies have also confirmed, agrarian documentary filmmaking has demonstrated its receptiveness to the expressive and semantic possibilities





Images 4 and 5. Materialist landscapes in Palot (Armand Chartier, 1947)

of the medium, with filmmakers enhancing their work through the incorporation of various formal features associated with both the artistic documentary and commercial fiction.

In this way, just as the thematic evolution of the European rural documentary can be considered a kind of cinematic chronicle of the transformation of the rural world, its formal diversification reveals the cinematic processes influencing the representation and conceptualisation of documentary film during the period. For example, the intervention of editing is rendered explicit through structures that are not restricted merely to a continuity of shots taken of a public demonstration or the teacher's work in the classroom, but that also integrate different film materials and sources to establish an argumentative logic that allows for the use of graphic, rhythmic and semantic association techniques, sound effects and music, and even a narrative mise-en-scène. Such enunciative strategies, contrary to the recommendations of canonical norms (Weinrichter, 2004: 25-38), underscore the advantages of the capacities for sensory, emotional, and semantic manipulation of film construction, including the construction of documentaries. Moreover, thanks in part to the above, the agrarian documentary participates in its own way in the progressive blurring of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, a key feature of the evolution of the various forms of European realism after World War II, leading to the emergence of modernist cinema in the 1950s, during a particularly rich historical period for the development of the agrarian documentary in several countries, as indicated above.

As evidence of the above, the elements borrowed from fiction are in fact obvious in examples such as *Palot* (Armand Chartier, SCMA, 1947), Las horas de la tierra [The Hours of the Land] and Diogenes (José Neches, SEA, 1965 and 1968) and the Italian film Un podere in Maremma, [A Country Home in Maremmal (Giorgio Ferroni, 1954). These films all highlight a certain tendency towards the docudrama and its use of the narrative film's powerful processes of identification with the spectator. This influence not surprising if we consider the ambiguity of documentary filmmaking dating right back to the Lumière brothers, which is why it is easier to identify the opposite tendency, i.e., where the presence of the agrarian documentary is evident in some of the major works of European realism of the period.





Images 6 and 7. The agrarian documentary in Farrebique (Georges Rouquier, 1946)

One example of this is the emblematic Farrebique ou Les quatre saisons [Farrebique or The Four Seasons] (Georges Rouquier, 1946), shot in the agricultural reality of the plantation from which it takes its name and performed in simple stagings by the plantation's own inhabitants. Although Rouguier's approach favours the documentation of daily activities and tasks throughout the yearlong cycle covered by the film, his pedagogical leanings result in the insertion of a whole sequence that conforms to the parameters of the scientific agrarian documentary: with the arrival of spring, a voice-over intervenes to explain the complex processes of nature, with the help of microscopic images and time-lapse photography to show the awakening of plants, animals and humans after the winter, interweaving the different orders into a single narrative of the earth. Another paradigmatic case of the progressive shift into the liminal space between documentary and fiction in European post-war realism is Roberto Rossellini's Stromboli (1950), whose famous documentary sequence on traditional tuna fishing is very similar to various sequences in Carlos Velo's Almadrabas (1934), mentioned above. Such similarities confirm the intersections that form the complex intertextual network established by rural and agrarian cinema as an indispensable part of the film heritage of the twentieth century.

APPROACHES TO THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY

This monograph on agrarian documentaries takes an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective. It addresses a wide range of issues, themes and motifs organised chronologically, starting with the 1960s and ending with the most recent productions, with the aim of highlighting the transformations and continuities between the different periods and areas studied.

The issue begins with a study by Pedro Poyato on a 1965 German film about the Badajoz Plan, offering an exogenous counterpoint to the Spanish agrarian propaganda documentary of the same era, in the article titled "Nuevas tierras para don Ramón [New Land for Don Ramón] (Ernst Niederreither, 1965); and the Badajoz Plan: the exodus to the promised land." Taking a comparative perspective, the author highlights the discursive orienta-



Image 8. Almadabras in Stromboli, Terra di Dio (Roberto Rossellini, 1950)

tions of Ernst Niederreither's Nuevas tierras para Don Ramón on the one hand, and El campo de Badajoz se transforma [The Fields of Badajoz Are Transformed] (Marquis of Villa Alcázar, 1961) on the other. Both documentaries explore the effects and consequences of the Badajoz plan, on both the agrarian economy and the fates of the settlers. The approach chosen makes it possible to spotlight the discrepancies between a more critical and distanced vision and the official propaganda of the Spanish State, revealing the very different narratives constructed around the same phenomenon: the displacement of settlers from Spain's arid regions to more fertile territories. Poyato's article is not limited to an analysis of the discourse articulated by the different narrators and characters. as it also considers the formal and aesthetic choices, showing their importance to the generation of meaning. For example, it exposes the poetising of reality in the German film through silent shots, in opposition to the Marquis's bombastic lyricism. In contrast to the Garden-of-Eden metaphor suggested towards the end of the Marquis's film, the German documentary draws on the myth of the Promised Land, subjecting it to a harsh test of reality. In his article, Poyato demonstrates the extraordinary value of this foreign documentary, unknown in Spain for decades, as a cinematic chronicle of the Badajoz Plan, offering a different perspective on the Spanish agrarian documentary during the Franco dictatorship.

Another transnational comparative perspective is offered in the article "The female body as an instrument of visual pleasure and patriarchal submission in the documentaries of the Spanish, Italian and French Ministries of Agriculture." Drawing on the tools developed by feminist theorists, especially Cixous, Mulvey and De Lauretis, Ana Melendo and Maripaz Cepedello explore the vision of women constructed in the docu-

mentaries produced by the ministries of agriculture of Spain, Italy and France from the 1930s to the 1970s. In the case of Spain, they focus on the production of both the Marquis of Villa Alcázar and José Neches, and on their instrumentalisation of female bodies and faces as mere objects of an erotic male gaze. Similarly, in the French documentaries selected for study, women are presented as objects of desire in their essentialised relationships with a wild and impulsive natural world. On the other hand, the Italian productions by the Istituto Luce are notable for the minimal presence of female figures and the way they are depicted, which is limited mainly to showing their roles as housewives subjected to patriarchal domination. This mode of the reification of women, characteristic of a particular historical context, is not so different from the others as, aside from the contextual differences of their production, all these agrarian pedagogical films deny women the status of full and integral subjects.

The third article explores the different forms of representation of rural landscapes in documentary series produced by the RAI from 1954 to 1968, with a special emphasis on Piovene and Sa-

bel's Questa Nostra Italia, broadcast in November and December 1968. Deborah Toschi and Linda Garosi offer a detailed contextualisation of the series, situating it within the project for democratic reconstruction undertaken by Democrazia Cristiana, with a clear design to promote the cultural hegemony and building on a media heritage originating with the radio series Viaggio in Italia (1954-1956), made by Piovene himself, and continuing with Sabel's television series Viaggio nel Sud (1958). Both productions introduced important changes into the representation of the rural imaginary constructed by the Istituto Luce under the Fascist regime, giving unprecedented attention to the social condition of rural workers. The rural landscape, exalted by fascist propaganda as the essence of the nation, becomes a setting that determines people's living and working conditions. In the late 1960s, the creators of Questa Nostra Italia adapted their discourse and their configuration of the rural imaginary to the political and social changes, exposing the effects of the decline in investments and the huge expectations placed on them with a nostalgic gaze on a rural landscape and a set of customs that were on the brink of extinction. By comparing the different series, the authors show how the evolution of the representation of Italy's rural landscape both reflected and contributed to the transformations to the country's national narrative and mythology.

The next contribution, Rafael Rodríguez López's "Jazz and Bossa Nova as New Musical Sounds in José Neches Nicolás's Spanish Agrarian Documentaries", examines the last agrarian productions of José Neches, who in recent years has been the object of growing interest and the focus of several prominent studies. The purpose of this examination is to consider the musical dimension, an aspect of the filmmaker's body of work hitherto overlooked, specifically in the last period of his career (1967-1976), when the influence of jazz and bossa nova had even reached the Spanish countryside. While identifying the different composers

employed by the filmmaker, this article explores the ways these modern musical styles are integrated into the rural context through their decorative, emotional, diegetic and extradiegetic use, either unified with or as a counterpoint to the rural setting. Thus, by including this music associated with classical and folk styles, the director expands the range of his documentaries' soundtracks and furnishes them with a tonality that transcends the more traditional rural film narratives.

The Notebook section concludes with a study of documentary cinema produced in Galicia between 1969 and 2020, with a special focus on the Novo Cinema Galego. "Property Divided Is Property Lost: Management and Conflict on Communal Forests in Galician Documentary Films" studies how these films depict the different types of use that have been made and the conflicts that have arisen over the years in relation to the region's monte veciñal en man común, or collectively owned forest, an institution unique to the northwestern Iberian Peninsula. From different perspectives, these documentaries address the issue of forest and water management, and since the end of the Franco dictatorship, they have documented the struggles of the people against attempts at the commercial annexation of communal lands and state plans to change the law that protects them. They also highlight the huge potential of the experiences with communal forests, as spaces constituting true sites of struggle, resistance and democratic education. Isabel Martínez Martínez. Talía Rodríguez-Martelo and Mónica Valderrama Santomé stress the connection in this filmography, which spans some fifty years, between the defence of a traditional cultural and socio-political legacy and contemporary concerns about environmental conservation.

In almost all the productions studied in this monograph, the issue of identity appears, often intimately linked to the filmic space of the rural world, either as an expression of a local identity projected from the outside or upheld from within,

or as a myth that underpins a national identity looked for in the supposedly genuine nature of the countryside. This inherently rural identity is always invoked to serve political purposes, both in times of dictatorial regimes and during periods of democracy, as the articles contained here clearly demonstrate.

NOTES

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FORMS AND DISCOURSES OF THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY IN EUROPE: AN EXAMINATION

Abstract

This article offers an introductory contextualisation of the object of study explored in this monographic issue, *Rural Documentary in the European Context*, establishing a basic historical and cinematic framework that can shed light on the practice of agrarian documentary filmmaking from an interdisciplinary perspective. Thus, beginning with its definition within the wider movements of rural and documentary cinema, the article traces the origins and the consolidation of this type of didactic-propagandistic film in the European ministries of agriculture and other institutions responsible for managing the rural sector, with attention to the main centres of production and the formal systems that defined their various modes of representation.

Key words

Agrarian Documentary; Rural Cinema; Film Heritage.

Authors

Fernando Luque Gutiérrez holds a PhD in art history and lectures in Film History, Spanish Cinema and Photographic Art in the Department of Art, Archaeology and Music History at Universidad de Córdoba. He is a contributing researcher to the research project Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: A Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979) and the author of book chapters and scholarly articles related to agrarian and rural cinema, such as Formas del montaje en el documental agrario de José Neches (Contribución de José Neches al documental agrario español del franquismo, Tirant lo Blanch, 2021) and Aproximación a un modelo didáctico-idealizante en el documental agrario de Armand Chartier: Palot (1947) (Ámbitos, 48, 2023). Contact: z02luguf@uco.es.

Pascale Thibaudeau is a university professor at Université París 8, author of a doctoral thesis on the cinema of Víctor Erice, Image, mythe et réalité dans le cinéma de Víctor Erice. She has coordinated several collective books and published numerous articles on Spanish and Latin American cinema. The Spanish version of her book on the cinema of Carlos Saura (Carlos Saura, el cine al compás del baile) is about to be published in the collection "Buñuel y las vanguardias" of the Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza. She has been director of the Laboratoire d'Etudes Romanes research team since 2017 and is involved in several international research projects (DONAFIE, CAREXIL.FR, EXPEDIAS). Contact: pthib@wanadoo.fr.

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FORMAS Y DISCURSOS DEL DOCUMENTAL AGRARIO EN EUROPA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN

Resumen

El artículo pretende efectuar una contextualización introductoria al objeto de estudio que vertebra el presente número monográfico *Documental rural en el contexto europeo*, estableciendo un marco histórico y cinematográfico básico que pueda arrojar luz sobre la práctica del documentalismo agrario desde una perspectiva interdisciplinar. Así, partiendo de su definición dentro de las corrientes generales del cine rural y documental, el texto rastrea los antecedentes y consolidación de esta tipología didáctico-propagandística en el seno de los ministerios de agricultura europeos y otras instituciones responsables de la gestión del sector, atendiendo a los principales focos de producción y a los sistemas formales que definieron sus diversos modelos de representación.

Palabras clave

Cine rural; documental agrario; patrimonio fílmico.

Autores

Fernando Luque Gutiérrez es doctor en Historia del arte y profesor de Historia del cine, Cine español y Arte fotográfico en el Departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música de la Universidad de Córdoba. Colaborador del Proyecto de Investigación Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudio comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultura de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1979), es autor de capítulos y artículos académicos relacionados con el cine agrario y rural, tales como Formas del montaje en el documental agrario de José Neches (Contribución de José Neches al documental agrario español del franquismo, Tirant lo Blanch, 2021) y Aproximación a un modelo didáctico-idealizante en el documental agrario de Armand Chartier: Palot (1947) (Ámbitos, 48, 2023). Contacto: z02luguf@uco.es.

Pascale Thibaudeau es catedrática de universidad en la Université París 8, autora de una tesis doctoral sobre el cine de Víctor Erice, Image, mythe et réalité dans le cinéma de Víctor Erice. Ha coordinado varios libros colectivos y publicado numerosos artículos sobre cine español y latinoamericano. La versión española de su libro sobre el cine de Carlos Saura (Carlos Saura, el cine al compás del baile) está a punto de publicarse en la colección «Buñuel y las vanguardias» de las Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza. Es directora del equipo de investigación Laboratoire d'Etudes Romanes desde 2017 y participa en varios proyectos de investigación internacionales (DONAFIE, CAREXIL.FR, EXPEDIAS). Contacto: pthib@wanadoo.fr.

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NOTEBOOK

THE RURAL DOCUMENTARY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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

Ana Melendo, María Paz Cepedello Moreno

NUEVAS TIERRAS PARA DON RAMÓN AND THE BADAJOZ PLAN: THE EXODUS TO THE PROMISED LAND

Pedro Poyato Sánchez

MODELS OF REPRESENTATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY SERIES QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)

Deborah Toschi, Linda Garosi

JAZZ AND BOSSA NOVA AS NEW MUSICAL SOUNDS IN JOSÉ NECHES NICOLÁS'S SPANISH AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES

Rafael Ángel Rodríguez López

WE LOSE WHEN DIVIDING:
MANAGEMENT AND CONFLICT OF
THE COMMUNAL FOREST IN
GALICIAN DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Beli Martínez Martínez Talia Rodríguez-Martelo Mónica Valderrama Santomé

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

ANA MELENDO**
MARÍA PAZ CEPEDELLO MORENO

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 cliched 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 Youl (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 Josel (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

- * This study was carried out in the context of the Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979) research project, supported by the State Program for the Promotion of Knowledge Generation and Scientific and Technological Strengthening of the R&D&I System and the State R&D&I Program oriented towards the challenges of society, under the auspice of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Ref. PID2019-105462GB-I00). 2019 Call. IP1: Ana Melendo Cruz.
- ** The authors participated in this work in an equitable manner, as both contributed equally to the design of the study, the acquisition of data, and its analysis and interpretation, as well as the writing of the manuscript and the critical review of relevant intellectual aspects. In this way, the requirements set by the CO-PE-authors-guidelines (https://publicationethics.org/files/u2/2003pdf12.pdf) were met for the authorship by the two to be considered equal, thereby complying with the classification established by CrediT (https://casrai.org/credit/) as "equal".
- 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).
- "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 (Fermiére a 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.

Authors

Ana Melendo holds a PhD in Art History from Universidad de Córdoba, where she is a senior lecturer in the Department of Art History, Archaeology and Music, and she leads the Film History, Theory and Analysis research group. Her lines of research focus on cinematic modernity, agrarian documentaries, and the gender perspective. She is the author of numerous articles published in scholarly journals, such as Film, Fashion & Consumption (Journal), Signa and Potestas. She is also the author of the book Antonioni: un compromise ético y estético (Consejería de Cultura. Junta de Andalucía, 2010). Contact: aa1mecra@uco.es.

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

Autoras

Ana Melendo (Baena, Córdoba, 1969) es doctora en Historia del Arte por la Universidad de Córdoba, profesora titular en el Departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música de la citada universidad y responsable del grupo de investigación Historia, Teoría y Análisis del Cine. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en la modernidad cinematográfica, en el documental agrario y en la perspectiva de género. Es autora de diversos artículos publicados en revistas científicas como Film, Fashion & Consumption (Journal), Signa y Potestas. Ha publicado el libro Antonioni: un compromiso ético y estético (Consejería de Cultura. Junta de Andalucía, 2010). Contacto: aa1mecra@uco.es.

María Paz Cepedello Moreno holds a PhD in Literary Theory from Universidad de Córdoba, where she is a senior lecturer in the Department of Language Sciences, and a member of the Languages research group. Her lines of research focus on narratological theory, the gender perspective and the relationships between cinema and literature. She is the author of numerous articles published in scholarly journals, such as Signa, Rilce and Studia Romanica Posnaniensia, and she is the author of the book El mundo narrative de Elena Soriano (UCOPress/Ayuntamiento de Bujalance, 2007). Contact: fe2cemom@uco.es.

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María Paz Cepedello Moreno (Sevilla, 1976) es doctora en Teoría de la Literatura por la Universidad de Córdoba, profesora titular en el Departamento de Ciencias del Lenguaje de la citada universidad y miembro del grupo de investigación Lenguajes. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en la teoría narratológica, la perspectiva de género y las relaciones entre el cine y la literatura. Es autora de diversos artículos publicados en revistas científicas, como Signa, Rilce y Studia Romanica Posnaniensia. Ha publicado el libro El mundo narrativo de Elena Soriano (UCOPress/Ayuntamiento de Bujalance, 2007). Contacto: fe2cemom@uco.es.

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NUEVAS TIERRAS PARA DON RAMÓN AND THE BADAJOZ PLAN: THE EXODUS TO THE PROMISED LAND*

PEDRO POYATO SÁNCHEZ

INTRODUCTION

The Badajoz Plan (*Plan Badajoz*), a project designed to regulate the waters of the Guadiana River, which entailed the consequent irrigation of extensive areas of the Spanish province of Badajoz for settlement by a significant number of people, was undoubtedly one of the most touted achievements of the Franco regime, which turned it into a centrepiece of its institutional propaganda (Ortega Canadell, 2004: 650). Even before its approval by the Spanish legislature in April 1952, the regime's apparatus used all the means at its disposal, including the press, brochures and books, radio, and especially cinema. This propaganda included newsreels such as the No-Do series—for example, the newsreel titled *La Provincia Resurge, El Plan*

Badajoz [The Province Resurgent, the Bajadoz Plan in 1957—and documentaries produced by the Ministry of Agriculture itself, a paradigmatic example being El campo de Badajoz se transforma [The Fields of Bajadoz are Transformed] (Marqués de Villa Alcázar, 1961), extolling the wonders of the Badajoz Plan. However, the relatively recent discovery of the German documentary Nuevas tierras para don Ramón [New Land for Don Ramonl (Neues Land Für Don Ramon, Ernst Niederreither, 1965) has shed light on the interest that this initiative aroused among foreign documentary filmmakers, some of whom, as in the case of Niederreither, travelled to Badajoz to shoot footage that would subsequently be used to produce films that clearly diverged from the official line of the Franco regime's propaganda.

The aim of this article is to offer an analysis of *Nuevas tierras para don Ramón*, discussing the key features underpinning the production of a film unconcerned with adhering to official Francoist propaganda. This analysis draws on Bill Nichols' work on documentary modes, and considers documents found in the general archives of Spanish government, in the Ministry of Agriculture, and in the Spanish Film Library (Filmoteca Española), as well as various historiographical articles on the Badajoz Plan. In this way, this article aims to contribute to the continuing development of the history of the Spanish agrarian documentary.

ON THE (RE)APPEARANCE OF NUEVAS TIERRAS PARA DON RAMÓN IN SPAIN

In 1964, the German production company FWU asked the Franco regime's Cinematography Service for permission to shoot a documentary, *Plan Badajoz*, about irrigation in the province. It would be used not for commercial purposes, but rather for teaching at colleges and universities, and would also be shown once on German television. The project received support from the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, which was participating in the initiative to settle people in the region under the Badajoz Plan, with plans to interview them in the documentary. In accordance with requirements, the application included a brief plot summary of the film:

The film shows how the Guadiana River in the province of Badajoz has been regulated by building a system of canals fertilising large parts of the province. This has given rise to the creation of new towns, attracting settlers and farmers. Lacking economic means, they have been provided with their own houses, livestock and farming machinery. With their earnings, they pay back their debts to the State in instalments, thereby acquiring ownership. Factories and organisations have also been created, offering employment for the manufacture and sale of agricultural products. In this

way, a once-barren province has become fertile land with flourishing trade and happy inhabitants. (AGA, Cultura, 36/05431)

The film obtained authorisation on 24 August 1964 and shooting started shortly thereafter in the province of Badajoz. Little else is documented about the project, apart from two interviews with settlers who had been involved in the film,² who reported that once they had finished filming the German film crew disappeared with the footage, never to be heard from again. It can therefore be assumed that whole project was a ploy by the production company for the sole purpose of obtaining the filming permit, as the completed film—even including the title—bears no resemblance at all to what was indicated on the application.

While looking for information for one of his projects at the Filmoteca Española, the German researcher and documentary filmmaker Dietmar Post³ stumbled upon Nuevas tierras para don Ramón. The Filmoteca's archives included a 35mm print of the film, which Post requested for viewing purposes. He discovered that the film stock was severely deteriorated: its images were so dark that they could barely be discerned, limiting the viewing experience mainly to listening to the voice-over narration in German. Despite this, Post was so impressed by the film that when he returned to Germany, he set out to gather information on it. To his surprise, he discovered that Niederreither's film was going to be auctioned by a company in the business of supplying teaching materials to German secondary schools. Post immediately acquired the rights to it for Play Loud! Productions, a production company he had created with Lucía Palacios in 1997. Also to his surprise, the condition of the print, in this case on 16mm film stock, was flawless. The celluloid reels were accompanied by a brochure published by one of the schools in Germany that had included the film as teaching material for their students. Post then contacted the Spanish

Ministry of Agriculture, whose archives contained no record of this film, which agreed to digitalise and subtitle it in Spanish. The documentary was subsequently disseminated by the Spanish Ministry as part of the DVD collection *Memoria y colonización* (2012).

It is possible that the copy that Post found at the Filmoteca Española had been deposited there by the production company FWU in accordance with ministry requirements, and that it had deteriorated over time into the state in which it was found. However, it cannot be ruled out that the print was intentionally delivered in poor condition by the producer, given the film's negative portrayal of the Badajoz Plan and therefore of the Franco regime. In any case, it is clear that this film was practically unknown in Spain, as there is no record that it was screened even once in the country. In Germany, in contrast, it was included in school materials, as noted above, and it is particularly interesting for the perspective it offers on the Badajoz Plan, decidedly different from that of the Franco regime, at a time when Francoist ideology suffused every aspect of the country's cultural fabric, especially cinema. An analysis of this almost-unknown documentary may therefore serve to expand the history of the Spanish agrarian documentary and the types of documentaries dedicated to the Badajoz Plan.

THE BEGINNING: THE NARRATION AND ITS DISCOURSE

The change of title from *Plan Badajoz* to *Nuevas tierras para don Ramón* points to a shift in the paradigm underpinning the documentary, with Don Ramón as the protagonist, who is to receive new land thanks of course to the Plan Badajoz. The film's images are thus concerned with depicting the journey that this process entails. But before telling this story, a brief introduction reveals to us the type of narrator who will be leading us on this journey.

THIS DOCUMENTARY DEPARTS COMPLETELY FROM THE OFFICIAL LINE, AND FOR THIS REASON IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN SHOWN IN SPAIN

Indeed, the first part of the documentary functions as a kind of letter of introduction for a narrator who, unlike the typical narrator in Francoist documentaries on the Badajoz Plan, is not an impersonal, authoritative voice speaking to us from on high, but a person living in Badajoz (whose accent reveals that he is a foreigner) who speaks to the viewer in a familiar way.4 The use of a narrator who is not omniscient but instead is relatable and personal is surprising, but even more surprising is the discourse of the narration, which is also very different from that employed by the narrators heard in the documentaries of the Franco regime, for two reasons. First, it describes widespread peasant unemployment in Extremadura as one the consequences of the Spanish Civil War ("after the Civil War, half of the peasants had no work..." says the narrator at one point), contradicting the official discourse that the war, a crusade aimed at purifying the nation, could in no case be viewed as a cause of unemployment. And second, the narrator expresses surprise that the Plan ended up becoming a reality ("But what surprised us most," says the narrator at one point, "is not the Plan, but the fact that it was actually implemented..."). Although none are openly specified, there are many possible reasons for this remark, such as the plan's Republican roots, 5 its audacious objective, or even the fact that the Franco regime often promised much and delivered little. In any case, this comment makes it clear that the narrator is questioning the commitment of the Movement, a commitment embodied in the words of Franco himself when he praised the qualities of his dauntless and unfailing supporters in his inauguration speech in Valdelacalzada in 1951:

Without a National Movement, without a political system of unity, stability and discipline, none of these achievements would be impossible. These achievements are legitimate daughters of the Movement, fruit of the energies of a minority impervious to discouragement, with a great spirit of service to the Fatherland, who give their word and keep it, even if it costs them their lives. (Riesco and Rodríguez, 2016: 10)

It is therefore clear that Nuevas tierras para don Ramón departs completely from the official line, and that for this reason it could not have been shown in Spain.⁶ The narrator even makes the point of explaining that the Badajoz Plan would result in a "reduction in poverty," which, far from completely resolving the rural problem, would never be more than a partial solution. The ending to Villa-Alcázar's El campo de Badajoz se transforma alone makes it clear that the objective of his documentary was to depict the Badajoz Plan as having worked a miracle, completely eliminating poverty and producing newly cultivated lands teeming with beautiful colours, filled with lush trees laden with fruits, along with new industries as a result, and new towns boasting comfortable and clean houses for the region's settlers. While it is true that in Nuevas tierras para Don Ramón, the Plan is depicted as bringing colours to the fields, which are transformed from a monotonous desert ochre to the shades of green and red of the plantations, the change is nowhere near the magnitude conveyed in Villa-Alcázar's documentary.

THE PEOPLE OF THE MOUNTAINS AND THEIR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: INTRODUCTION OF THE PROTAGONIST

In a striking change of register, Niederreither's images then take us to the rocky terrain of a mountain village that we later learn is Orellanita (Figure 1), whose residents have to carry drinking water to their homes in jugs. These

images evoke the photographs of the La Chanca series (1956-1962) by Carlos Pérez Siguier (2001), as they share a humanistic perspective inherited from Italian neorealism, calculated to portray the misery of the people of Spain who have been spared from war but not from poverty. It is a town where, according to the narrator, the only person who seems to be doing well is the ropemaker, who is shown engaged in his craft. But suddenly the camera moves away from him to focus on an old woman (Figure 2) standing behind the bars of a house fence. We are struck by her absolute stillness and her forlorn look, before the camera pans down to her hands resting on the bars; they are worn hands, presumably from many years of hard labour. These are silent images (as the narrator does not comment on them) that stray from the topic or idea being dealt with in the scene to enrich the fabric of the documentary, in this case by introducing a contrast to the activity of the rope maker, portraying the paralysis—ultimately suggestive of death—that the town, like the woman, is immersed.

In contrast to the images that serve as mere illustrations of the narrator's comments, these others are relevant in themselves, reflecting a mode of documentary with features characteristic of what Bill Nichols calls the "observational mode" (Nichols, 1997: 73-75), as they emphasise the filmmaker's non-intervention, ceding control more than any other mode to the events that unfold in front of the camera. These are thus images that evade narrator commentary, sacrificing the expository dimension of the documentary to the observational dimension, and also to the aesthetic one—evident, for example in the textures captured in the footage of the old woman.

And it is right in this town of Orellanita where we meet Don Ramón, one of the many townspeople who have decided to leave in search of the new land created by the Badajoz Plan. At this point, the narrator cedes the floor to the protagonists, Don



Figure I. A rocky landscape, Orellanita



Figure 2. A human landscape, Orellanita

Ramón and his neighbours. The film thus creates a space for the peasants to speak, giving them their own voice, in contrast to the regime's official documentaries, where everything—including the thoughts of the protagonists—is subordinated to the narrator's commentary. The universe of the story thus comes to *life* (through sound) to show how by choosing to become a settler Don Ramón will leave his town, and in doing so, will tear up

the roots that other inhabitants of Orellanita are striving to maintain. The film thus seeks to stress that most of the residents. who are proud even of their poverty, refuse to abandon the town that represents their roots. Of relevance to this point is José López Clemente's documentary Reportaje sindical No. 8: Oliegos (1950), produced by the Information and Publications Service of the National Trade Union Delegation, which relates how the residents of Orellanita had no choice but to leave their town and give up their roots, in this case being forced to do so by the regime. However, the difference between López Clemente's propaganda film and Niederreither's is that in the former the townspeople-cum-settlers ultimately discover that their hesitation was misplaced, as the new land to which they were forced to emigrate made up for everything, offering them extraordinary wealth.

In any case, the Franco regime's documentaries on the Badajoz Plan generally sought to avoid the question of whether or not the settlers paid a sentimental price for settling on the land transformed by the Plan, as can be seen in the No-Do documentaries made by Villa-Alcázar and even by José Neches.⁷ And when they did, as in the case of *Oliegos*, the new land's many benefits more than compensate for the loss. *Nuevas tierras para don Ramón* is also different from the official documentaries in this respect.

THE JOURNEY: FROM DRY LAND TO FERTILE LAND

With Don Ramón having been singled out as protagonist, his journey from his hometown of Orellanita to his new home is what the documentary uses to structure and even dramatise

its representation of the Badajoz Plan. This is thus a cinematic model with a distant precursor in the anarchist documentaries on the Spanish Civil War, which used situations featuring an actor playing a character, both to dramatise the documentary's expository dimension and to enhance its mechanisms of persuasion, as can be seen in the example of *La Silla Vacía* [The Empty Chair] (Valentín R. González, 1937). § Similarly, Niederreither's documentary uses Don Ramón to stage and dramatise the family's exodus from its mountain town on its way to the irrigated terrain of the promised land (which we later find out is Gargaligas).

The journey taken by Don Ramón and his family is structured around a dry/wet geographical dialectic. The narrator also uses the journey to introduce merely informative content, such as: "In 1946, the land was expropriated as part of the Badajoz Plan, so that fertile land could be prepared for 5,000 settlers, including Ramón Cortés and his family." The narrator fails to add, however, that this expropriation was carried out under very advantageous conditions for the landowners, and as José Antonio Pérez Rubio has demonstrated, "the land expropriated under this 1946 law received

Figure 3. Stray dog seeking shade



a generous appraisal by the Supreme Court after the large landowners were not pleased with the one issued by the *Consejo Nacional de Colonización*" (Pérez Rubio, 1994: 396-397). In any case, the narrator does not explore this question because it is not among the aims of the documentary, which is focused more on the dialectic around which it is structured.

Indeed, this is evident in the subsequent images, which focus on everything related to the dry, sunbaked land, such as a flock of sheep looking for somewhere to graze under the scorching sun ("the heat is suffocating," remarks the narrator) and a stray dog looking for the shelter of the scant shade to be found on a deserted street (Figure 3). This leads to a series of angled shots bathed in the harsh light of the searing midday sun from which the peasants struggle to shield themselves. None of these images—a peasant sleeping in a cornfield, a window barred and shuttered (Figure 4), a woman washing clothes in a wash bucket, clothes hung out to dry in the sun—are given any specific spatial reference. Skirting around its subject matter, the documentary thus digresses to focus on a unique, almost abstract portrait of a rural Spain practically devoid of water, weighed down by the

Figure 4. Window barred shut





Figure 5. A mountain of peppers

drowsiness of the time of siesta, on what could be any summer's day. This crystallises a new component of the documentary, previously suggested, that Nichols (1997) might describe as "poetic". It is a component that endows this fragment—in this case, the soporific afternoon heat in the arid towns of Spain—with both a formal integrity and an aesthetic of its own. Such digressions, which greatly enrich the fabric and aesthetics of the documentary would not have been viable in the documentaries of the Franco regime, whose narratives had to be placed entirely at the service of their sole objective of persuasion, and thus could not be used towards any other ends that might undermine or hamper that aim.

As the Cortés family continues on its journey, the setting shifts from this dry land we shift to a very different one: a land of water and irrigation canals. We are thus presented with a succession of images of bright yellow corn fields, of cobs being shelled and hens gobbling up the kernels in the feeding troughs at the farms. This explosion of colour and fertile fields is immediately called into question, however, when the narrator observes, with reference to a harvest of red peppers: "There aren't enough factories to process them yet. The factories set the prices, which are sometimes very low. The settlers are growing desperate." As

the narrator speaks these words, we are shown a huge pile of peppers almost burying the worker (Figure 5), in an extraordinary visual metaphor that underscores the fact that too many peppers were being grown. Unlike Villa-Alcázar's documentary, Niederreither's film is thus critical of the factories, yet another sign that this is the opposite of a propaganda documentary, as this metaphor of the settler being buried under the peppers impresses upon the viewer the shortage of factories to process them, and the consequent low prices offered for them. Rather than helping to generate wealth, the factories thus make life harder for the settlers, who are not fairly rewarded for their work. In this way, Nuevas tierras para Don Ramón anticipates what historians would point out many vears later:

The implementation of the [Badajoz] Plan revealed the misalignment between the agricultural plans and the industrial plans, one of the main causes of the poor results achieved, especially in the group of industries that were to process the produce of the new irrigated land [such as tomatoes and peppers]. (Barciela, López and Melgarejo, 1998: 159)

The irregular way in which production was carried out meant that sometimes the factories could not absorb all the production in the region, while at other times there were shortages of produce. The irregularity of production was incompatible with the exploitation of the industry's full capacity. (Barciela, López and Melgarejo, 1998: 149-150)

In opposition to the official propaganda, which claimed that the quantity and quality of the crops had brought factories that "maintain stable prices for the settlers," according to the narrator in the Villa-Alcázar's film, *Nuevas tierras para don Ramón* was more in line with what would subsequently be acknowledged by historians, openly criticising the Badajoz Plan—and therefore the Franco regime—for the disconnect between farms and factories that would thwart one of the Plan's main objectives.

THE NEW TOWN; THE HOUSE AND THE SCHOOL; THE END

Meanwhile, Don Ramón and his family continue their journey to the promised land of Gargaligas. The narrator takes advantage of the next stretch of their trip to comment on emigration: "The youngest of the family wanted to go to Germany, but his mother would not let him. Her motto is that the family must stay together." But the settler's family had to stay together not only because it was the mother's desire, but also because it was required, as the narrator himself immediately notes: "volunteering to be a settler means that the whole family must work; no external help is allowed, as only these families are admitted." It can be inferred from this that the land granted to the settler was going to demand gruelling labour from the whole family, as a shot evoking Eisenstein's work seems to foreshadow: the shot focuses on the feet of the man and the woman (Figure 6) as they walk in lockstep beside their cart, as if both were bearing the same yoke.9

Finally, the travellers reach the town of Gargáligas, an event given special emphasis in the film by means of sustained close-up shots of the

reactions of each member of the Cortés family when they stop to behold what will be their new home. First, the father (Figure 7): the hard features of his timeworn face, his slightly narrowed eyes and the wrinkles drawn across his forehead convey a certain wariness. Then, the family's firstborn son: although his taut-skinned face bears features similar to his father's. his expression conveys something closer to indifference. His little brother's expression, meanwhile, suggests the freshness typical of boys of his age; his is a face of innocence. The older sister's countenance bears a hint of hope, while the younger sister beside her in the shot has her gaze fixed on where everyone is looking,

but without understanding anything. The mother's face completes the series (Figure 8): with her serious, imperturbable gaze and the slight downturn of her closed mouth, her visage communicates a mixture of resignation and sadness. Niederreither thus constructs a gallery of faces that contrast sharply with the cheerful smiles shown in Villa-Alcázar's film. As shown in this scene, far from manifesting a profound satisfaction, these faces exhibit emotions ranging from distrust and indifference to resignation, in a representation markedly similar to what José María Vázquez describes:

The settler and his family [...] were separated from their home, from their native land [...], they had to travel sometimes hundreds of miles from their place of origin to start a new life, in a new town [...] Undoubtedly, there was a fear of the void in these people uprooted by force, a contained fear best expressed in the blank stares of emigrants when they arrive at their destination (Vázquez, 2009: 7).

These images attempt to express the family's "contained fear" when they reach their destination, in a segment in which the acting work of the documentary's protagonists is most obvious.



Figure 6. Man and woman walking in lockstep

The images seem to reflect the approach taken by Paul Rotha, who believed that documentaries involved "the use of the cinematic medium to interpret reality creatively and, in social terms, people's lives just as they exist in reality" (Rotha, 1952: 75). However, unlike Grierson or Vertov, Rotha did not place emphasis so much on the authenticity of the images shown as on the idea of conveying the truth in the broadest sense of the term. leading him to defend the presence of actors and sets. As Sira Hernández points out in her extensive study on the subject, "the dramatisation of different social and political issues had already been incorporated with great success into documentary filmmaking by the singular newsreel series The March of Time (1935-1951)" (2004: 94), while Rotha stresses the fact that documentaries should not forgo "trained actors, or the advantage of sets" since "both have an effect on the viewer" (1952: 30-31). The option chosen by Niederreither was actor training, which, as he was working with non-professional actors, 10 required patient effort on the part of both the director and the performers, as some of his actors have themselves acknowledged.11

In contrast to Villa-Alcázar's documentary, which repeatedly shows the settlers' new homes, praising them as "comfortable and clean houses" that made their inhabitants happy, Niederreither ignores them and goes straight to the school, the children's place of learning, in scenes in which the narrator lets the characters (the teacher and Don Ramón's younger daughter) speak for themselves. This endows the images with a literalness and starkness aimed at highlighting—and in a way ridiculing—the type of indoctrination typical of Spanish schools in the 1960s, based on the propaganda of the Franco regime.





Figure 7. The father in front of the new house Figure 8. The mother in front of the new house

Like the little children, parents and older siblings also had to undergo learning processes, in their case, at agrarian schools:

Settlers had to face the tough task of starting from scratch, being instructed in a new profession by foremen and experts from the National Settlers' Council, and gradually learning to work in a productive economy driven by the authoritarian and paternalistic Francoist state. Each settler had to learn to maximise the production of the four irri-



Figure 9. Poverty persists

gated hectares assigned to him, in what was a simple question of survival. (Vázquez, 2009: 7)

This is vividly reflected in the documentary in a scene where the settler is receiving instruction. This scene also conveys the precarious nature of the settler's way of life through a series of images that serve as visual metonyms: the camera shifts from the attentive gaze of the settler participating in his class to show the worn-out cloth slippers he is wearing, and his equally tattered cloth hat (Figure 9). This remarkable editing work was calculated to document the poverty in which the settler's family continued to be mired, even in their new home.

If settlers wanted to survive, they had to get down to work fast to reap as much as possible from the land they had received, as Vázquez points out in the passage cited above. And this is what the film aims to convey in a set of images in which Don Ramón and his eldest son are shown working their new land. "I wish you good luck and success, Don Ramón," says the narrator, by way of farewell. Although Don Ramón can-

not hear him because the two belong to different narrative levels, the narrator seems to want to conclude by proclaiming a sympathetic connection to the world of the story. More concerned with the peasant's fate than with extolling the virtues of the Franco regime, the film thus seeks to convev that the new settlers are not really living in the best of all possible worlds, contrary to what was reflected in the images of the official propaganda films. In addition to hard work. these settlers need luck (something that is never necessary in the propaganda films), and not to achieve a certain degree

of success, but simply to survive.

Niederreither's documentary concludes with a map of Spain showing the province of Badajoz, now coloured green and with a river running through it, represented by a blue line. Between the map shown at the beginning of the film, portraying a grey Badajoz, and this one showing a Badajoz dyed in the green of the countryside, was Don Ramón's exodus from his native land to this new one that he has just begun to farm: the promised land. This is the model used by the film to expose the truth that the Badajoz Plan, although it led to certain improvements, did not result in anything resembling the Edenic paradise proclaimed in the Franco regime's documentaries.

CONCLUSIONS

In its approach to the Badajoz Plan, *Nuevas tierras* para don Ramón is not concerned with documenting the province's flourishing commerce or its happy inhabitants, as claimed in the film's plot summary submitted to the Spanish film censors-

hip committee; nor was it interested in showing the different towns that were settled or the homes said to have made their inhabitants so happy. as Villa-Alcázar did in his documentary El campo de Badajoz se transforma. Instead, Nuevas tierras para Don Ramón focuses on the settlers' exodus and what it meant for them in terms of losing their roots, everything that they had to leave behind, and their uncertainty (a word never used in the official documentaries) in relation to their new housing and the work that awaited them on their new land. While in Villa-Alcázar's film the Edenic garden was a metaphor used to represent the Badajoz Plan, Niederreither uses the myth of the promised land, a myth that begins to crumble immediately, as before the settler's journey is even over we see that the produce grown in these beautiful new fields are not profitable because of insufficient industrial infrastructure. The myth is then definitively debunked by the poverty that the peasants continue to suffer even after settling in the new land.

In structural terms, the film contains features of different documentary modes, including the expository mode, which predominates in the segments where the images serve as mere illustrations for the voice-over narration. However, the observational mode is also evident, particularly in the footage where the narrator is silent so that the images can speak for themselves; this is the case, for example, of the stray dog searching for shade on a deserted street, an iconic symbol of a rural Spain paralysed by the summer afternoon heat, which is reinforced in the subsequent empty shot of a barred window with its blind pulled right down, the feet of the man and woman walking together beside the cart, suggesting the yoke they both bear, and finally, the man's tattered slippers and hat, reflecting the settlers' impoverished living conditions. Each of these images, taken from the reality of Extremadura's fields, towns and settlers also highlights the documentary's poetic qualities.

Moreover, in Nuevas tierras para don Ramón the performative nature of its protagonists' participation is clearly exposed, especially in two segments: the family's arrival at the house, when the camera stops to register the expressions of these uprooted people gripped by fear; and the segment at the school, where the teacher, in her conversation with the Cortes family's younger daughter, imparts a lesson that reflects the pedagogical approach of the Franco regime. This unique hybrid of modes thus becomes the armature supporting this unusual documentary, which, as its title suggests, tracks the exodus of Don Ramón (and family) to the promised land produced by the Badajoz Plan. It is a documentary that has long been overlooked in Spain, but its analysis is essential to an understanding of the history of cinematic representations of the Badajoz Plan, and therefore of the Spanish agrarian documentary.

NOTES

- * This work was written in the context of the Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: A Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1970) research project, supported by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (Reference PID2019-105462GB-I00).
- 1 All these data appear in the *Badajoz Plan* folder at the Spanish government's general archives (Archivo General de la Administración, AGA) in Alcalá de Henares, Fondo Cultura, Caja 36/05431.
- 2 The interviews in question were conducted with Inés Cortés, in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), on 18 March 2019, and with Diego Cortés, in Orellana la Vieja (Badajoz), on 17 April of the same year.
- 3 All these data were provided by Dietmar Post himself in an interview conducted in Cordoba, on 20 September 2018.
- 4 On the types of narrators see Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis (1999: 118-128).
- 5 José Luis Mosquera Muller points out that "the 1933 Hydraulic Works Plan already contained the regu-

- latory reservoirs of El Cijara (its foundations were being laid as early as 1932), Zújar, Alange and Puerto Peña (García de Sola), and the Montijo bypass dam to irrigate the Vegas Altas" (Mosquera Muller, 2009: 13). However, it is reasonable to expect that the Franco regime sought to hide this, as is evident in Francoist documentaries, from the No-Do newsreels to the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar's film.
- 6 In the aforementioned interview, Inés Cortés noted: "once they finished shooting, the Germans disappeared with the film, and we never heard about it again, until a long time later, when my husband acquired a copy privately in Germany."
- 7 Another documentary filmmaker at the Ministry of Agriculture who would work on this same subject of the Badajoz Plan in *La conquista de una vega* [Conquest of a Plain] (1971), a documentary that characterises the settlers as "new conquistadors" in the history of Spain (Poyato, 2020: 17-37).
- 8 An analysis of this documentary can be found in Poyato (2016: 213).
- 9 Like a shot in *The General Line* (Staroye i novoye, Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1929), this shot "unites the man and woman sharing their path and their destiny" (González Requena, 1992: 197).
- 10 In that interview, Diego Cortés stated that the family of settlers was chosen for the film solely because it was a large one, not for their acting skills.
- 11 Both Diego and his sister Inés mentioned in their interviews that the interpreter, following the director's instructions, told them over and over again the expression that they were supposed to adopt, where they were to look, and how they were to move. As a result, some takes had to be repeated dozens of times until the director was satisfied.

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NUEVAS TIERRAS PARA DON RAMÓN AND THE BADAJOZ PLAN: THE EXODUS TO THE PROMISED LAND

Abstract

Nuevas tierras para don Ramón [New Land for Don Ramón] was the last film by Ernst Niederreither, a German filmmaker who directed 24 films between 1936 and 1965. Shot in the Extremadura region in Spain's southwest, it was never released in Spain until 2012, when the German production company Play Loud! Productions, which by chance had acquired the film rights, contacted the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture to arrange Spanish subtitling for the film. The Ministry itself then digitalised, catalogued and distributed this interesting documentary on the Badajoz Plan that depicts the exodus of settlers from their homes to what was to be their promised land. This article submits the film to a comparative analysis, considering other documentaries dealing with the Badajoz Plan that were aligned with the Franco regime's official propaganda, with the aim of contributing to the history of the agrarian documentary in Spain

Key words

Film; Documentary; Badajoz Plan; Settlers; Exodus.

Author

Pedro Poyato Sánchez holds a PhD in Information Sciences (Image) from Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He is a professor in the Department of Art History, Archaeology and Music at Universidad de Córdoba and a member of the Film History, Theory and Analysis research group. His lines of research include the films of Luis Buñuel, agrarian documentaries, and Spanish cinema. He is the author of several articles published in scholarly journals, such as Archivo Español de Arte, Signa, Ars Longa and Fotocinema. He has also published the books El sistema estético de Luis Buñuel (Universidad del País Vasco, 2011) and Identidad visual y forma narrativa en el drama cinematográfico de Almodóvar (Síntesis, 2015). Contact: pedro.poyato@uco.es.

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NUEVAS TIERRAS PARA DON RAMÓN Y EL PLAN BADAJOZ: EL ÉXODO HACIA I A TIERRA PROMETIDA

Resumen

Nuevas tierras para don Ramón fue el último trabajo de Ernst Niederreither, cineasta alemán que dirigió 24 films entre 1936 y 1965. Rodada en tierras extremeñas, la película de Niederreither no se da a conocer en España hasta el año 2012, cuando la productora alemana Play Loud! Productions, que por casualidad se había hecho con los derechos, contacta con el Ministerio de Agricultura para el subtitulado en español de la cinta. El propio Ministerio digitaliza, cataloga y distribuye entonces la película, un interesante documental sobre el Plan Badajoz que indaga en el éxodo del colono desde su lugar de origen hasta la tierra prometida. El presente trabajo se ocupa del estudio de este film a partir de un análisis comparativo del mismo con algunos de los documentales sobre el Plan Badajoz alineados con la propaganda oficial franquista, con el fin de completar así la historia del documental agrario español.

Palabras clave

Cine; documental; Plan Badajoz; colono; éxodo.

Autor

Pedro Poyato Sánchez (Castuera, Badajoz, 1956) es doctor en Ciencias de la Información (Imagen) por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, catedrático de universidad en el departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música de la Universidad de Córdoba y miembro del grupo de investigación Historia, teoría y análisis del cine. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en el cine de Buñuel, el documental agrario y el cine español. Es autor de diversos artículos publicados en revistas científicas, como Archivo español de Arte, Signa, Ars Longa y Fotocinema. Ha publicado los libros El sistema estético de Luis Buñuel (Universidad del País Vasco, 2011) e Identidad visual y forma narrativa en el drama cinematográfico de Almodóvar (Síntesis, 2015). Contacto: pedro.poyato@uco.es.

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MODELS OF REPRESENTATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY SERIES QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)*

DEBORAH TOSCHI LINDA GAROSI

I. RADIO AND TELEVISION AT THE SERVICE OF A COUNTRY IN TRANSFORMATION

As part of the television program Sapere. Orientamenti culturali e di costume, coordinated by Silvano Giannelli, the documentary series Questa Nostra Italia, written by Guido Piovene¹ and directed by Virgilio Sabel, was broadcast between November and December of 1968. The reports produced by RAI were part of a commitment to education and dissemination undertaken by Italy's public radio and television service. The program, one of the new productions of that year, was launched with the aim of taking advantage of the popularity enjoyed some ten years earlier by Viaggio in Italia, a radio program by Piovene that had been broadcast on the Programma Nazionale between 1953 and 1957, which was followed by the publication of a book «at the request of the listeners» (Piovene, 1957: 7). Viaggio in Italia had been one of the cultural initiatives sparking a renewed interest in

the real Italy in the years after the Second World War, when its depiction under Fascism as the cradle of the Roman Empire and classical culture was abandoned, as it became the object of serious research that offered clear, direct, and detailed images of the country, not distorted by the prism of the regime's self-aggrandising rhetoric that had sought to mask its underdevelopment and social problems. The program, as well as an eponymous book, existed in a «fervent climate of curiosity and desire to tell stories [...] that characterised the country's years of reconstruction, recovery and economic boom» (Tamiozzo Goldmann, 2009: 103-104), when new media products found fertile ground as a result of the convergence of the different media formats.² In addition to being popular with the public, the series consolidated a style of radio documentary that reached its peak in those years. The first television reports of the late 1950s, such as Viaggio nel Sud (V. Sabel, 1958) and Viaggio nella valle del Po alla ricerca dei cibi genuini (M. Sol-

dati, 1959), took Piovene's radio program as a point of reference (Bertozzi, 2008: 183).

Piovene's series therefore offers a rather significant opportunity to explore models of representation of Italy's agricultural landscapes, which were associated with important transitions in 1950s and 1960s Italy, a country in the midst of a major transformation. The first of these transitions was the shift from the rural mythos of fascist propaganda to the excitement over the agrarian reform, along with the necessary modernisation of southern Italy and the recognition of its failure. At the same time, in any analysis of this topic it is essential to remember that television reports replaced film documentaries due to their informative capacity in a context of production and exhibition controlled by institutions that understood television as a public service and as a channel for the promotion of forms of cultural hegemony. Questa Nostra Italia is located at this crossroads, as at the end of the 1960s, it facilitated the exploration of the various discursive instances that connected seamlessly to the origins of the Italian rural landscape, while at the same time shaping an imaginary, once again, that served the country's new political and sociohistorical direction.

The yearning to discover and document social, territorial and human realities was programmatic and strongly motivated by the need to generate national cohesion and engage all citizens in the great leap forward that followed the country's reconstruction. Although far from the rhetoric of the dictatorial regime, these radio and television programs should be viewed within a political-institutional framework that on the one hand delimited the public service's renewed action, while on the other it would seem reasonable to assume that they also constituted «attempts to manage cultural life» (Forgacs, Gundle, 2007: 4).

During the age of radio's greatest popularity and the rise of television, RAI was a state monopoly that was submitted to increased government control by the Convention of 1952, going from

EL NUEVO PAISAJE AGRARIO SOLO FUE ESBOZADO POR EL RÉGIMEN FASCISTA

being considered a technical agency for communication at the service of institutional action to playing a decisive role in the hands of the Democrazia Cristiana party and the Catholic hierarchies, which, through their political control of the apparatus, managed to reinvent «a model for shaping public opinion and mass cultural dissemination that has been considered too reductively as being merely instrumental, but which was actually part of an effective design of cultural hegemony» (Monteleone, 2005: 287). The introduction of public television broadcasting (on 3 January 1953) represented not only a technological achievement, but also «the initiation of a unifying action to construct a national identity that RAI, under the auspices of the political class of the time, was ready to carry out» (Piazzoni, 2004: 24). In the political context following the fall of De Gasperi and dominated by the figure of Fanfani, the public broadcaster was charged with a crucial role: «the mass media, from radio to cinema, from children's magazines to television, was recognised as having an indisputable function to educate and to guide» (Monteleone, 2005: 288). A few months after broadcasting had begun, there was a shakeup in RAI's top management in accordance with the new political balance and with a very clear vision of the media's potential (Grasso, 2004). It was necessary to enhance not only its technical and production infrastructure, but also its content, so that through its programs RAI could really become an instrument of teaching and knowledge, fulfilling the educational mission assigned to it. This was why intellectuals were engaged in the development of formats and mechanisms of mass dissemination placed at the disposal of a television service capable of influencing cultural and social

progress, as well as guiding the citizen/viewer in a renewed process of national unification in parallel with the country's profound transformation (Piazzoni, 2004: 28).

At a crucial moment for the reconfiguration of the narrative of Italy's national-popular identity, public communication strategies were employed once again to trigger the evolution of the collective consciousness. It is worth noting that even before the Second World War, media products had contributed to the fact «that Italian society could be seen and heard by its own members» (Forgacs, Gundle, 2007: 5). The need to make the country known to Italians, which had made radio documentaries so popular, had not disappeared in the short period of time since the rapid rise of television:

These were years in which social documentaries and investigative reports on television, often by young directors trained during the years of neorealism, were able to produce in-depth and detailed documents of a country that had been united only a century earlier and was almost entirely unknown to most Italians; not only were there profound differences between the North and South, but also a heterogeneous wealth of traditions that they sought to reveal to the widest possible audience through the audiovisual medium. (Di Marco, 2014: 142)

In this context, this study proposes to explore how television reports on contemporary issues would prove especially well-suited to narrating the reality of the country and its changes, while also playing a key role in introducing innovations to the documentary genre. To this end, an analysis of the configuration of the rural landscape is particularly important, as will be demonstrated below.

The methodology used is mainly qualitative, in that it seeks to describe processes of creating meaning in society through mass media, employing as a principal technique the analysis of these reports in relation to the rural imaginary, examining the relationship between text and context based on the concept of the landscape as an au-

diovisual construction and its cultural and historical dimension. This research takes a multidisciplinary approach to the object of study, analysing the representation of the rural world on both the radio program of the 1950s and the television program of the late 1960s.

2. THE LANDSCAPE, BETWEEN OLD AND NEW MODELS

It was between 1925 and 1930 that the idea of the rural landscape began to be perceived as a geographically defined space and to develop its own visibility, thanks in part to the Fascist regime's major investment in it, which led to the projection of a new identity and a new social imaginary. It is no coincidence that in these years two important institutions, the Opera Proiezioni Luminose and the Istituto Italiano Proiezioni Luminose, were replaced by the Istituto Luce, and that the period was marked by a process of transition towards new modes of representation (Toschi, 2009: 156).

The narrative of the rural landscape began to be codified in the framework of the impressive machinery of the Istituto Luce, which used photographs and documentaries to record many of the transformations to the countryside from a decidedly oblique perspective closely tied to the regime's ideology. Indeed, as Italo Insolera (2009) points out, these visual documents rarely reflected the everyday dimension, focusing instead on events, inaugurations and the presence of the authorities. The purpose was to underscore the regime's role as a driving force, its commitment to improving the country's situation, and its capacity to mediate between the industrial world and the agrarian economy, all of which had the effect of relegating rural landscapes and local populations to the background.

Piero Bevilacqua stresses that the new agrarian landscape was really only vaguely sketched by the Fascist regime, as it was not until the post-war period, under the administrations

of the Italian Republic, that the country's widely celebrated changes were clearly portrayed (2002: 19). The *Istituto Luce*'s collection of institutional images had captured part of the modernisation that had begun, focusing on the transformation of well-known landscapes, especially marshes and the country's epic efforts at land reclamation, but had not placed enough emphasis on the important modernisation of the country's infrastructures and their consequent metamorphosis (Bevilacqua, 2002: 188). These elements would be better reflected in the shorts, in both black and white and colour, produced by the *Centro di Documentazione* of the Presidency of the Council of

EL PROGRAMA DOCUMENTA UN TERRITORIO EN RÁPIDA TRANSFORMACIÓN, EN EL QUE CONVIVÍAN HERENCIAS RURALES Y NUEVAS REALIDADES INDUSTRIALES

Ministers between 1952 and the early 1960s (Frabotta, 2002). In addition, some elements neglected or only partially recognised by the regime in the films of the Istituto Luce seem to resurface after the Second World War. For example, the well-established didactic-scientific documentary formula lent itself well to conveying the changes to Italy's infrastructures and economy, particularly in the industrial sector, and was deployed with remarkable success thanks also to the synergy between business leaders and filmmakers (Pierotti Pitassio, 2019). Important companies, such as Montecatini (Petrini, 1999), Edison (Bruni, 2008; Mazzei, 2004) and Eni (Latini, 2011), would play a complementary role to that of state institutions in the visual narrative of Italy and its transformation, while Olivetti's "techno-films" (Pierotti, 2019: 129-153) merit separate discussion.

The genre's transformation is evident, in aesthetic terms, in the diversification of its subjects,

the hiring of prestigious directors and, of course, the major investments in production, resulting in films of great artistic value. Out of these corporate filmmaking departments, firmly tied to the communication objectives of a specific company, emerged a school of documentary production following in the wake of neorealism and on a par with the best international movements (Toffetti: 2005). One element that represented a break from the pre-war period and also stood out in the production of industrial documentaries was the new attention given to the human and social condition. The documentation of Italy's territory was a journey not only through the tapestry of a changing landscape, captured in its transformation from rural to industrial, but more generally through the socio-anthropological identity of the Italian population. Many different approaches taken to the representation of the Italian landscape intersect at its genesis, although it is important to stress that both institutional short films and industrial documentaries had guite limited audiences, while the television medium largely took over the task of presenting that landscape to society. Before delving into this aspect, it is important to note, as Bertozzi put it, that «Italian television played an important role in updating the forms of the documentary. This was a process that was carried out above all thanks to what were called 'filmed reports'» (2008: 183). Notable examples include Mario Soldati's Viaggio nella valle del Po alla ricerca di cibi genuini (1957, 12 episodes) and Virgilio Sabel's Viaggio nel Sud (1958, 10 episodes), as well as Chi legge? Viaggio lungo le rive del Tirreno (M. Soldati, C. Zavattini, 1960, 8 episodes), Viaggio nell'Italia che cambia (U. Zatterin, 1963, 5 episodes), and the program I viaggi del telegiornale, which first aired in 1957 (Simonelli, 2009). Moreover, in contrast to other television genres, the report offers the element of documenting reality, as Edoardo Bruno noted in his talk at the discussion panel on the Inchiesta Filmata (Centro Culturale Estense, 1964):

it was the first crack in that wall of conformity that television fed and feeds with its usual productions. Zatterin's La donna che lavoro and Joris Ivens's L'Italia non è un paese povero continued to highlight a need to search, to offer a series of objectifications of a reality ignored and distorted by many. From all these images it is possible to capture aspects of the reality of a society struggling to define itself, as well as the confirmation of the validity of neorealism's social critique. (Cited in Di Marco, 2014: 143)

It is thus evident that numerous reports were produced in the form of travelogues, in a kind of virtual tourism, anchoring the narrative to geographical stages and their landscapes in order to reinterpret and connect the multiple facets of a country undergoing a rapid transformation. What emerges in this repeated journey across the Italian Peninsula is an attempt to expose the public to the slow yet profound transformation of the national landscape. This new genre proved especially well-suited to telling a story of the country, its landscape and the changes it was undergoing. It is worth remembering that it was a genre based on the radio documentary. Indeed, the case study chosen for this article is especially revealing in this respect. Therefore, before analysing the filmic texts that will allow us to corroborate our hypothesis, it is necessary to consider the radio series Viaggio in Italia and its relationship with the program that was broadcast on television a decade later.

3. FROM RADIO DOCUMENTARY (AND TRAVELOGUE) TO TELEVISION REPORT

Questa Nostra Italia is a case worthy of study because it constitutes a culmination of cultural initiatives associated with the hiring of Piovene by RAI in 1953, which involved the intersection of several media formats (radio, travel book), and simultaneously of the different modes and forms used to tell the story of the Italian landscape and present it to Italians.

After his trip to the United States as a correspondent for Corriere della sera (1950-1951), and his successful book De America (1953), Piovene was hired by the director of RAI's Giornale Radio, Antonio Picone Stella, and Saverio Sarnesi, who assigned him the task of telling the country's story on the radio, at the very moment of the birth of Italian television. The first episode of Viaggio in Italia aired on the Programma Nazionale on 6 December 1954, while the last one was broadcast on 17 December 1956. In total, there were 94 episodes, broadcast on Monday and Saturday nights from 9:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The objective of the program, now that Italy was free at last of the Fascist regime's self-indulgent verbosity, was to explore Italy's heterogeneous regional realities, as well as to expose the situation of a country struggling to recover after the destruction wrought by the war. The broadcast, which was very well received by the public,³ contributed in part to the publication of a book of the same name by the Mondadori publishing house. Drawing on notes taken on a trip he took between May 1953 and October 1956 from Bolzano to Rome and including visits to the two main islands,4 Piovene worked on both the radio and print versions (first for some brief articles published in advance in the weekly magazine *Epoca*, and then for the book). As will be discussed below, it is interesting to note the "hybrid" dimension of the writing, as although the travelogue of the journey, reworked into the 18 chapters of the book, conforms to the conventions of literary tradition, it nevertheless suggests «a new approach to travel narratives» (Valese, 2020: 120-121). The work is not really a travelogue as seems to be suggested by its title, which brings to mind the products of the Grand Tour, but instead represented a

perfect example of an active combination of the exploration by the journalist, who [...] produces weekly radio reports in which he carries out a social and economic investigation of the Italian situation in the early 1950s, with an artistic-literary purpose (Zava, 2020: 9).

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Descriptions of landscapes-natural and urban—and references to the country's vast cultural heritage, traditions and folk customs are interspersed with interviews with prominent figures of the time and socioeconomic analyses of the industrial and primary sectors, supported by data, statistics and precise numbers. All this is framed by reflections on the specific identity of a region, or of a specific city, often combined with a discussion of the distinctive features of its inhabitants. The account of the journey is constructed based on focalisations and panoramas that treat the juxtaposition of accumulatio (Crotti, 1996: 278) as the formal instrument closest to what the author himself defines as an «inventory of Italian things» (Piovene, 1957: 7). The text thus eschews a monolithic vision of the country, like the one that had been imposed by the Fascist regime, by contrasting the variety and unique features of Italy's different regions, visited one by one. Another key element that guides the reporter/traveller's explorations is the repeated reference to statistics and figures, as well as the detailed analysis of the industrial and primary sectors and the exploration of Italian society, which also clearly reflected an attempt to praise the actions of the new government.5 In this long national tour, the observer's gaze is framed by the main issues faced by the administrations of the new Italian Republic at that time: regional autonomy, the industrial boom, public construction, the problem of the degradation of the natural landscape, the deterioration of the country's artistic heritage, mass emigration, unemployment, the gap between north and south, and particularly the process of implementing the Agrarian Reform, which Piovene depicts in both positive and negative terms. Moreover, while describing the progressive decline of peasant civilisation and the persistence of pockets of poverty and backwardness in every region (but especially in the south), he documents the strong push towards the mechanisation and modernisation of agricultural production.6 It is safe to suggest that this was due

to the powerful albeit indirect message emerging from the initiatives planned in the government's reconstruction programs. It is worth recalling that during those years, thanks also to the money from the Marshall Plan (1948-1952), the country was achieving very promising results.

A decade later, in 1968, in a very different historical context defined by the cultural hegemony imposed by the public broadcaster, Piovene received a new commission from RAI, for which he was joined by a prominent documentary filmmaker, the Turin-born Virgilio Sabel, who was also documenting the Italian situation once again. On 5 November 1968, the first of the 16 episodes aired on Canale Nazionale, with half-hour broadcasts every Tuesday and Thursday at 7:15 p.m. until December 26. Like the radio series and the book, the television program was very popular with the public, as Giannelli (1968) points out. For the television version, however, significant modifications were made: the title was changed, the 94 episodes that had been produced for radio were reduced to 16, and the geographical criterion that had defined the order of the previous versions was abandoned. In addition, in contrast to the radio program, Piovene's in-studio commentary was in the first person, interspersed with images of the locations and a voice-over (Alberto Lupo) or live interviews. There are some similarities with the book published in 1957, such as the fact that the exploration of the different regions and their inhabitants reflects the same style of curiositas, without the author's mediation. Some of the places visited are also the same, and Piovene's comments and the voiceover include excerpts from the book, albeit reorganised. Fifteen years later, however, the author was cognisant of the profound changes that had occurred in the country and therefore proposed a new investigation, while also being aware that the sociopolitical context and thus the purpose of the program had changed as well. He toned down the meticulous analysis of the cultural and socioeconomic stratifications of a country in ra-

pid transformation in which rural heritages and new industrial realities coexisted, while trying to condense the country's geographical, human, economic and cultural variety for didactic purposes. The aim was not to provide a unitary vision of the nation, one that would ultimately fail to reflect its complexity, but rather to offer a picture of the whole made up of representative samples, driven by the potential of the new television medium. In keeping with the didactic approach of the section of which the documentary formed a part, Sapere. Orientamenti culturali e di costume, the narration of the journey across the country became a compendium of Italian geography in which Piovene's evocative prose was reduced to a minimum, replaced in the new medium by a succession of images.

4. THE VISUAL IMAGINARY OF QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA: THE RURAL LANDSCAPE, BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND FOLKLORE

Guido Piovene, as the creator of the radio project, but above all as a writer, i.e., an exponent of the literary culture that Italian mass media outlets have always sought to integrate into radio, film

Image I. Guido Piovene and the documentary television series Questa Nostra Italia (1968)



and television content (Sacchettini, 2018; Colombo, 1998), was the most prominent name involved in the Questa Nostra Italia television documentary series. Equally significant, especially for the program's visual imaginary, was the contribution of its director, Virgilio Sabel (b. Turin, 1920ñ d. Rome, 1989), a multifaceted figure with an outstanding capacity for storytelling, which he employed in the production of literary works and scripts, as well as documentaries and musical compositions. Sabel launched his career with an unusual collaboration with the poet Leonardo Sinisgalli on the short film Una lezione di geometria (1948) and the subsequent Un millesimo di millimetro (1950), an award winner at the Venice International Film Festival that formed part of his experience at Olivetti. After another brief foray into the industrial documentary with Le ricerche del methano e del petrolio (1951), produced by the Istituto Luce for Agip/ Eni, he began working on films about society for which he is particularly remembered, such as In Italia si chiama amore (1963). The report Viaggio nel Sud (1958), with a plot and script by the writers Giuseppe Berto and Giose Rimanelli (Del Gaudio, 2017), was undoubtedly the reason why he was

chosen for the *Questa Nostra Italia* project. However, Sabel's visual contribution suggests a different range from that found in *Viaggio nel Sud*, which is notable for the variety of shots and the pacing of the editing (Valentini, 2019: 92).

Viaggio nel Sud offers a powerful examination of the southern question and the problem of the deep economic and social gulf dividing northern and central-southern Italy in a specific historical period. With the creation of Cassa del Mezzogiorno and the SVIMEZ institute, between 1950 and 1962

a special endowment was allocated for land reclamation, the creation of infrastructures, and, more generally, the modernisation of what was still a very rural landscape in the south (Taviani, 1972). The television documentary seeks to capture the sources of this change, intertwining the history of an early industrialisation of the south with stories of a return to the land.

For example, the episode filmed in Metaponto in the Basilicata region features an interview with some labourers who had been assigned land to plant an orchard and rotation crops (29') with the help of expert advisors specialising in agriculture. Again, certain transitions

stand out: for example, the formula of roving agricultural experts, and the idea that education must be expanded to include workers who are often unqualified, both of which were already present in the educational and propagandistic filmography of the Fascist period, are addressed here with a different approach. In the television series, the focus is not so much on specific techniques and crops that is, on teaching modern farming and stockbreeding techniques and methods but on the social transformation that the government was seeking to bring about. In addition, the rural landscape is no longer the protagonist of the narrative: rather than filling the visual space, it becomes the backdrop to an ongoing transformation captured in a few emblematic shots, playing a role that is secondary to the human activity and new settlements. This is clearly seen in the pan shots that begin with wide shots of the crops before coming to a halt on an interviewee. The interviews are largely unedited and take up a significant portion of the running time, effectively assigning the residents of these regions an important role in the socioeconomic progress of the period. In this episode, as in the one shot in the town of Manfredonia in the Apulia region, the camera goes inside



Image 2. Metaponto (Basilicata region) episode of Viaggio nel Sud (Sabel, 1958)

the people's homes: in this case, a farmhouse at dawn, when the farmworkers are waking up. A decidedly ethnographic approach is evident in the attention to the people's working and living conditions, which were practically ignored in previous productions. The footage conveys a profound concern with the southern landscape, which appears archaic yet at the same time in search of a new identity. The camera moves quickly, as if curious to probe the possibilities of a moderate modernisation that could preserve the beauty of the rural landscape without sterilising it.

Questa Nostra Italia was created more than ten years after Viaggio nel Sud, in the completely different context of 1968, when the major investments and the dream of modernising the south had waned and new tensions were looming on the horizon. [IMAGE 3] In the first episode, Piovene's in-studio introduction, which evokes but modifies the one in Soldati's well-known Viaggio in Italia, gives content and visual continuity to the reporting tour of the country. Instead of the map and painted background behind the presenter, there are a series of sweeping horizontal shots in the studio that modernise the approach and counteract the stiffness of Piovene, whose

presentation is very different from the colloquial, direct style of Soldati. The editing also has a faster pace, linking the shots of the presenter, taken from different angles and enhanced by constant zooms, with the images in the studio and those in the report. Guido Piovene does not look completely at ease in the television studio, where he is forced to read at a distance and respect strict time limits. In this regard, the host's limited presence is noteworthy, as he appears briefly to introduce the program and/or specific episode, and only in the episodes on the regions of Apulia, Piedmont and Liguria. The writer's imprint on the program is visible, also with an impact on the style of Sabel, who has a less mobile and more focused gaze in Questa Nostra Italia, with more use of zoom and static shots, reproducing one of the literary characteristics of Piovene's prose, defined as a snapshot, a photograph of a moment to «save a landscape from destruction, to photograph it before the catastrophe, to document it, especially an inner landscape, which exists in the precarious aware-



Image 3. Apulia, the first episode of Questa Nostra Italia

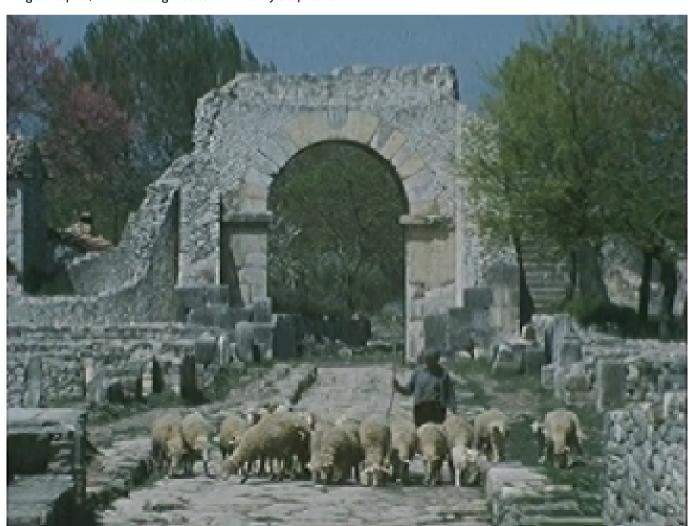
ness of a dissolution that seems to hasten almost as it is being narrated» (Crotti, 1996: 279). The content of the episodes is quite varied and seems to be arranged according to a process of *accumulatio*, as Ilaria Crotti has previously pointed out, as the interviews with locals are interspersed with shots of rural and urban landscapes, along with des-

criptive shots of monuments and examples of Italy's artistic heritage. This is a distinctive element of the Bel Paese, and after the Second World War it became a crucial factor for the revival of cultural tourism. Nature and art coexist in Piovene's prose and converge in Sabel's perspective, which treats monuments as landscapes to be visually traversed, broken down into different angles. The rural world, included in the imaginary of the south, was giving way to urban space, which in those years constituted the pulsating core in which most of the Italian population were finding a place to live and work. This raises questions about the role

and representation of the rural landscape at the crossroads of 1968, a year rife with new and profound sociocultural transformations.

An interesting example can be found in the episode on the regions of Abruzzo and Molise, which begins by focusing on the paintings, wrought iron works and historic buildings of the town of Pescocostanzo, but with a change of perspective and of music, with a shift from opera to a folk song while the camera climbs up a cobblestone slope towards a group of women in the streets engaged in the ancient art of lacework. Continuing from L'Aquila to Pescara, again through castles and museums, the episode displays the region's incipient modernisation, and in a dialogue with young students from Pescara, the question of the loss of local traditions is discussed. As we move on to the Molise region we find the same internal division in the narrative. From the history of the cathedral's art the story shifts to the tradition of knitting. [IMAGE 4] This is followed by a distinct pause, signalled in the soundtrack by the braying of donkeys and the crowing of roosters, before presenting Sepino, a town in the province of Campobasso, which boasts an extensive archaeological site. Sabel's filming comes alive again with a long pan that draws the viewer closer to the Roman ruins. [IMAGE 5] However, in contrast to previous archaeological sites, Sepino's setting is typically rural, as the Roman city lies in the countryside, now inhabited by shepherds who come here so their flocks can graze. Stone dwellings can be glimpsed nearby. The interviews convey a reality that is isolated but still marked by the changing routes of the livestock and the arrival of foreign tourists. Here an important transition occurs: the rural landscape, previously interpreted as natural and firmly entrenched in the Italian

Image 5. Sepino, an archaeological site inhabited by shepherds



imaginary, dissolves into a nostalgic, folkloric, elegiac setting that takes on an evanescent quality with luminous tones. The rural landscape, like the Roman ruins, becomes the memory of a bygone past. Once again, Sabel and Piovene seem to be in perfect harmony. The faded folk-magic dimension of the south, in particular the south that is still rural, is rendered palpable. As Altamura suggests, «as Piovene enters the South, in fact, he gradually introduces a melancholic touch that little by little, as Pasolini pointed out, makes the Viaggio resemble a 'poem' or a 'work of the imagination'» (2004: 19; Pasolini, 1979: 161). With this melancholic gaze, the rural landscape bids farewell to the Italian viewer, becoming a landscape of memories, a reminder of a reality that is almost extinct.

CONCLUSIONS

After the Second World War, there were significant changes to the Italian media and the country's institutions. This transition was especially important for documentaries, since film production, particularly the output of the Istituto Luce during the years of the Fascist regime, gave way to other media such as television, and to other genres, including television reports. Meanwhile, the governments of the Democrazia Cristiana party, the protagonist of Italy's democratic revival, assumed control of RAI, which they considered an essential instrument to promote the country's cultural and social progress. To this end, they once again adopted mass communication strategies that had been used in radio broadcasting, including the participation of prominent personalities on the cultural scene. They continued to create multidisciplinary projects whose impact was further amplified by the expressive potential of the new medium of TV, resulting in the construction of the country's national folk identity at a crucial time.

In this context, it is also necessary to situate a process of major innovations to the documentary in terms of the changes that the rural imaginary codified by the *Luce Institute* underwent in the new historical and political environment. This analysis of the *Viaggio in Italia* radio program and the *Questa Nostra Italia* television reports has made it possible to highlight significant innovations introduced to the models of representation of the landscape through the formula of the travelogue.

The analysis of the texts here has revealed lines of continuity and points of divergence: in contrast to the codes of propaganda oriented towards the construction of self-aggrandising images under the Fascist regime, the "inventory of Italian things" (Piovene) filmed by Sabel for RAI in the late 1960s became a visual narrative in which the landscape took on an increasingly mythical nature, imbued with predominantly folkloric leanings. Precisely at a time when the rural world was disappearing and turning into a memory, its representation was increasingly associated with human presence and the narrative of a new national identity.

NOTES

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- 1 Italian writer and journalist (b. Vicenza 1907-d. London 1974). In 1935 he joined the *Corriere della Sera* and then went on to *La Stampa*, where he worked until founding the Milanese newspaper *Il Giornale* (1974), together with Indro Montanelli and others. His work, which ranges from correspondence and high-level journalistic reports to travel pages and reflections, as well as short stories and novels, is that of an essayist trained at the intersection of a Catholic sensuality

- and an Enlightenment sensibility inspired mainly by the French moralists and novelists of the 17th and 18th centuries, but open to the suggestions of Freudism and Existentialism. His best-known novels include Lettere di una novizia (1941), Le furie (1963) and Le stelle fredde (1970).
- 2 The project *Italia Mía* was presented to the Einaudi publishing house in 1952, with the idea of narrating the reality of the country through a combination of images and words, in a film-book. This initiative would ultimately only give rise to *Un paese* (1955) a phototextual publication, with writing by Cesare Zavattini and pictures by the Frenchman Paul Strand, documenting the artist's places of origin. It also reveals an incipient visual interest in landscapes that would shift as well towards the printed page (Pontillo, 2020).
- 3 Gigi (Luigi) Michelotti points out this fact in a review of RAI's programming for 1957 in *Radiocorriere* (Gigi Michelotti, *Documento di un'annata*).
- 4 Piovene's texts are read by Paolo Pacetti and interspersed with audio recordings of direct testimonies collected by active reporters sent to the different regions, such as Nanni Saba, Aldo Salvo, Nino Vascon and Sergio Zavoli.
- 5 This hypothesis seems to be confirmed in a private letter, preserved in the Piovene Collection, which accompanied the request for documentation dated 5 July 1954. Piovene writes: «due to the agreements between this Chamber and RAI, I will have to produce some weekly radio broadcasts aimed at illustrating the economic life of each of the Italian provinces» (the text of the letter is quoted in Arpioni, 2017: 141).
- 6 These topics are the exact same ones dealt with in *Tre-no della Rinascita*, a large national travelling exhibition presenting the achievements of the first governments of the new Republic (Frabotta, 2002: 25-36).
- 7 The order of the episodes is as follows: 1. Puglia; 2. Piedmont and the Valle d'Aosta; 3. Campania; 4. Friuli-Venezia Giulia; 5. Lazio; 6. Basilicata and Calabria; 7. Emilia Romagna; 8. Trentino Alto Adige; 9. Umbria and Marche; 10. Lombardy; 11. Sicily; 12 Abruzzo and Molise; 13. Liguria; 14. Tuscany; 15. Sardinia: 16. Veneto.

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MODELS OF REPRESENTATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY SERIES QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)

Abstract

This article presents a study of representations of Italy's rural landscapes in the 1950s and 1960s. This period, which has been somewhat neglected in studies of the country's rural imaginary, was a time of important transitions: from the Fascist regime to democracy, from rural predominance to economic acceleration and industrialisation, from the documentary production and didactic initiatives of Istituto Luce to the new industrial productions and the consolidation of the television medium. In fact, it was Italy's newly founded public broadcaster, RAI, that seized the baton of education and rediscovered the landscape through reports on travels around Italy with a focus on social issues. The case study chosen for this research is the documentary program Questa Nostra Italia, a follow-up to Guido Piovene's historic radio program and book, directed by Virgilio Sabel. These television reports capture rural Italy, particularly the rural south, with a dynamic perspective encompassing both modernisation and a return to the land, always with a view to the human presence, which becomes the protagonist and driving force of the narrative. The landscape is subjected to a profound reconsideration, crystallised in an array of images with folkloric and evanescent connotations to become a bucolic and timeless remembered space, fixed in the memory of every Italian.

Key words

Rural landscape; RAI; Piovene; Sabel; radio documentary; television documentary; *Questa Nostra Italia*.

Authors

Deborah Toschi holds a degree in Modern Literature and a PhD in Philosophical Disciplines, Arts and Entertainment from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. She continued her studies at Università degli Studi di Pavia and is currently an Associate Professor at the Università dell'Insubria in Como. She has published her research in Italian and international specialist journals on Italian cinema, educational cinema and gender studies, and she is the author of the monograph *Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista.* (Vita e Pensiero, 2009). Contact: deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it Contact: deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it

MODELOS DE REPRESENTACIÓN DEL PAISAJE RURAL EN EL DOCUMENTAL TELEVISIVO QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)

Resumen

El artículo propone un estudio sobre la representación del paisaje rural italiano en los años cincuenta y sesenta. La periodización, algo desatendida en relación con el imaginario rural, da cuenta de algunas transiciones importantes: del régimen fascista a la democracia, de la Italia campesina a la Italia de la aceleración económica y la industrialización, de los esfuerzos documentales y didácticos del Istituto Luce a los nuevos sujetos industriales y a la afirmación del medio televisivo. De hecho, fue la recién nacida RAI la que recogió el testigo de la educación y el redescubrimiento del paisaje mediante el reportaje de viaje por Italia y de corte social. El caso de estudio propuesto es el reportaje Questa Nostra Italia, evolución del histórico programa radiofónico y libro de Piovene, aquí con la dirección de Sabel. En el reportaje televisivo, el territorio rural, y en particular el meridional, es captado con una mirada dinámica, entre la modernización y el retorno a la tierra, siempre en relación con la presencia humana, que se convierte en protagonista y motor de la narración. El componente paisajístico sufre una profunda revisión, cristalizándose en un repertorio de imágenes con connotaciones folclóricas y evanescentes hasta convertirse en un paisaje de la memoria, bucólico e intemporal, fijado en la memoria de los italianos.

Palabras clave

Paisaje rural; RAI; Piovene; Sabel; documental radiofónico; reportaje televisivo documental; *Questa Nostra Italia*.

Autoras

Deborah Toschi, tras licenciarse en Literatura Moderna y conseguir su doctorado en Disciplinas Filosóficas, Artes y Entretenimiento por la Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore de Milán, ha continuado su trayectoria académica en la Università degli Studi di Pavia y actualmente ocupa una plaza de profesora titular en la Università dell'Insubria (Como). Ha publicado en revistas nacionales e internacionales ocupándose del cine italiano, cine educativo y estudios de género. Es autora de la monografía Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista (Vita e Pensiero, 2009). Contacto: deborah.toschi@ uninsubria.it

Linda Garosi holds a degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Università di Verona, and a PhD from the Universidad de Córdoba, where she is currently an Associate Professor in Italian Philology. Her research, which has been published in Italian and international journals and monographs, examines areas including representations of Italian emigration in cinema and literature and the canons of Fascist ruralism in newsreels and documentaries. She co-edited the volume Esodi e frontiere di celluloide. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni (Franco Cesati Editore, 2016). Contact: linda. garosi@uco.es

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Linda Garosi, tras licenciarse en *Lingue e Letterature Straniere* por la Università di Verona y conseguir el doctorado en la Universidad de Córdoba, es actualmente profesora titular del área de Filología Italiana en este centro. Ha publicado en revistas y monografías nacionales e internacionales, ocupándose, entre otros, de la representación de la emigración italiana en el cine y la literatura, así como de los cánones del ruralismo fascista en los noticiarios y documentales. Ha coeditado el volumen *Esodi e frontiere di celluloide. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni* (Franco Cesati Editore, 2016). Contacto: linda. garosi@uco.es

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JAZZ AND BOSSA NOVA AS NEW MUSICAL SOUNDS IN JOSÉ NECHES NICOLÁS'S SPANISH AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES*

RAFAEL ÁNGEL RODRÍGUEZ LÓPEZ

1. INTRODUCTION

When we talk about documentary film, we refer to a cinematic record that attempts to reconstruct or describe reality by means of a series of elements that comprise the film sequence, a brief audiovisual space in the production of this type of film, in which music plays an important and sometimes even crucial role. Music has the particular quality of providing the right atmosphere, functioning as an element of visual cohesion that elicits a range of emotions from the spectator, enhances the beauty of the image and, just as importantly, highlights cultural and social aspects related to the subject matter of the documentary.

Discussing the importance of the music that accompanies the visuals of this type of film, Nieto argues that it "promotes the use of rich, free cinematographic languages, while offering excellent possibilities for experimentation" (2003: 146). Sánchez Noriega suggests that the introduction of sound "expanded the range of informational possibilities of the genre by allowing stories, oral testimonies, voice-overs and music to complement, comment on or function as counterpoints to the images" (2018: 115-116). Indeed, since the advent of sound film, music has become one of the most important communicative and aesthetic elements of this genre, evolving into a personal language related to images, movement, plot and voice (Román, 2008).

A WIDE RANGE OF MUSICAL GENRES, WITH MUSIC EITHER CREATED ORIGINALLY FOR THE FILM OR TAKEN FROM OTHER SOURCES

It is precisely here, in this musical element that has accompanied the visual development of the documentary genre throughout its history, that the filmography of José Neches Nicolás emerges as essential to the study of Spanish agrarian documentaries, a group of film texts whose importance "lies in their value as historical documents that can bear witness to the events of the past, but also in the cinematic form contained in them" (Melendo, 2019: 1058). If there is one thing that characterises the agrarian documentaries produced by this filmmaker over three decades-from 1945 to 1976-it is the "presentation in his filmography of musical genres that render these films unique and give them their own personalities" (Rodríguez, 2021: 181). Neches's agrarian documentaries thus offer spectators a wide array of musical genres, either originally made for the film or borrowed from other sources, ranging from Andalusian folk music to classical pieces by Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner, and even orchestral arrangements by the Spanish composer Enrique Granados, as well as more modern genres such as jazz and bossa nova, two musical styles that are related in various ways, with an aesthetic connection that dates back to the 1950s and 1960s in Brazil and the United States.

In this respect, it is important to note that jazz, often used as a musical resource in cinema, has been established as a theme in its own right, occupying a particular place in the film and creating a certain sonic atmosphere (Chion, 1997: 290). This musical style originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among the African American communities of New Orleans in the United States and evolved over time, incorporating new sounds from

different cultures and music genres. It was in this context that the Brazilian musical genre of bossa nova emerged in the 1950s, absorbing influences from jazz, classical music and other genres.

With all of the above in mind, it is worth acknowledging that there have been a number of previous film studies by authors that have offered in-depth examinations of different aspects of the aforementioned films, ranging from the representation of the female figure in Neches's documentaries (Melendo, 2018, 2019), to their particular cinematographic aesthetic, the editing techniques, images, and literary formulas employed in their audiovisual production (Sánchez, 2021), and even a historiographic overview of his documentary filmography (Poyato, 2020; Gómez, 2020), among others. However, this study aims to fill a small research gap, in view of the absence of in-depth studies of the music used in Neches's work.2 The focus of this study is therefore on this aspect of the soundtrack to the agrarian documentaries directed by José Neches Nicolás from 1967 to 1976, a period in his career characterised by his use of jazz and bossa nova music in his films, reflecting a direct influence of his stay in the United States in 1958.3

Therefore, the intention of this study is, one the one hand, to identify the films in José Neches Nicolás's extensive documentary filmography that contain these musical styles, and secondly, by means of the *musivisual* analysis outlined below, to discern how jazz and bossa nova were combined with Spanish agrarian documentary images to endow this audiovisual space with a new way of describing and complementing Neches's images, vesting them with a sound aesthetic.

2. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives outlined above, quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted for this study. The methodological process began with a meticulous auditory review of the 47 agrarian

documentaries directed by José Neches Nicolás that could be located, all produced between 1945 and 1976. This initial stage involved the identification of jazz and bossa nova sounds featured in Neches's agrarian documentaries. Once the films containing any element of these musical styles were identified and catalogued, they were carefully recorded together with relevant information including title, year of release and producers. A musivisual analysis of the sequences found was then conducted with a view to shedding light on the complex interplay between sound and image in order to discover significant connections and patterns arising in Neches's oeuvre.

The agrarian documentaries selected for study then underwent a second stage of sound editing, necessary to ascertain the artist, composer or musical group responsible for performing or creating the music used in the agrarian documentary. To do this, it was necessary to separate the audio from the visual content, which in turn facilitated the extrication of the voiceover from the music. This made it possible to confirm more precisely the piece of music used in each visual sequence of the agrarian documentary in question.

Thirdly, once all possible information about the jazz and bossa nova music accompanying Neches's images had been compiled, a musivisual analysis was conducted on each documentary in order to understand how the music functioned in combination with the images. This analysis draws on concepts introduced by authors such as Román (2017), Chion (2017) and Nieto (2003) in relation to types of music (distinguishing whether the jazz or bossa nova audio pieces were created expressly for the documentary or borrowed from other sources), and the diegetic category of the music used in each sequence (being classified as diegetic if the "source of the music is found within the world depicted by the images and the time of the action portrayed, whether the source is visible or not" [Román, 2017: 171], and extradiegetic if the source of the music is unknown and the music

itself is not heard by the characters appearing in the agrarian documentary).

Also considered in this analysis is the synchronisation of image and music in the documentaries selected for this study. Chion describes this as a "salient moment between a sound moment and a visual one, a point where the connection between the two elements is more accentuated" (2017: 96), while Nieto characterises it as "a sound and an image occurring at exactly the same point in time" (2003:129). Finally, the study will identify the levels of sound occupied by the music, i.e., whether they play a leading role in the sequence or are kept in the background, secondary in importance to the narrator's voiceover. In addition, the cinematographic function assigned to the jazz and bossa nova music in Neches's agrarian documentaries will also be analysed. Here, a distinction will be drawn between three different aesthetic functions of music, the intention of which is to "enhance the artistic aspects of the films, as well as provide originality" (Román, 2017: 138): the first is a unifying function, where it serves as a connective element "through the establishment of an orchestral atmosphere or colour" (Chion, 1997: 130); the second is a decorative function, whose purpose is to complement the image without adding an emotional dimension; and the third is a transitional function, where the "objective is to give musical continuity to the transitions between the different visual shots and sequences" (Rodríguez, 2021: 189).

3. JAZZ AND BOSSA NOVA IN NECHES'S AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES: A MUSIVISUAL ANALYSIS

As mentioned above, it is in Neches's last period of documentary production that the different sounds associated with jazz and bossa nova can be heard, reflecting the influence of the filmmaker's stay in the United States in the late 1950s. From 1967 to 1976, Neches made nine

agrarian documentaries whose visual sequences are accompanied by the sounds of these two musical genres. The documentaries in question are: Feria internacional de maquinaria agrícola de Zaragoza - FIMA 67 [International Farm Machinery Fair in Zaragozal (1967), Máquinaria orgánica para el suelo [Organic Machinery for the Soil] (1967), Concurso de maguinaria agrícola [Farm Machinery Contest] and Recolección de remolacha [Beetroot Harvest] (1967), all produced by the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Extension Service (SEA): Y mañana... un día cualquier [And Tomorrow... Just Another Day] (1971), Conquista de una vega [Conquest of a Fertile Plain] (1971), Reforma y desarrollo de una vega [Restoration and Development of a Fertile Plain] (1971), all produced by the Ministry of Agriculture's National Settlement Institute and the Spanish Cement Manufacturers' Association; and El cultivo del tabaco [Tobacco Cultivation] (1973). Flores [Flowers] (1975) and Primores [Beauties] (1976), also sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Extension Service.

3.1. The first strains of jazz in a 1967 agrarian documentary

Nothing in his films' soundtracks suggested that the audiovisual sequences in José Neches's first agrarian documentaries in 1967, dedicated to promoting the processes to modernise the Spanish countryside based mainly on industrialisation and mechanisation (Luque, 2021), might diverge from the folk and classical music he had been using in his films for years. Yet in the late 1960s the filmmaker created a series of films marked by this musical peculiarity and containing common musivisual aspects, including Feria internacional de maguinaria agrícola de Zaragoza, FIMA 67, and Concurso de maquinaria agrícola, Recolección de remolacha. The visuals of both these agrarian documentaries are accompanied almost throughout by a jazz version of "I Only Have Eyes for You"4 performed by Paul Phillips and His Band, together with jazz arrangements by Joe Harnell. The song appears on the album The Sound of Midnight: Naked City, originally released in London and launched on the international market a few years

Images I and 2. Concurso de maquinaria agrícola. Recolección de remolacha (left) (1967) and Feria Internacional de maquinaria agrícola de Zaragoza – FIMA 67 (right). Sequences featuring the musical version of the song "I Only Have Eyes for You" performed by Paul Phillips







Image 3. Maquinaria orgánica para el suelo (1967). Sequence featuring the song "Elmer's Tune" by Dick Jurgens

earlier in 1961. It is thus a piece of music that constitutes a feature of the soundtrack of both films, with an importance based on its iconic status in the repertoire of popular music and jazz over the years.

This first example is a case of a pre-existing composition used in two agrarian documentaries whose thematic focus is the presentation of farm machinery (Images 1 and 2). At the same time, at the *musivisual* level, in the scenes in which it is featured the music is always extradiegetic, as its source is not known, and it serves both decorative and unifying functions, connecting different shots and whole sequences to give cohesion to the visuals of both documentaries. It also acquires an important and sometimes even a central role in relation to the image, as it is always somewhere between the foreground and the background, only ever dropping in prominence to give precedence to the narrator's voiceover.

The audio and *musivisual* characteristics of these first two documentaries are repeated in Neches's next production, *Maquinaria orgánica* para el suelo (1967), which employs the same *musivisual* configuration. In this case, the soundtrack features the jazz song "Elmer's Tune", written by

Elmer Albrecht, Dick Jurgens and Sammy Gallop in 1941, a composition covered by a multitude of artists that forms part of the traditional jazz and popular music repertoire of the 1940s. The original version of this song by Dick Jurgens and His Orchestra is clearly influenced by swing, a subgenre of jazz that was very popular at that time and that plays a prominent role in this film's audiovisual construction.

"Elmer's Tune", with its jazz harmonies and swing influences, thus becomes the main sound element used to complement the images of this documentary presenting different models of tillage machinery (Image 3). As he did in the previous films, Neches takes pre-existing music and positions it extradiegetically in the foreground and background of the soundtrack, giving way only to the narrator's voiceover, and with a cinema-

"ELMER'S TUNE", WITH ITS JAZZ
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tographic function that is once again both decorative and unifying, connecting the whole visual sequence.

3.2. Alfonso Santisteban and the introduction of bossa nova to Neches's agrarian documentaries

While the audiovisual elements of Neches's 1967 agrarian documentaries contain new jazz sounds, in 1971 the filmmaker proposes another musical style that would have a huge influence on his film production: bossa nova. Emerging in the 1950s, this Brazilian musical genre had a major impact on jazz music around the world. Bossa nova is characterised by an elegance and beauty that have the power to move the listener with its smooth, melodic tones. Neches drew on these qualities to frame the soundtrack to two of the documentaries produced in 1971 by the Ministry of Agriculture's National Settlement Institute and the Spanish Cement Manufacturers' Association: Y mañana...un día cualquiera and Conquista de una vega.

Neches's first use of the bossa nova compositions of Alfonso Santisteban, sought out by the filmmaker due to his status as one of the most renowned composers on the Spanish film scene, can be found in one of the documentaries entirely dedicated to the daily life of a rural community: Y mañana...un día cualquiera. It is almost at the end of one sequence (11'38") where one of Santisteban's compositions is placed diegetically in the foreground of the film's soundtrack: "La chica de la bahía", a piece for piano written years earlier by Santisteban for the album Bossa '68,5 functioning in this documentary as a pre-existing composition. In fact, as will be discussed below, this piece of music was also featured in Neches's last rural documentary. Primores (1978).

Although different pieces of folk music are featured diegetically throughout this agrarian film, a diverse range of popular songs are also included, and classical music is also prominent. This includes such emblematic works as Luigi Rodolfo

Boccherini's String Quartet Minuet, Opus 13 No. 5, which gives way to the audiovisual moment featuring Santisteban's piece characteristic of the bossa nova style. At this very moment, one of the protagonists of the film is shown turning on his radio to listen to Santisteban's composition, serving to create a special atmosphere, enhance the storyline of the sequence, and offer the spectator a new visual and auditory experience (Image 4). A minute later (12'22"), this version of Santisteban's bossa nova is heard again, but this time extradiegetically, in order to complement and decoratively enhance a magic show (Image 5).

With a musical configuration very similar to that of Y mañana...un día cualquiera, another of Neches's films, Conquista de una vega (1971), also features the rhythmic and melodic presence of Alfonso Santisteban's bossa nova, in this case at the end the audiovisual sequence (17'22"). As Poyato observes in relation to this film, the "title already presents the Badajoz Plan in terms of a conquest, that of an expanse of flat and fertile land irrigated by the waters of a river, in this case, the Guadiana" (2020:19). Supporting this theme of settlement, irrigation and rural development are a series of preexisting musical pieces, inclu-

Image 4. Y mañana...un día cualquiera (1971). Sequence featuring the song "La chica de la bahía" (Alfonso Santisteban)



ded extradiegetically one after the other, paving the way for the inclusion of Santisteban's bossa nova. These pieces include a composition with a Baroque flavour, Richard Wagner's The Ride of the Valkyries, Enrique Granados's Spanish Dance No. 5 and España, Rhapsody for Orchestra by Emmanuel Chabrier.7 The succession of these musical pieces that accompany Neches's images give way to some final sequences comprised of aerial pan shots offering a view of the completed irrigation works. All of these shots are accompanied by Santisteban's bossa nova, which frames them with a mesmerising, evocative musical accompaniment in the foreground of the soundtrack that transcends the limits of the narrative, performing a decorative function while also serving as an element of audiovisual cohesion tying together the different shots in the sequence (Image 6).

3.3. A symphony for the countryside: jazz again

Although Neches's agrarian documentaries analysed above use new musical styles such as jazz and bossa nova, along with other musical genres, it would be the documentaries he made between 1971 and 1975 that offer the best examples of Neches's depiction of the rural world in combination with jazz music. These documentaries include

Image 6. Conquista de una vega (1971). A sequence featuring Alfonso Santisteban's bossa nova





Image 5. Y mañana...un día cualquiera (1971). Sequence featuring the song "La chica de la bahía" (Alfonso Santisteban)

Reforma y desarrollo de una vega (1971), again produced by the Ministry of Agriculture's National Settlement Institute and the Spanish Cement Manufacturers' Association, and *El cultivar de tabaco* (1973) and *Flores* (1975), both produced by the SEA.

As if constructing a leitmotif, Neches masterfully articulates a common musical and visual theme that unifies all three of these documentaries, as each of them uses an identical *musivisual* configuration applying the same meticulous order, expert sequencing, and musical formatting to accompany the rural images. This painstaking approach not only highlights his artistic consistency but also reflects the depth of his connection to the very essence of the rural settings he films. Every note and every image seem to intertwine in a perfect dance, painting a vivid and emotional portrait of the rural world through a symphony of carefully orchestrated sounds and visuals.

Offering a good example of this new musivisual configuration is *Reforma y desarrollo de una vega* (1971), whose visual sequence focuses entirely on the National Settlement Institute's efforts to transform the plains around the Guadiana River, in what is basically a reduced version of the

documentary La conquista de una vega but with a different voiceover. In the very first minute of this documentary, the images are enhanced by a series of rhythmic beats that break with the film's rural theme; here, the ploughing of the fields becomes a backdrop while the beats create a serene yet vibrant rhythm, injecting a new soundscape into this traditional scene and generating an intriguing contrast between the rural and the contemporary (Image 7). To do this, Neches turns to the one of the most iconic figures of jazz music, Henry Mancini, a composer whose sound seemed to represent "the bright, confident, welcoming voice of the middle class's new efficient life: interested in pop songs and jazz, in movies and television" (Caps, 2012: 1). Specifically, it is with the track "The Blues", a musical composition written for the album The Blues and the Beat (1960). that Neches draws on the creator of the original soundtrack for The Pink Panther to set the initial tone for this documentary. The music is heard in the background behind the voiceover, serving to

enrich and unify the rural images captured by Neches.

Immediately after this first minute of the documentary, Neches inserts the song "Good Bait" (1944) by jazz musician Tadd Dameron. Once again, the director makes extradiegetic use of a pre-existing composition that is emblematic of this musical style, a piece that has become a jazz standard performed by numerous musicians over the years. Neches thus accompanies this part of his documentary showing the irrigation works with the unmistakable swing rhythm of this piece of music, which becomes the soundtrack for a landscape undergoing a transformation, endowing the images with a dynamic vibrance and highlighting the arduous agricultural work of irrigation displayed on the screen.

Later, in the third minute of this rural archive (3'20"), we hear another gem of the jazz genre: "Misty" (1954), by pianist and composer Erroll Garner, a song widely covered and often used in films and on television. Finally, to conclude the





documentary, Neches employs another iconic jazz composition, Louis Prima's "Sing, Sing, Sing" (1936), as the soundtrack to a series of pan shots showing the irrigation works in detail. These musical pieces not only vest the images with an additional layer of emotional depth but also serve as a tribute to the legacy of jazz, a genre that has endured over time and has left an indelible mark on audiovisual culture.

The filmmaker would take advantage of the uniqueness of these musical styles in two subsequent films, El cultivo de tabaco (1973) and Flores (1975). Here, although the music provides the images (in this case, of tobacco cultivation and flower farming, respectively) with a different aesthetic, Neches uses the same musivisual sequencing used previously with "The Blues", "Good Bait", "Misty" and "Sing, Sing, Sing", making use of pre-existing music extradiegetically, always in the foreground except when the narrator's voiceover takes over, to serve a decorative and unifying function that gives cohesion to the different shots and sequences. In this way, the filmmaker enriches each shot and sequence of the rural documentary with a soundscape that enhances the historical and cultural contexts of the agricultural practices shown on the screen. His choice of music not only serves as a bridge between the narrative and the images but also adds an emotional layer, constructing a unique sensory experience that transports the spectator to Neches's rural world.

3.4. Santisteban and his bossa nova in Neches's final agrarian documentary

As mentioned above, it would be Alfonso Santisteban's trademark bossa nova style that would serve as a pre-existing soundtrack to accompany and enhance the idyllic rural images presented in the last documentary produced by the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Extension Service, titled *Primores* (1976). Once again, bossa nova music taken from Santisteban's acclaimed *Bossa '68* album would be used as the sonic centrepiece, in a

film that immerses us in a world where technical innovations in greenhouse management come to life, offering a detailed display of the cutting-edge farming techniques of the era (Images 8 and 9). In fact, Santisteban's music provides the film's only sound accompaniment, thus accentuating the depth of the images in a way never seen before in Neches's agrarian films.

For his last documentary, Neches used music exclusively from Santisteban's *Bossa'* 68 album, including (in order of appearance) the tracks "La chica de la bahía", "Melodía para un hombre solo", "Sofisticado", "Esperar" and "Soledad". Every note of the compositions taken from the album, which are integrated extradiegetically and move into the foreground on the soundtrack on several occasions, thus finds a resonance in the meticulous cultivation process depicted on screen. It is a soundtrack that serves not only as an accompaniment but as a vital element that lifts the documentary's narrative to another level, transforming it into a complete audiovisual experience.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the rich musical palette woven into Neches's agrarian documentaries, combining jazz sounds and unmistakable bossa nova rhythms that are skilfully integrated into his visual universe. The director uses these musical styles to frame the scenes in his rural documentaries, giving them a prominent place in the soundtrack that often transcends the boundaries of his rural narratives.

The analysis offered reveals how this evocative musical accompaniment, originating from beyond the rural world shown on screen, performs a decorative function while at the same time playing a crucial unifying role by connecting the different shots and sequences of each film. Indeed, the shots filmed by Neches acquire cohesion and elegance precisely thanks to the musical framing of the jazz and bossa nova pieces that accompany





Images 8 and 9. Primores (1976). Sequences featuring the songs "La chica de la bahía" and "Melodía para un hombre solo" (Alfonso Santisteban)

them, transforming the visual experience of the rural documentary into a symphony of sounds and images.

It is also worth noting that most of the music used is pre-existing and that it is presented extradiegetically, i.e., its source is unknown to the protagonists of the documentaries except for one sequence in the documentary Y mañana...un día cualquiera (1971), whose images present the music as diegetic, as discussed above. In this way, Neches uses the music of great jazz and bossa nova figures such as Paul Phillips, Dick Jurgens, Henry Mancini and Alfonso Santisteban to accompany and illuminate the rural images in his agrarian

NECHES USES THE MUSIC OF GREAT JAZZ AND BOSSA NOVA FIGURES

documentaries and turn them into a new audiovisual experience. It is these same melodies composed by these creators that give life to and enrich all the documentaries analysed in this study.

This is how José Neches Nicolás concluded his career as a documentary maker, offering viewers a profoundly enriching musical language fused with an astonishing diversity of musical styles and genres. Neches masterfully wove a visual and auditory symphony in which each note and each chord is intertwined with the very essence of his images. This amalgam of sounds not only enriches the spectator's experience but also transforms these agrarian documentaries into a complete art form in which music becomes a character in its own right, speaking a universal language that transcends the barriers of time and space.

NOTES

- This study was carried out in the context of the Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979) research project, supported by the State Program for the Promotion of Knowledge Generation and Scientific and Technological Strengthening of the R&D&I System and the State R&D&I Program oriented towards the challenges of society under the auspices of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Ref. PID2019-105462GB-I00). 2019 Call. IP1: Ana Melendo; IP2: Pedro Poyato.
- 2 At a time prior to conducting this research, I was able to conduct a *musivisual* study of José Neches Nicolás's agrarian documentaries (Rodríguez, 2021), identifying, albeit more generally, the types of musical styles or genres the filmmaker uses in his documentaries' visual sequences.

- 3 As indicated in the filmmaker's Cinematographic Historical Documentary Collection (2016: 9), "[o]n January 22, 1958, he requested voluntary leave and resigned from the Agroeconomic Headquarters in Zamora. In the period from 24 November to 19 December 1958, he obtained an English diploma for a course he took at the University of the District of Columbia. In December 1958, on a U.S. Cooperation scholarship, he travelled to California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo (on the Pacific coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles). In the context of an international cooperation program, he participated in a course on 'earthmoving methods' from December 1958 to March 1959, attended by 18 people from different countries around the world."
- 4 The song was originally written and released in 1934 by Harry Warren (an American composer and lyricist who focused mainly on writing songs for movies), with lyrics by Al Dubin, an American musician and lyricist of Swiss origin. Since then, it has been covered by various music groups and even adapted to different styles, including its jazziest version, by Paul Phillips. It should also be noted that these documentaries also contained brief fragments of jazz music that could not be identified in this research. These fragments are sometimes interwoven very well with Paul Phillips's piece as the main theme.
- 5 Santisteban, A. (1968). *Bossa '68*. [Vinyl]. Spain. Estudio Sintonía.
- 6 In relation to Richard Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries, Del Álamo claims that "it was Francis Ford Coppola who employed Wagner with the most media success in his Apocalypse Now (1979) [...] turning it into one of the most chilling pieces of music in film history" (2020: 27).
- 7 Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894) was a French composer who, during his four-month stay in Spain with his wife, as reflected in the classic radio program *Cuaderno de Notas* (2018), was "absolutely fascinated by the rhythms and melodies of our country. It was on his return to France that he captured the essence of our folk music in a score, writing his first important symphonic work: *España*, *Rhapsody for Orchestra*."

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Abstract

Over an extensive period spanning three decades, from 1945 to 1976, filmmaker José Neches Nicolás produced a fascinating series of documentaries focusing on rural and agrarian life. It is a body of films that stands out not only for its thematic approach, but also for the wide range of musical genres that accompany the visuals. Andalusian folk music, classical compositions and other styles, such as jazz and bossa nova, infuse Neches's images with a new atmosphere. This study focuses on the use of music in his agrarian films from 1967 to 1976, a period in his career characterised by the integration of jazz and bossa nova sounds styles in his film sequences. The objective is to identify and analyse the musivisual behaviour of these musical genres that intertwine with the images in Neches's agrarian documentaries and provide them with a rich soundscape.

Key words

José Neches Nicolás; Jazz; Bossa Nova; *Musivisual Study*; Rural Documentary.

Author

Rafael Ángel Rodríguez López holds a PhD in Cinema, Music and Advertising from Universidad de Córdoba. He is an interim professor in the Department of Language, Art and Sport Didactics at Universidad de Málaga and a member of the Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979) research group. His lines of research focus on the relationships between music and documentary film. He is the author of several articles published in scholarly journals, such as Historia y Comunicación Social and Ámbitos Comunicación. He has also published the books Cómo crear música publicitaria (Berenice, 2021) and Imagen y música para el Noticiario de NO-DO (1943-1981): una sincronía a la vanguardia en la persuasión audiovisual (Universidad de Sevilla, 2023). Contact: rrlopez@uma.es

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EL JAZZ Y LA BOSSA NOVA COMO NUEVAS ARMONÍAS SONORAS PARA EL DOCUMENTAL AGRARIO ESPAÑOL DE JOSÉ NECHES NICOLÁS

Resumen

Durante un extenso periodo de tres décadas, que abarca de1945 hasta 1976, el cineasta José Neches Nicolás produce una fascinante serie de documentales centrados en la vida rural y agraria, una producción cinematográfica que destaca no solo por su enfoque temático, sino también por estar acompañado por un gran abanico de géneros musicales. Así, el folklore andaluz, la música clásica y la utilización de otros estilos sonoros como el jazz y la bossa nova, proporcionan una nueva atmósfera a la imagen nechesiana. Por lo tanto, será en este último contexto sonoro de su producción filmográfica agraria, de 1967 a 1976, en el que se centre esta investigación, un periodo que está caracterizado por incluir en su secuencia cinematográfica la armonía del jazz y el estilo sonoro de la bossa nova. Todo ello con la intención de identificar y conocer el comportamiento musivisual de estos géneros musicales que se entrelazan y proporcionan una rica atmósfera sonora a la imagen agraria-documental de José Neches.

Palabras clave

José Neches Nicolás; *jazz*; *bossa nova*; estudio *musivisual*; documental rural

Autor

Rafael Ángel Rodríguez López (Córdoba, 1989) es doctor en Cine, Música y Publicidad por la Universidad de Córdoba, profesor interino en el departamento de Didáctica de las Lenguas, las Artes y el Deporte de la Universidad de Málaga y miembro del grupo de investigación «Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudio comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultura de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1979)». Sus líneas de investigación se centran en las relaciones entre la música y el cine documental. Es autor de diversos artículos publicados en revistas científicas, como Historia y Comunicación Social y Ámbitos Comunicación. Ha publicado los libros Cómo crear música publicitaria (Berenice, 2021) e Imagen y música para el Noticiario de NO-DO (1943- 1981): una sincronía a la vanguardia en la persuasión audiovisual (Universidad de Sevilla, 2023). Contacto: rrlopez@uma.es

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PROPERTY DIVIDED IS PROPERTY LOST: MANAGEMENT AND CONFLICT ON COMMUNAL FORESTS IN GALICIAN DOCUMENTARY FILMS

BELI MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ
TALIA RODRÍGUEZ-MARTELO
MÓNICA VALDERRAMA SANTOMÉ

INTRODUCTION

Rurality is a concept that has been closely associated with Galician cinema ever since its origins. This concept has an intimate relationship with independent productions in the region and with what has come to be known as *Novo Cinema Galego*, a filmmaking movement that emerged in Galicia at the beginning of the 21st century, represented by a group of films—many of them non-fiction—that tell stories about rural life in the region while reflecting Galicia's cultural and linguistic identity.

Contemporary Galician films explore people's relationship with their environment in depth, using the landscape as a character that engages in a dialogue with both past and present. These films highlight tradition and collective memory, contrasting ancestral rural life with modernity, and reflecting on a cultural identity in an almost constant state of transition. Underlying this tug of war between old approaches and new creators

is rurality as a trope that brings texture and definition to the idea of Galicia represented on screen (Ledo Andión, 2019).

From the early days of cinema through to the contemporary era, rurality has been present not only in documentaries but also in fiction films that have used Galicia as a setting, including both local and foreign productions, such as Oliver Laxe's Fire Will Come (O que arde, 2019) and Rodrigo Sorogoyen's The Beasts (As Bestas, 2022), to cite two particularly prominent examples of recent years. This eminently rural quality has been criticised for offering a romantic image of the region that constructs a stereotypical depiction, or for presenting a portrait of Galicia specifically for urban viewers, as Concheiro (2022) suggests in his discussion of Sorogoyen's The Beasts.

Numerous critics have questioned the *Novo Cinema Galego* movement for its predilection for rural settings, reflecting a certain obstinate repetitiveness in its use of evocative images. It is a

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representation sustained by the need of mostly urban directors to portray and analyse our origins, an obsession associated with romantic nationalism and the identification of certain types of landscape with the homeland. Vilariño (2021: 137) sheds some light on this idea when he speaks of certain settings used as representative images of a nation:

This ideology of the landscape invariably tends to perpetuate tradition, creating different cultural manifestations of communities that exist outside of time, much closer to the myth than to the reality of Galicia as a largely urban society, where it is the cities (especially around the Atlantic coast) that hold the decision-making capacity and economic power, while the rural sector is organised entirely according to urban logics.

In recent years, the region and its landscape has been used as a protagonist in a number of non-fiction films whose objective is to portray a rural space. The perspectives and approaches taken are highly varied, ranging from films closer to experimental cinema, such as Alberte Pagán's Forgoselo (2014) or Lucía Vilela's Toxos e flores [Gorse Bushes and Flowers] (2021), both produced with the support of the Chanfaina Lab, to productions whose aim is predominantly informational, such as Alberto Lobelle's Pico Sacro [Holy Mountain] (2023), or anthropological, such as César Souto and Luis Avilés's Os Días afogados [The Drowned Days] (2015).

Rurality is unavoidable in much Galician cinema largely because it is one of the primary features of Galicia itself. Any analysis of films made and set in Galicia will involve a consideration of natural landscapes far from urban settings, marked by a practically constant use of the green tones that Galicia's lush vegetation and humidity contribute to the texture of all productions filmed in the region. Another striking feature of Galician non-fiction films is their depiction of the appropriation, exploitation and diversification of uses of this rural environment. The present study offers an over-

view of the uses of communal forests and the speculative conflicts that have affected them over the years through the analysis of documentary films produced in Galicia over the course of film history.

A DESCRIPTION OF RURAL GALICIA

The autonomous community of Galicia is one of the most important forest regions of the Spanish state. Woodlands cover 48% of the region's total area, constituting more than 1,400,000 hectares and accounting for close to 45% of Spain's wood production (Law 55/1980). Most Galician forestlands are privately owned, including the traditional Galician concept of montes veciñales en man común, collectively owned forestlands that cover a quarter of Galicia's total area, more than 700,000 hectares managed by 2,800 local communities. This concept is thus not only important as a symbol of Galician identity and culture but also as a clear contributor to the region's productive economy (Xunta de Galicia, 2023).

Community-owned forestlands are a traditional Galician institution, although they can also be found in other Spanish autonomous communities, including western Asturias and the provinces of León and Zamora in Castile and León, as well as in northern Portugal, where they are known as baldíos. A concept of Germanic origin, common lands are actually owned by groups of local residents and are not subject to government control. They are used for traditional, communal purposes, without allocating individual shares to their owners, who must be local residents with active households in the area. Ownership of common lands changes in accordance with changes to the permanent resident population, adding newcomers to the local area and removing those who close up or leave their local residences. In this sense, these common lands are not private property, as owners are required to reside in the area and to participate in the community (Concello de Nigrán, 2023).

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Common lands are regulated in Spain by Law 55/1980, of 11 November, which recognises their social function and their value to the public. This law stipulates that these lands belong to groups of local residents and defines them as indivisible, inalienable, imprescriptible and non-seizable properties. They are not subject to local taxes or to employer contributions to the Agricultural Social Security fund, and they are collectively owned by the members of the community group without individual shares.

Traditionally, Galicia's mountains and forestlands have been essential for sustaining livestock activity in the region, thanks to the common lands that provided pasture for grazing. Until 1936, local communities managed the structure of their own agricultural ecosystems in a way that reflected a style of land organisation specific to the region. However, after the Franco regime came to power in 1939, it initiated processes of expropriation and intensive reforestation with fast-growing species such as pines and eucalyptus trees, which led to an increase in emigration from the region, especially to other parts of Europe. The regime allowed communal ownership of forestlands, not to give local communities back their rights to use the land, but so that those communities would see themselves as recipients of the hypothetical benefits of the reforestation processes, thereby reducing opposition to the forestry policy it had imposed (Freire, 2016). This omission in the recognition of community ownership, which persisted until well after the transition to democracy in the 1970s, resulted

in the decline of resident collectives, leading to depopulation and the abandonment of rural areas that had been cultivated previously. Today, local residents claim that a new form of expropriation is taking place with the debilitation or break-up of the communities of the forestlands. Although it may seem like a conflict of the past, the struggle for the right to use and exploit the forestlands keeps the issue of communal ownership very much alive (Punzón, 2023).

Like many other autonomous communities, one of the challenges Galicia has faced in recent years is stopping rural population decline. To address the challenges posed by rural flight in Spain, multidimensional strategies are essential. Some studies suggest prioritising rural revitalisation through economic incentives, improvements to infrastructure and better access to basic services (Moyano Estrada, 2020). Depopulation is a complex phenomenon that requires policies that will promote the employability and quality of life of rural residents. It is also crucial to enhance educational opportunities and digital connectivity in order to attract and retain young people. Collaboration between local and national institutions is vital to implement these solutions (Pinilla & Sáez, 2017).

Both rural life and the Galician forestlands have thus been undergoing a process of constant change since the beginning of the last century in terms of land use and exploitation, requiring a new approach based on the need for sustainable development and the rational use of forestry resources. It is a transformation that transcends rurality and affects all levels of human activity. Our era is the first to describe itself as posthumous: post-modern, post-capitalist, post-Fordist, post-ideological and post-truth are just a few of the examples of ways in which we name our own era or aspects thereof. In this sense, late capitalism is founded on a large-scale cognitive dissonance that involves something like a "denial of the second law of thermodynamics," which underpins a

basic fiction in relation to the climate crisis, namely, sustainable development (Taibo, 2024), a fiction that we could define in general terms as the idea that the Western way of life can be maintained substantially at its present level by means of material and energy extraction that do not compromise the environment. In other words, although we have already gone beyond sustainable limits of growth, "our entire socioeconomic life is organised around the aberrant opposite assumption" (Aguado et al., 2016: 18). To make matters worse, this delusional model, which is completely disconnected from reality, is paradoxically presented as absolute realism, i.e., as if there were no alternative to it (Fisher, 2016). In this context, a strong movement has developed that is critical of the uncontrolled growth of capitalism, pointing out new approaches that consider responsibility and innovation within the limits of what the planet can sustain, and establishing concepts such as responsible stagnation and degrowth as alternative options (de Saille et al., 2020).

DOCUMENTARY FILMS AND COMMUNAL FORESTS

Numerous documentary filmmakers have delved into the reality shaped by Galicia's forestry resources. Over the years, various documentaries have offered portraits of rural Galicia, ranging from explorations of everyday life in this setting to the conflicts arising in the region. A significant example is Antonio Fernández-Román's *O Carro e o home* [The Cart and the Man] (1941), co-written by Fernández-Román and Xoaquín Lorenzo ("Xocas"), an anthropologist from Ourense who belonged to the group of Galician intellectuals known as *Grupo Nós*. This film shows the process of creating a traditional cart, intermingled with other typical farming activities, such as harvesting and threshing.

A collaboration between Carlos Velo and Fernando G. Mantilla is one of the most noteworthy of the earliest cinematic portraits of Galicia and

its landscapes. Their film *Galicia* (1936) could also be classified as one of the emblematic works on the region's rural and coastal areas, at least based on the footage that we have been able to view, as it has not been possible to locate a complete print of the film. This rural image is essential to the idea of Galicia and appears repeatedly throughout the region's filmography (Fernández, 2007).

There are also several documentaries that have specifically addressed the question of the ownership and management of Galician forest-lands. While it is surprising to find such a varied sample of films studying and analysing this phenomenon, it is clear that many productions offer a vehement defence of communal ownership of the land as a democratic practice and as a way of involving local residents in both the management and exploitation of their own environment.

One of the first Galician productions to document communal forests is O monte é noso [The Forest Is Ours], a film directed by Llorenç Soler in 1978 that deals with the struggle to recover community ownership of forestlands in the area of Pontevedra in the 1970s after their seizure during the Franco regime to implement its policy of planting eucalyptus and fast-growing non-native trees for wood production. These plantations provided raw material to the wood processing industry and to companies such as Ence, a pastry factory located in the Ría de Pontevedra, undermining the land's original use as pasture. This 30-minute film portrays the battles waged by residents of various civil parishes to win back ownership and management of the surrounding woodlands, a conflict that caused a break with a way of life and with a form of community organisation. The film also portrays the beginnings of real estate speculation in the comarca (county) of O Morrazo, exposing the first attempts by certain political leaders to profit from unlawful building developments and the fraudulent exploitation of communal forestlands such as those in the O Hío parish (Cangas do Morrazo), where an unlicensed campsite was built on land near the seaside.

Llorenç Soler is a filmmaker who stands out for his militant commitment to investigative reporting. His films are also characterised by a certain anthropological quality. According to his own redefinition of the concept (Mir García, 2006: 56), militant cinema is expressed through audiovisual language understood as an intersection between filmmaking at the service of a democratic ideology and a formal and aesthetic quest.

O monte é noso is thus a portrait of the devastation of the region's natural heritage and of a way of life in the name of progress, combined with images of considerable ethnographic value and the use of a simple and direct language. It presents the conflict in straightforward terms, using a voiceover that condemns the acts of the government and its representatives, together with the testimonies of community members. Shot on 16 mm film stock, this documentary continues to be recognised as a work of cultural resistance. However, it belongs to a period when Soler was taking commissioned works, as he did in this case, as the film was funded by an organisation responsible for the coordination of communal forests, which probably recognised the potential of the documentary genre to denounce scandalous situations like these. Documentaries have been used to record and expose the negligent use of forestlands since the dictatorship and the appropriation of community-owned lands for the purpose of exploiting them in ways contrary to the interests of local residents. In contrast to the other films analysed in this article, the aim of O monte é noso is to claim lands back for use by the community, so that local residents can manage their own natural resources in a manner consistent with their ways of life (Bria Lahoz & Aran-Ramspott, 2020).

Lorenç Soler explores this same theme, albeit incidentally, in another film. The documentary Autopista, unha navallada á nosa terra [Highway, a Knife Slash across Our Land] (1977) deals with the despoilment of common lands, the destruction of a way of life and the disruption of a form of com-

munity organisation resulting from the construction of the AP-9, a highway spanning the Atlantic coastal region from Ferrol to Tui. In this film, produced by the community organisation created to protest the construction of the AP-9, Soler once again focuses on ordinary people with the aim of making their experiences visible, in a way that exposes realities that help us understand and reflect on society.

Xosé Bocixa's documentary As Encrobas: A ceo aberto [As Encrobas: In the Open Air] (2007) offers an analysis of the struggle of the local residents of As Encrobas, a civil parish of the municipality of Cerceda in the province of A Coruña, who in 1977 fought the forced expropriation of both their common lands and their own houses, title to which was transferred to Lignitos de Meirama (Limeisa, a subsidiary of Fenosa) for the purpose of lignite extraction. To the cry of "A terra é nosa e non de Fenosa" ("the land is ours and not Fenosa's"), the residents organised numerous demonstrations, not only in Cerceda itself but also in the city of A Coruña, in an effort to defend their ownership of the land against progress and capitalist interests.

The documentary combines archival footage of the demonstrations with testimonies in the present by witnesses who recount their memories of the conflict. At the same time, these witnesses reflect on the importance of defending their land not only for economic reasons, but also because of its significance as a cohesive element of their community. In addition to constituting a kind of

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communal therapy to heal the trauma of being evicted from the land they had lived on all their lives, this expository documentary also offers an interesting reflection on new methods of attacking the notion of the commons, in this case communal forests, in order to forcibly seize local residents' houses and lands in the name of a progress that offers minimal compensation to its victims. In the words of the filmmaker himself: "It would be a mistake to view it as a one-off battle, because it is a story of constant destruction. As time went by, the houses started to fall apart, the cemetery fell to ruins and a lot of us local residents were displaced" (Bocixa, quoted in Mariño, 2013).

Xisela Franco's SOS Comuneiros de Cabral (2013) exposes the speculative interests that brought local residents of the community of Montes de Cabral (on the outskirts of Vigo) into conflict with their own local council over plans by the company Eurofund to build a 300,000-square-metre shopping complex on their lands. In this case, it has the unique characteristic of being communal forestland in the suburbs of Vigo that is of great interest to property developers because it is land close to the city that could be acquired at very low price.

This documentary is composed of testimonies by the community members fighting the project, supported by the statements of experts who explain and analyse the importance of community ownership of forestlands. It is a film that could be classified under the category of *cine urgente*, a filmmaking approach that is an almost automatic response to a situation that the director wishes to document in order to foster debate both because of its topicality and out of a need to provide criticism and raise public awareness of the issue.

There is a certain parallel with the As Encrobas case, because, as reported in the documentary, the conflict in question began with an attempt to purchase common lands, followed by the design of a process of expropriation of private houses for the construction of roads to connect the shopping complex with Vigo, with the consequent destruc-

tion of the natural environment. Like Bocixa, Xisela Franco was born in the community whose plight she is documenting and much of her family have roots there. Her interest in defending her family's lands and environmental resources prompted her to record the testimonies of the community members who opposed this land grab. The film had limited distribution, with a public première for local residents in the local community centre, followed by posting on YouTube and Vimeo to provide access to interested viewers. The aim of this strategy was to raise awareness within the community itself and to make the existence of the conflict known to people outside it. However, the media exposure provided by articles in major Spanish newspapers such as El País and La Voz de Galicia constituted a turning point in the publicising of the conflict, spreading public debate on the issue throughout the whole Vigo region.

En Todos as mans [In All Hands], a film directed by Diana Toucedo in 2015 and produced by the Trespés cooperative, connects us with the reality of communal forests in Galicia and northern Portugal (where they are known as baldíos). Although made with a low budget (60,000 euros), this documentary had multiple funding sources, including support from the Galician cultural industry agency AGADIC, the participation of Galicia's regional public broadcaster (TVG) through the purchase of broadcast rights, and a crowdfunding campaign carried out in 2015 that collected a total of 10,220 euros on the Verkami platform. The film also had a commercial première of a token nature, as according to figures collected by the Spanish Institute of Sciences and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA), it sold a total of 232 tickets and took 1,330 euros in box office earnings. However, this figure does not take into account the people who viewed the film in informal venues, such as the auditoriums and community centres around Galicia where it was screened on several occasions. In addition, it was included in the program of Cineuropa 2015, a major event held that year in Santiago de Compostela.

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Through the testimony of various community members (both Galician and Portuguese), this film portrays the day-to-day activity of caring for and exploiting the land. In this case, several forestry crews are shown cleaning and maintaining the forest, planting tree species and engaging in other similar activities. Also shown are the meetings of community members to plan different actions related to forestry exploitation, as well as cultural activities and social events. The documentary showcases active, democratic community management, which—in the words of the community members themselves—is a form of direct democracv as it allows them to decide what to do with the land they live on, which they therefore feel is their own (López-Calzada, 2021).

At the same time, Toucedo's film offers an analysis of the current status of this type of ownership and the government's recent attempts to abolish it. It also considers hazards such as forest fires, which can effectively erase all the achievements made through communal efforts. In aesthetic terms, it is another expository documentary, although in this case it is notable for the meticulously designed aesthetic and for Iván Castiñeiras's cinematography. There are also certain recurring shots or motifs that would reappear in the director's subsequent films, such as the static shots of women that are common in *Homes* (2016), a project supported by Chanfaina Lab, or the treatment of the interviews in *Camille y Ulisse* (2021).

Another issue that has been the subject of documentaries is not a conflict but rather an achievement on the part of the local communities in these rural areas: water transfer systems. First introduced in the 1970s, transfer systems now involve around 5,000 catchments supplying water to 300,000 residents. This highly unique method of water management entails both daily regulation and the contribution of capital by local residents for the construction of the network (Campo Galego, 2017).

In 1969, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture produced Galicia Agraria [Agrarian Galicia], a film that uses a similar style to the Franco regime's No-Do newsreels to present the work of the Spanish government's Agrarian Extension Services with a local community of common forestland owners to improve their living conditions with a water transfer system in San Xiao de Vigo, a civil parish of the municipality of Paderne in A Coruña province. This film offers a highly didactic overview of the whole process, from the description of the problem of daily water shortages to the negotiations with local residents, the execution of the works to build the water transfer networks (providing jobs to those involved), and finally, the change to local lifestyles resulting from the introduction of running water into each of the houses of the rural community. This is an informational documentary that uses a voice-over narration to describe each of the steps in the project, together with testimonies by local residents. However, it is particularly interesting for its meticulous aesthetic and formal structure, in addition to its anthropological value.

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STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE

Beatriz Vázquez Campaña's A auga que trouxeron [The Water They Brought], produced by the Trespés cooperative, analyses water transfer and the role played by forestland communities that have been responding to the need to provide basic services to their areas since the 1960s. The film offers a historical review of the development of DOCUMENTARY CINEMA IN GALICIA
HAS BECOME AN ESSENTIAL VEHICLE
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water transfer systems in many of these communities to bring water from underground aquifers in rural areas for various uses. The different rural communities featured in the film include the rural parishes of Marzán (in the municipality of O Rosal). San Adrián de Calvos (in Fornelos de Montes), Gargamala (Mondariz), Vide (As Neves) and Tameiga-Casal (Mos), as well the urban centre of Meira de Abaixo in the municipality of Moaña. This documentary highlights the work of common owners, and especially their boards of directors, to provide important benefits to their community. It also presents the problems posed by a model developed in the 1960s being used in a contemporary era with no specific regulations for this water management model, as well as the changes that have occurred over time and the disruptions to the residential centres and to the use of these systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Galician non-fiction films have often addressed the critical importance of the management and exploitation of communal forests, highlighting the nature of these spaces not merely as scenic backgrounds but as sites of struggle and resistance. Through stories that reveal attempts to expropriate or mismanage forestlands, Galician filmmakers have highlighted the tension between local communities and external forces seeking to

control their resources. These films not only capture conflicts, but also serve as vital reminders of the need to preserve community rights to the land, highlighting its environmental and cultural value.

Documentary cinema in Galicia has become an essential vehicle for depicting the battles waged by communities to manage and exploit communal forests. More than mere backdrops, these settings are epicentres of intense socio-political and environmental clashes. The visual narratives of these Galician documentaries reveal repeated attempts to deprive communities of their ancestral lands, showing how local residents have been subjected to expropriation pressures and policies that threaten their way of life and their livelihood.

In addition to the conflicts, these documentaries also explore the deep connection between people and their environment, highlighting the importance of the communal forest not only as an economic resource but as a cultural and natural legacy intrinsic to Galician identity. The stories they tell provide clear evidence of public resistance against power dynamics aimed at commercialising or altering these lands, often ignoring the historical rights and sustainable practices of their communities.

This filmography thus serves not only as a chronicle of disputes over the land, but also as a defence of local sovereignty and a call to action to preserve community autonomy and biodiversity. It is a body of work that underscores the imperative need to protect community rights and keep alive the traditions that have allowed Galicians to coexist harmoniously with their environment for generations.

Novo Cinema Galego is notable for its originality and its quest for truth in its stories, intertwining the theme of community management of Galician forests with cinematic artistry. The directors involved have used the power of cinema, in both visual and narrative terms, to express the difficulties faced by the communities of Galicia in

their struggle to preserve community-owned forests. In addition to depicting the challenges and frictions caused by attempts at unlawful appropriation of land, they inject vitality into their narratives of struggle and community self-management, which places their work at the forefront of cinematic and cultural innovation.

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WE LOSE WHEN DIVIDING: MANAGEMENT AND CONFLICT OF THE COMMUNAL FOREST IN GALICIAN DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Abstract

Galician cinema, deeply rooted in rurality, reflects the essential features of the Galician landscape, where nature and community management of forestlands are recurring themes. Covering 48% of the region, Galician forestlands, most of which are private property, include land jointly owned by residents, managed collectively by local communities without individual shares. These forests, regulated by Spanish legislation, are inalienable and imprescriptible, a fact that underscores their social and cultural importance. Galician documentary films have explored these questions, from the traditional use of land for livestock to contemporary conflicts over expropriation and speculation. Documentaries such as O monte é noso and As Encrobas: A ceo aberto capture the struggle of communities to preserve their heritage against reforestation policies and industrial development. In response to rural flight and depopulation, multidimensional strategies have been proposed, including economic incentives and improvements to infrastructure and digital connectivity. In recent years, the local film movement known as Novo Cinema Galego has continued to present rural life and Galician landscapes, although it has sometimes been criticised for perpetuating romantic national stereotypes. In short, Galician films not only document conflicts over the land, but also advocate for local sovereignty and biodiversity, highlighting the importance of sustainable, community-led management of the natural environment.

Key words

Cinema; Documentary; Rurality; Galicia; Forests; Communal ownership.

Authors

Beli Martínez Martínez holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication and teaches in the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at Universidade de Vigo, in addition to working as a researcher with the CISPAC research group. She combines her academic work with film production. She is a producer at Filmika Galaika, a Galician studio specialising in auteur cinema, which has produced the latest works by Lois Patiño and Matías Piñeiro (Sycorax, 2021), Helena Girón and Samuel M. Delgado (Eles transportan a morte, 2021), Eloy Enciso (Longa Noite, 2019) and Jessica Sarah Rinland (Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another, 2019). Her films have been recognised by juries at festivals such as Locarno, Donostia, Mar del Plata, BAFICI, FICUNAM, Transcinema, Zinebi and Play-Doc, and have been screened at venues such as MoMA, Museo Reina Sofía and the Harvard Film Study Center. She is currently developing upcoming film projects by Lois Patiño, Maureen Fazendeiro, Alberto Gracia and Carlos Casas, among others. Contact: isabelmartinez@uvigo.gal

BIENES DIVIDIDOS, BIENES PERDIDOS: GESTIÓN Y CONFLICTO DEL MONTE COMUNAL EN EL CINE DOCUMENTAL GALLEGO

Resumen

El cine gallego, profundamente enraizado en la ruralidad, refleja las características esenciales del paisaje gallego, donde la naturaleza y la gestión comunal del monte son temas recurrentes. Abarcando un 48% de la región, los montes gallegos, principalmente de propiedad privada, incluyen los singulares montes vecinales mancomunados, gestionados colectivamente por comunidades locales sin cuotas individuales. Estos montes, regulados por la Ley 55/1980, son inalienables e imprescriptibles, enfatizando su importancia social y cultural. El cine documental gallego ha explorado estos aspectos, desde el uso tradicional de las tierras para ganadería hasta los conflictos modernos de expropiación y especulación. Documentales como O monte é noso y As Encrobas: a ceo aberto capturan la lucha de las comunidades por preservar su patrimonio frente a políticas de reforestación y desarrollo industrial. En respuesta al abandono rural y a la despoblación, se sugieren estrategias multidimensionales que incluyen incentivos económicos y mejoras en infraestructura y conectividad. En el ámbito contemporáneo, el Novo Cinema Galego continúa presentando la vida rural y los paisajes gallegos, aunque a veces criticado por perpetuar estereotipos románticos o nacionales. En resumen, el cine gallego no solo documenta conflictos sobre la tierra, sino que aboga por la soberanía local y la biodiversidad, destacando la importancia de una gestión comunitaria y sostenible del entorno natural.

Palabras clave

Cine; documental; ruralidad; Galicia; monte; mancomún.

Autoras

Beli Martínez Martínez (A Guarda, 1980) es doctora en Comunicación Audiovisual y docente del Departamento de Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad en la Universidade de Vigo e investigadora vinculada al CISPAC. Es productora en Filmika Galaika, empresa gallega especializada en cine autoral y que ha producido los últimos trabajos de Lois Patiño y Matías Piñeiro (Sycorax, 2021), Helena Girón y Samuel M. Delgado (Eles transportan a morte, 2021), Eloy Enciso (Longa Noite, 2019) y Jessica Sarah Rinland (Those that, at a distance, resemble another, 2019). Sus películas han obtenido el reconocimiento del jurado en festivales como Locarno, Donostia, Mar del Plata, BAFICI, FICUNAM, Transcinema, Zinebi o Play-Doc entre otros y se han visto en centros como el MoMA, el Museo Reina Sofía o el Harvard Film Study Center. En la actualidad, desarrolla los siguientes proyectos cinematográficos de Lois Patiño, Maureen Fazendeiro, Alberto Gracia o Carlos Casas, entre otros. Contacto: isabelmartinez@ uvigo.gal

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ackslash **NOTEBOOK** \cdot THE RURAL DOCUMENTARY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Talia Rodríguez-Martelo holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication and Advertising from Universidad Complutense de Madrid and teaches in the degree program in Advertising and Public Relations at Universidade de Vigo. She is currently a member of the work teams for two research projects coordinated by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and the Spanish Research Agency: Debatrue: Fight against misinformation and value criteria in electoral debates on television and digital media, FakeLocal: Mapa de la Desinformación en las Comunidades Autónomas y Entidades Locales de España y su Ecosistema Digital, led by Universidade de Vigo; and Valcomm: Medios audiovisuales públicos ante el ecosistema de las plataformas: modelos de gestión y evaluación del valor público de referencia para España, led by Universiade de Santiago de Compostela. Her lines of research are audiovisual production, digital distribution, television content and audiovisual platforms, disinformation and current communication environments. Contact: talia.rodriguez@uvigo.gal

Mónica Valderrama Santomé holds a PhD in Advertising and Public Relations from Universidade de Vigo. Since 2018, she has served as Vice-Rector for Communication and Institutional Relations and as one of the directors of the Scientific Culture and Innovation Unit at Universidade de Vigo. She has worked as a journalist, columnist, director of local information for La Voz de Galicia (Vigo, Galicia) and editor-in-chief of España Exterior (Vigo, Galicia), a weekly magazine for Spanish emigrants. She has completed research stays at institutions in Mexico, Brazil and Italy. Her lines of research include social media, creative trends in emerging audiovisual media, the evolution of television advertising production, new audiovisual advertising formats, television identities and new technologies applied to organisational communication. Contact: santome@uvigo.gal

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Martínez Martínez, B., Rodríguez-Martelo, T., Valderrama Santomé, M. (2024). Property divided is property lost: management and conflict on communal forests in Galician documentary films. L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos, 38, 79-90.

Talia Rodríguez-Martelo (Santiago de Compostela, 1983) es doctora en Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y docente en el Grado de Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas en la Universidade de Vigo. Actualmente forma parte de los equipos de trabajo de los proyectos de investigación del Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación y la Agencia Española de Investigación, Debatrue: Lucha contra la desinformación y criterios de valor en los debates electorales en televisión y medios digitales, FakeLocal: Mapa de la Desinformación en lanas Comunidades Autónomas y Entidades Locales de España y su Ecosistema Digital, liderados por la Universidade de Vigo, y Valcomm: Medios audiovisuales públicos ante el ecosistema de las plataformas: modelos de gestión y evaluación del valor público de referencia para España, liderado por la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en la producción audiovisual, la distribución digital, los contenidos en televisión y plataformas audiovisuales, la desinformación y los entornos comunicativos actuales. Contacto: talia.rodriguez@uvigo.gal

Mónica Valderrama Santomé (Waiblingen, 1974) es doctora en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas por la Universidade de Vigo. Desde el año 2018 es vicerrectora de Comunicación y Relaciones Institucionales y una de las responsables da Unidad de Cultura Científica e Innovación de la Universidade de Vigo. Ha trabajado como periodista, columnista y jefa de Información Local en La Voz de Galicia (Vigo, Galicia) y fue redactora jefa del semanario para emigrantes españoles en países latinos España Exterior (Vigo, Galicia). Ha realizado estancias en centros extranjeros en México, Brasil e Italia. Sus líneas de investigación son los medios sociales, las tendencias creativas en medios audiovisuales emergentes, la evolución de la producción publicitaria televisiva, los nuevos formatos publicitarios audiovisuales, las identidades televisivas y las nuevas tecnologías aplicadas a la comunicación organizacional. Contacto: santome@uvigo.gal

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FROM SOCIAL REALISM TO FILMIC FABLE: NEW APPROACHES TO SPANISH AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES

Dialogue with

FERNANDO GÓMEZ LUNA

FROM SOCIAL REALISM TO FILMIC FABLE: NEW APPROACHES TO SPANISH AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES*

DIALOGUE WITH FERNANDO GÓMEZ LUNA

ALBERTO AÑÓN LARA ÁLVARO MARTÍNEZ SÁNCHEZ NOELIA OJEDA MUÑOZ

Fernando Gómez Luna (b. Córdoba. 1981) is one of the most promising young artists on the Andalusian art scene today. Although his work as a filmmaker is the main reason for this interview. it is important to note that his creative output has not been limited exclusively to audiovisual productions. In addition to participating in the production and direction of numerous feature films. over the course of his career his personal interests have led him to explore other forms of artistic expression, such as poetry. This has allowed him to engage in a complex process of experimentation that has resulted in works such as Mi rostro es de brea, mi alma es viscosa [My Face is Made of Tar, My Soul Is Viscous], a fascinating videopoem whose extraordinary aesthetic qualities earned it the prize in the local category at the 1st Cosmopoética International Videopoetry Competition in Córdoba in 2010. Moreover, his striking artistic sensibility has led him to combine his career as a creator with the development and coordination of cultural projects such as Suroscopia (2011-2018) and UCOpoética (2012-2018).

While taking into account his long career as an artist and cultural manager, this interview is concerned with the interest aroused by his latest work as a filmmaker, El rastro firme [The Firm Trail] (2022). In this film, which can be described as what is popularly known as an agrarian documentary, Fernando Gómez Luna tells a story with a clear message aimed at highlighting the value of the flora and fauna of the Andalusian countryside. The film's homodiegetic narrator recounts the tale of the Marquis of Altarriva's obsessive interest in an Iberian lynx that has been given the name of Larus. In this way, the empirical reality of the documentary footage merges with a different reality that is completely fictionalized. Making use of various aesthetic and formal strategies, the director presents the spectator with his view of the dire conditions of Andalusia's rural environment resulting from the overexploitation of its farmland, among many other issues.

Given the scholarly interest that the depiction of the rural world has stirred up in recent years, *El rastro firme* stands as a particularly relevant film of recent times as it effectively connects with the

tradition of the agrarian documentary, which is an extensively developed genre in Spain. It is worth noting that the intertextual references to the filmography of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar in part of the film attest to this fact, as does the aesthetic relationship that some of its images maintain specifically with his documentary España se prepara [Spain Gets Ready] (1949). However, by shifting back and forth between reality and fiction. Fernando Gómez Luna's film constitutes a substantial departure from the usually propagandistic and even indoctrinating nature of the de Villa-Alcázar documentaries promoted by the Franco regime. Therefore, although it never loses the pedagogical component also present in much of the documentary production of the Marquis, El rastro firme offers us an open window which, by using formal and discursive mechanisms typical of fiction, invites us to reflect on the problems resulting from the *latifundia* in Andalusia. In the following interview, intended as a starting point for an exploration of his filmography, we attempt to unpack the narrative and formal procedures used by Fernando Gómez Luna in this agrarian documentary that makes the motif of the Iberian lynx its true protagonist.

NOTES

* This interview was conducted in the context of the Agrarian Documentaries and Nationalities: A Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1970) research project, supported by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (Reference PID2019-105462GB-I00).

Figure I. Fernando Gómez Luna, filmmaker of El rastro firme (2022)



Figure 2. The use of drawings as a formal aesthetic strategy in the documentary





Figure 3. The archive as a means of research on the lynx

We would like to begin by discussing some aspects of your academic training and career. We know that in addition to having studied audiovisual communication, you hold a master's degree in creative documentary filmmaking from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, and that since you completed your studies, you have participated in numerous projects that have usually been based on the use of documentary footage. However, we wondered what led you to make a film like *El rastro firme*. Had you been interested in the rural environment before embarking on the production of this documentary?

I have never really had a specific interest in this subject, but the context I live in is markedly rural. When you live in a place, you try to get to know it better. The province of Córdoba, and the autonomous community of Andalusia, is a place whose economy and society depend hugely on agriculture and livestock breeding. My interest in making this film was to try to understand the phenomenon of latifundismo in Andalusia and its impact on the landscape. I have always been aware of latifundia, as my grandmother had a small field near La Carlota. When I used to go there with my family, I would look at the mounds and the wide-open spaces of those fields. From the car, driving along the Cuesta del Espino, I would imagine myself walking across those places.

As you yourself indicate, one of the main objectives of this documentary is to portray the problem of *latifundismo* in Andalusia, but from a different perspective, without turning it into a story of the peasant struggle. With this in mind, what were your motivations for making this film about the rural world?

When I started working on the project, I was curious about some questions related to Andalusian identity, based on an interest in how Andalusia differentiates itself from the rest of Spain. However, once I got working and researching, this changed, as it was no longer a question of being attracted to

Andalusia as a political concept, but of getting to know the region better from a geographical point of view, based on the relationship I have had with the landscape since I was a child. When I started studying the phenomenon of latifundismo, I saw that there were conflicting positions on the subject. In the geography I sensed a more objective way forward that was also consistent with my way of understanding life. Latifundismo is an issue that has been resolved politically in a way that is not very satisfactory for the defence of workers' rights, but I think it is a very complex issue and one that not even the political left, which has been in government in Andalusia for forty years, has been able to tackle. I could identify my perspective in the books by the geographer Antonio López Ontiveros on the colonisation of the land, or in his monumental Geografía de Andalucía (1998). López Ontiveros had a conservationist vision that was not linked to the traditional advocacy for the rural world.

We would also like to explore how this supposed neutrality of the discourse fits in with the tale of the Marquis, which is told by a peasant woman. We find a certain contradiction there because we see a discourse that seeks to lay blame for what is happening in rural Andalusia, but it is formulated from a particular point of view, i.e., the landowner's. Thus, on the one hand, there is one part that is more tied to reality, while on the other is the fictional part of the story. In other words, there is a proposition of objectivity, but there is also criticism.

The criticism is there because of the conservationist discourse, which is the *political* stance of the film. In his quest to return to the origins, the Marquis goes against his own interests and those of his class. He blames his own people for the excessive presence of olive trees. It is a fact that the entire Andalusian countryside is plagued by olive trees, which are destroying the region's biodiversity and influencing existing crops that used to enrich the

landscape. This also affects animal species that inhabit this region. This is the political discourse of the film. I understand that there is a contradiction in this, although perhaps it is a consequence of how I feel about it, as I tend to associate politics with matters related to political parties or trade unions, and because I didn't approach this project with an activist intention in the traditional sense of rural workers' protest. The idea has more to do with showing the different uses that can be made of the countryside.

We would like to emphasise this precise detail of the narrative voice used in the film, as it belongs to a peasant woman, and so she is the one who presents the story to the spectator, making her an indisputable protagonist. Does the fact that the story is told by a peasant woman influence the construction and perception of the film? Why did you make this choice? What could she contribute?

From the beginning I had the idea that the film would be told by a storyteller, because she was a metaphor for the land, for Andalusia. We didn't want to give her the quality of a storyteller; instead, we wanted to integrate her into the story as a character who has lived what she is telling. As another layer of the landscape. The estate where the story is set is dominated by men. A female presence creates a contrast that fits in with the singular nature of the story of the Marquis himself. whose existence is a contradiction in terms of the functioning of aristocratic houses, which seek to preserve what they hold. What this man proposes, however, is the suicide of his human lineage, which is replaced by the lineage of the lynx. In the context of this singularity, as I have pointed out, the presence of a female narrator heightened the sensation of witnessing a different narrative about the countryside.

On this point, although you point out that you were always seeking to avoid the typical story

of the peasant struggle, several moments in the documentary bring to light the historical problem of the Andalusian *latifundium* and the overexploitation of the land. Among many others, there is one particularly striking shot that serves as a visual metaphor, showing olives falling into the back of a lorry while we hear the sound a slot machine. Do you think it would have been necessary to focus more on this type of issue and to disassociate yourself from the mythical story you present through the figure of the lynx?

I don't think that taking a view based on a dichotomy of good guys and bad guys would have served the creative purpose of the film. My approach to this rural reality is similar to a geographer's. Geography takes confirmed facts into account. This does not conflict with the fact that as a filmmaker I avoid filming with preconceived ideas or with the aim of validating a particular ideology. Indeed, the shot of the olives has an ironic touch because of the use of music composed by Juan López López. No one can deny that the Andalusian countryside is becoming a reticulated landscape of olive groves, in the interests of maximum economic profitability. The film sets up the extractive and the eulogistic relationships with nature in opposition to one another. It is conservationist with regard to the landscape, as there is a tendency to return to the origin of everything, to purity, to the fable. The mythical story is the consequence in my imagination of any knowledge I have been able to acquire by studying and relating to that environment.

We would also like to delve into the mythical vein of your film. In Spanish cinema, thanks to directors such as Víctor Erice, we have examples that show a marked interest in the construction of metaphor, in symbolism and even in the act of narrating, i.e., in the existence of an awareness of the narration itself. Is this true of you, and do you think your film is connected to this vein?

Ever since I was a child, I have had an interest in fantasy and fable. And, at the same time, I think of cinema as a means of exploring reality. With varying degrees of success, El rastro firme brings these two elements together. I like to feel that what I'm watching may refer to something else, that what I'm looking at contains meanings that go beyond the literal. This is the basis of the mythical vein because when I decided to construct a fable to tell the story of a rural estate today, I researched the mythical dimension of the lynx. To do this, I drew on Caballero Bonald's vision of the lynx, not so much in his novel Ágata ojo de gato (1974) as in a poem titled Tótem, in which he describes the magical qualities of the lynx. One of these is the ability to travel in time, hence the inclusion of this idea.

Continuing with the mythical vein of the film, embodied in the figure of the lynx, why did you choose time travel, when you could have explored other aspects in all the literature and symbolism constructed around this emblematic species? Do you think it is a way of expressing the changes that have been taking place to the climate and the landscape for several decades now?

The lynx's time travelling and its return to the origins is the way of finding the pure state of the Cotomonte before humans changed the landscape. I think the film speaks of these changes in its own way. On another level, time travel is what allows us to learn, through the Marquis of Altarriva's writing, about the events that took place in the Guadalquivir Valley, and therefore in Andalusia. In the process of creating the story, after my numerous visits to the estate, I learned that prehistoric caves have been found there, as well as coins from Roman times (the Via Augusta passed through there) and the ruins of Kant-Hisn Castle, which appear on several occasions in the film. Knowing the space, knowing about the presence of the lynx in the place and studying its symbolism, helped me to construct a fable of genealogy

where time is diluted through the many holes that populate the area, be they caves, burkers, burrows or water channels.

We see that the film includes the song *España* se prepara by the composer Jesús García Leoz, taken from the documentary of the same name by the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar (1949). To what extent do you think that his agrarian documentaries informed the whole creative process of *El rastro firme*?

There is a clear identification with the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar. He made films, while in the case of the Marquis in the film they are photographs, but the reference is obvious. The dance of the tractors and the song used comes from the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar's film España se prepara (1949). In fact, some sequences of the documentary, when the trees are uprooted, or the images of the tractors themselves, evoke his films. The Marquis of Villa-Alcázar's filmography was important because it allowed me to get to know an aristocrat and agricultural engineer's way of looking at the countryside. He is someone who represents the human profile of a latifundium manager. The testimony he left in his films on agricultural work was very valuable and certainly original, and it inspired me to record what happened on the estate. The inclusion of Jesús García Leoz's song is therefore a small tribute to his work.

On the other hand, regarding the creative process of the film, we would like to know whether you had planned to film a particular species of flora or fauna, one that had special relevance or that you wanted to pay more attention to, when you decided to make this film.

I started filming in the summer of 2016 and finished in May 2019. When I decided to make the film, I didn't begin with a clear intention to film olive trees or the wildlife. I had a permit to work on that estate. The people in charge of it allowed me access, and from there I began a process of ge-

tting to know the estate. The process consisted of immersing myself in the space little by little, and getting to know the crops that were there, among other things. In fact, the apricot trees that are uprooted at the end of the film were in all their splendour in 2016, and in August 2017 they decided to remove them to plant olive trees. In a way, I allowed myself to be carried away by what was happening as I worked to construct the fictional plot of the film.

We can see a lot of images of the estate in the film, of the different crops and of the fauna there, but we believe that there must have been many more that could not be included due to the limitations of the filming or the story. In this regard, what was the editing process like?

I started editing with a co-editor. She edited some sequences, and I edited others. Later, I worked with another editor from the production company who worked with me in the final stage of the film. It was a laborious process because there was a lot of footage that was left out. When I shot them and saw them in the editing room, there were a lot of shots that seemed to be essential, but in the editing, it doesn't always fit what you would like it to. The narrative of the film has its demands, and you have to make compromises.



Figure 4. Inclusion of native fauna

Turning now to other aesthetic questions, throughout the documentary, there is a notable interest in prioritising a time-image, i.e., in thickening the story through the use of formal mechanisms such as static shots (many of which are full shots) so that life—in this case rural life—can unfold in front of the camera and reveal a truth, in one way or another. Moreover, this is clearly associated with tedium, since the pace of the film slows down. What were you aiming to achieve with this? To recreate the cadence of rural life through the slowness of the passage of time?

The pacing of the film is subject to the spaces; it has a spatial logic. That is why I have pointed out that the approach is geographical. It is obvious that in the rural world time is less regulated than it is in the urban world, and this perhaps explains the slowness conveyed by the film, which requires unhurried viewing, surrendering to the poetic expression of each shot. The time of the film is the time of Aion, not of Chronos.

As you say, in this unhurried viewing, we are struck by the technical quality of the shots of the animals. How were they made? Were they all shot for the film or were some of them recycled shots?

The close-up shots of the fauna were taken by Daniel, who plays the role of the Marquis. Daniel is a bichero, a person who goes to the countryside to take shots of wild animals. He provided me with footage of animals in that region and we selected the most interesting. I also accompanied him, and we spent many hours waiting, even in the early hours of the morning, in keeping with the time when the animals usually come out. On the other hand, the black-and-white images are from camera traps in the region and were provided to us by the Lynx Recovery Plan.

Another point of interest, in our opinion, is the sound. In the film, almost everything is ambient sound, except for the scene where we hear the song taken from *España se prepara*. However,

we find the incorporation of electronic music in some scenes particularly interesting.

I am not meticulous when it comes to deciding on music or how to use it. If you know how to integrate it well, I think you can get good results. Except for España se prepara, which is more extradiegetic, I think the electronic music is well integrated. It gives you something that physical instruments don't, and these could make the music clash with what you're seeing. Juan—whose artistic and musical career I'm familiar with—came with me to the filming of some sequences, and as we had discussed that he was going to do the post-production sound, I proposed that he compose something. He sent me some cuts, I made some changes, like drawing out the melody more, and we worked on that material and composed the soundtrack. One of the aspects of the film I am most satisfied with is how the soundtrack came out.

In relation to the previous question, we read in an interview with the sound editor Juan López López, who commented on the use of this music: "It works as an allegory of the relentless and inevitable passing of time, moving between nostalgia and optimism. A soundtrack to stop being a slave to time." But to what extent do you think it is possible to speak of optimism with the ending offered?

The optimism is that life goes on and nature will continue, with or without us. Like when at the end of the film the lynxes appear above the bunker. The cycle of the year shows us that things are born, grow, die... and are born again. This is how nature works and therein lies its mystery.

Leaving aside the creative issues of the film now and focusing on the logistics, from the point of view of financing and subsidies, how does a first-time director get going? Do they have any kind of support?

I applied three times for grants offered by the Andalusian regional government. In the first two,

due to my inexperience, I made some administrative errors. The third year I got the grant, but claiming the expenses is complicated. You make an investment before the call for applications, but you can only claim expenses you incurred immediately before the determination, so that money is not recovered. It is a bureaucratic process that can force you to redo the budget several times to meet the administration's requirements. The budget I presented to the Andalusian government was much lower than what the film actually cost. As the grant was given in 2019, I could only claim expenses from that year until 2022. And work on the film, as happens with this kind of project, started much earlier, in 2016. Apart from that, I haven't had any other sponsors; everything has been financed with my own funds and the grant from the Andalusian government.

Regarding distribution, when the documentary is released on the circuits where it is going to be screened, do you recover any costs?

It always depends on the festival. Of the festivals we've been at, only one has paid us for the screening rights. You could say that I've done everything out of love for art, and I understand that few people can afford to make a living from filmmaking. The interesting thing is to be able to create. Afterwards, if some kind of compensation comes your way, that's great.

Figure 5. Social realism in the documentary





Figure 6. Conversations between livestock breeders in the documentary

Making films is a truly complex task in Spain, but making a documentary with such a markedly rural thematic focus is even more so. Could you explain what the process was to obtain funding? Do you think that the boom in rural cinema in the last two years, with such outstanding examples as Alcarràs, As Bestas and Libertad, has helped producers take a greater interest in these projects? Do you think that these themes about the situation in rural areas in Spain help viewers empathize with a situation which, although it may seem far away, really has devastating consequences in their daily lives?

The film was self-produced—with the support of Omen Cinema—and the financing came from my personal savings and a small grant of just over 3,000 euros that I obtained from the Andalusian government. My impression is that anyone starting out will find it difficult to get funding. In Andalusia, moreover, the system of grants for film production is not as developed as in other autonomous communities such as Galicia or Catalonia. My presence in this context is very recent, with two self-produced films, the first one co-directed with the Galician filmmaker César Souto. Fortu-

nately, both had premieres at festivals (*Interregno* at the Jihlava Festival and *El rastro firme* at the Alcances Festival). I don't know if producers tend to be more interested in these projects. If it is profitable for them, they certainly would.

The documentary shows a rural estate that only a few decades ago enjoyed an age of splendour based on a variety of crops (cereals, tubers, fruit trees, etc.) and livestock of all kinds, as well as hunting and the exploitation of a quarry. Today, its survival is dependent on a mechanised production model that is gradually dispensing with manual labour. El rastro firme contains footage that conveys the sensation of bearing witness to a world in decline. I'm thinking of shots like the high-speed train running down a track that crosses the estate, sequences like the harvesting of maize, the repairing of the roofs of the old houses where the workers live, the uprooting of the apricot trees, the burning of the remains of the olive trees... I haven't sought to raise awareness about current issues. What seems clear is that changes are occurring on the planet and that requires us to get involved because we need to leave behind something valuable for the next generations.

Your film seems to effectively reconnect with that old dream of social realism that Spanish cinema has been aspiring to for a long time. It is also a realism that can be appreciated in the camera itself, which privileges the selection of material shots that reveals the farmland through its textures. Do you think that your film opens up a new space for conceiving of the rural world? Do you feel that you have managed to expose a reality that does not usually have a place in the commercial circuits of our country?

My intention was to get away from the typical vision of the land problem in Andalusia. To explain this issue from a different place—in this case, the controversial *latifundium*. The idea was to tell the story of an aristocrat and reveal to the viewer a new way of looking at and understanding the Andalusian countryside with the mythical tale as a guide. This can prompt us to ask ourselves whether what we take for granted actually contains another meaning.

With respect to the rural reality and its exposure on commercial circuits, in a way, I think so. I have the satisfaction of having been able to make the film I wanted, with the limitations of my experience and my budget, on a subject that I have studied.

Considering the enormous commercial success that rural cinema has been having in recent years, what do you think the future holds for agrarian documentaries in Spain?

There is a growing interest in returning to the rural environment in my generation and in later generations. The idea of returning to our origins and *resetting* is part of the spirit of the times. It is an idea that has been reinforced since the CO-VID-19 pandemic. This represents an interesting foundation for a greater interest in creating works that address this theme.

To conclude, do you plan to continue exploring this aspect of the rural world?

Just now, I have made what seems to be a short film in Cabra (a municipality in Córdoba province), but focusing more on the urban than the rural world. In addition, I am working on another feature film project that does have a link with the rural world, which is set in a place affected by mining.



Figure 7. Importance of the landscape as a protagonist in the documentary

FROM SOCIAL REALISM TO FILMIC FABLE: NEW APPROACHES TO SPANISH AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARIES. DIALOGUE WITH FERNANDO GÓMEZ LUNA

Abstract

The Spanish agrarian documentary, represented by directors as important as José Neches or the Marquis of Villa Alcázar, far from being exhausted, is a way of creation for directors today. This is the case of the documentary *El rastro firme* (Fernando Gómez Luna, 2022) in which the aesthetic-narrative approaches of the agrarian documentary tradition are brought into play, although at the same time they are updated through the introduction of greater social realism or the path of myth, so present in Erice's filmography. Thus, through the interview with the director, the aim is to address the way the film is made, along with the approach to the context of production and post-production of it.

Key words

Social Realism; Agrarian Documentary; *El rastro firme*; Fernando Gómez Luna; Spanish Cinema.

Authors

Alberto Añón Lara holds a PhD in heritage and a degree in art history from Universidad de Córdoba. He is the author of the monograph *La metáfora zombi en el cine y la ficción televisiva* (UCOPress, 2023). His research focuses on the critical reception of classic horror cinema in US and Spanish film magazines in the 1930s, and most recently on the rural/urban dialectic in films of the genre, as a member of the HITEAC (History, Theory and Analysis of Cinema) research group. Contact: 192anlaa@uco.es

Álvaro Martínez Sánchez holds a degree in film and culture with an Extraordinary Degree Award from Universidad de Córdoba (2017-2021), and a master's degree in cinematography from the same institution, for which he also obtained an Extraordinary Master's Award. He currently has a FPU predoctoral contract with Universidad de Córdoba, attached to the Department of Art History, Archaeology and Music, where he is working on a doctoral thesis on the representation of the female universe in Pilar Miró's films and television series. He pursues his research as a member of the HITEAC (History, Theory and Analysis of Cinema) research group. Contact: 172ma-saa@uco.es

DEL REALISMO SOCIAL A LA FÁBULA FÍLMICA. NUEVOS PLANTEAMIENTOS DEL DOCUMENTAL AGRARIO ESPAÑOL. DIÁLOGO CON FERNANDO GÓMEZ LUNA

Resumen

El documental agrario español, representado por directores de la talla de José Neches o el Marqués de Villa-Alcázar, lejos de agotarse, supone una vía de creación para los directores en la actualidad. Es el caso del documental El rastro firme (Fernando Gómez Luna, 2022) en el que se ponen en juego los planteamientos estético-narrativos de la tradición documentalista agraria, aunque a su vez se actualizan mediante la introducción de un mayor realismo social o de la vía del mito tan presente en la filmografía ericiana. Así, mediante la entrevista al director, se pretende abordar la forma de hacer la película, junto con el acercamiento al contexto de producción y posproducción de esta.

Palabras clave

Realismo social; documental agrario; *El rastro firme*; Fernando Gómez Luna; cine español.

Autores

Alberto Añón Lara es doctor en Patrimonio y licenciado en Historia del Arte por la Universidad de Córdoba. Es autor de la monografía La metáfora zombi en el cine y la ficción televisiva (UCOPress, 2023). Desarrolla su actividad investigadora en torno a la recepción crítica del cine de terror clásico en las revistas cinematográficas, tanto estadounidenses como españolas, de la década de los años treinta. Asimismo, centra su investigación más reciente en la dialéctica rural/ urbano dentro de las películas del género, actividad que desarrolla en el marco del grupo de investigación HITEAC (Historia, Teoría y Análisis del Cine). Contacto: 192anlaa@uco.es

Álvaro Martínez Sánchez es graduado en Cine y Cultura por la Universidad de Córdoba (2017-2021) con Premio Extraordinario de Grado y cuenta con un Máster en Cinematografía por la misma institución por el que obtuvo también Premio Extraordinario de Máster. Actualmente tiene un contrato predoctoral FPU en la Universidad de Córdoba, adscrito al departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música a través del cual elabora una tesis doctoral sobre la representación del universo femenino en el cine y las series televisivas de Pilar Miró. Desarrolla su investigación dentro del grupo de investigación HITEAC (Historia, Teoría y Análisis del cine). Contacto: 172masaa@uco.es

Noelia Ojeda Muñoz holds a degree in art history and a master's degree in cinematography, both from Universidad de Córdoba. She currently has a FPU contract with the Department of Art History, Archaeology and Music at Universidad de Córdoba. Her lines of research focus on gender studies applied to 1930s Spanish cinema and other cultural products. She pursues her research as a member of the HITEAC (History, Theory and Analysis of Cinema) research group, which has resulted in contributions to high-impact journals and collective works for recognized publishers. Contact: 162ojmun@uco.es

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Noelia Ojeda Muñoz es graduada en Historia del Arte por la Universidad de Córdoba y ha cursado un Máster en Cinematografía en dicha institución. Actualmente disfruta de un contrato FPU en el Departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música (Universidad de Córdoba). Sus líneas de investigación se centran en los Estudios de Género aplicados al cine español de los años treinta y a otros productos culturales. Desarrolla sus investigaciones en el marco del grupo de investigación HITEAC (Historia, Teoría y Análisis del Cine), y fruto de ellas son sus contribuciones en revistas de impacto y en obras colectivas en editoriales reconocidas. Contacto: l62ojmun@uco.es

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(DIS)AGREEMENTS

THE ARCHIVE AND THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY MEMORY

introduction

Fernando Luque Gutiérrez

discussion

Valeria Camporesi Beatriz Contreras Luz Gutiérrez Rubén Justo

conclusion

Fernando Luque Gutiérrez

I introduction

FERNANDO LUQUE GUTIÉRREZ

Originally conceived as a primarily functional tool integrated into the agricultural reform and rural modernisation projects and initiatives promoted by the competent authorities since the beginning of the last century, the most basic definition of the agrarian documentary is in fact usually summarised in terms of the informative. propagandistic and above all pedagogical usefulness that would justify the cost and objective of its production by public administrations (Poyato Sánchez, 2018). This practical purpose has resulted in a corpus composed mostly of short or medium-length films subordinated to the transmission of technical, scientific, mechanical. economic, medical, or any other theoretical and practical knowledge disseminated among the rural population—farmers, stockbreeders and other professionals in the sector-screened in a clearly educational context.

However, this causal definition should not lead us to oversimplify the richness of the agrarian documentary understood as a creative movement that transcends national boundaries, where the historical transformations of the modes of production and lifestyles of the peasant societies documented in its images all converge, together with the evolution of the formal, aesthetic and semantic systems it mobilises in the fulfilment of its functions. It is, in short, a filmic form that establi-

shes a productive, intricate network of expressive redirections through contact with the different dominant systems in the general history of documentary film (with which it is primarily intertwined due to its ontological condition), but also with other styles that can be described as belonging to the more canonical codes of narrative fiction cinema or associated with avant-garde formalism and experimentation, in a synthesis that underscores the extraordinary malleability that characterises this apparently humble breed of documentary (Gómez, 2015).

The unquestionable historical, anthropological, sociological and technical value of these filmic documents that form an inalienable part of our heritage, is complemented by other essentially cinematographic values that are not always widely recognised as these films exist in most cases on the fringes of the dominant commercial distribution circuits, doomed to invisibility once their useful life as material for internal consumption or very limited distribution is over, rendering them at constant risk of being consigned to oblivion.

Protecting this accumulated memory of filmic documents against such an existential threat are the institutions responsible for safeguarding it. These are the archives maintained by the ministries of agriculture, recognised historical promoters of agrarian documentary filmmaking, who

(DIS)AGREEMENTS

are particularly important for their invaluable work in retrieving and storing a cinematic heritage that would otherwise be wiped out by the immediacy and voracity of the medium.

In the case of Spain, this role is fulfilled by the Central Archive attached to the current Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA), the historical guarantor of the conservation of the abundant filmography created over time by the different film services that have formed part of the ministry.

Following the first educational films produced by the General Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry at the end of the 1920s and the subsequent Central Agricultural Cinematography Service of the Spanish Republic, the ministry's collection grew exponentially during the Franco regime, thanks to the prolific activity of the Agricultural Extension Service (SEA) and other agencies operating in the sector, such as the National Institute of Colonisation, the National Institute for the Conservation of Nature and the National Land Consolidation Service. The SEA's various educational projects, advertising campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness about the socioeconomic value of the Spanish countryside essentially constitute the origin of the audiovisual productions made by the technical and creative teams employed by the service, including its most emblematic filmmakers. Notable among these are the pioneers Pascual Carrión and Carlos Velo, as well as the uniquely Francoist examples of Jesús Francisco González de la Riva (better known by his noble title of Marquis of Villa-Alcázar) and José Neches,1 among many others effectively responsible for developing a cinematographic and didactic model of outstanding formal and intertextual value. With the transition to democracy and the first signs of the globalisation and digitalisation processes of recent decades, this canonical model would be forced to readapt once again to new modes of creation and new needs to be met (Camarero Rioja, 2014: 36-38).

Through its "Historical" and "Modern" catalogues, the Archive and Media Library of the Ministry of Agriculture, with the invaluable collaboration of the Filmoteca Española in the restoration, conservation and dissemination of the collection, connects with a crucial sample of the development of this cinematographic mode in Spain throughout the different socio-political and creative stages that shaped its constant evolution over time, thus standing out as a key centre of reference for the retrieval and analysis of film footage that is as specific as it is open to possible disciplinary interests.

Bearing in mind that one of the main objectives of this monograph is to contribute as much as possible to making this type of agrarian and rural cinema visible, it is clear that the first step in this respect would be based on direct contact with the available material. In this sense, the Archive as an institution, in the context of contemporary law, is a key pillar of any structure designed to safeguard our documentary memory.

Thus, following the research presented in the monographic dossier and the interesting panorama it offers of the modes, forms and other parameters of the rural documentary subject to academic study, this (Dis)Agreements section, dedicated to dialogue and critical reflection, focuses on the indispensable archival work that makes access to this filmic and audiovisual legacy possible in the first place, giving a voice to the professionals responsible for its technical and administrative management.

To this end, we met with members of the Archive and Library Area of the Studies and Publications Division at the Ministry of Agriculture: Beatriz Contreras (Head of the Area), Luz Gutiérrez (Head of the Media Library and Photo Library Section) and Rubén Justo (Head of the Technical Section), as well as the Director of the Filmoteca Española (Spanish Film Library), Valeria Camporesi, to discuss the main functions and objectives of archives today, and especially the functioning

and services that these institutions provide to the user, in a historical context in which the potential dehumanisation of electronic administration and the loss of public credibility due to digital simulation, pose important challenges for the immediate future.²

NOTES

- * This work has been carried out in the context of the research project Agricultural documentaries and nationalities: comparative study of the productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979) of the State Programme for the Promotion of Knowledge Generation and Scientific and Technological Strengthening of the R&D&I System and the State Programme for R&D&I oriented towards the challenges of society of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Ref. PID2019-105462GB-I00). Call 2019. PI1: Ana Melendo; PI2: Pedro Poyato.
- 1. The cases of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches are especially significant in terms of the results of the heritage recovery and restoration work carried out by the Archive and the Media Library of the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the Filmoteca Española and researchers such as Pedro Poyato and Ana Melendo of Universidad de Córdoba and Agustín Gómez of Universidad de Málaga, among others. This joint work facilitated the production of the digital DVD edition of the complete filmographies of these filmmaker-engineers, under the title Obra cinematográfica 1934-1966. El Marqués de Villa Alcázar, Serie Fondo Documental Histórico Cinematográfica, nº 11 (2015) and Obra cinematográfica 1945-1976. José Neches Nicolás. Serie Fondo Documental Histórico Cinematográfica, nº 12 (2016).
- 2. The conversation with Beatriz Contreras, Luz Gutiérrez and Rubén Justo from the Archive and Library Area of the Ministry of Agriculture took place in May 2023 via video conference. The exchange with Valeria Camporesi took place during July 2023. The discussions were transcribed by Fernando Luque Gutiérrez and organised thematically.

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discussion **PERSPECTIVES**

I. As experienced managers of documentary archives and the heritage they contain, could you summarise the main objectives and functions of the Archive and Library Area of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA)?

Beatriz Contreras

First of all, as a unit integrated into the Archives System of the Spanish national government, we have the responsibilities of a memory centre that has to ensure the transparency of the administration in a democratic system based on the rule of law, so that all its activity is exposed to public scrutiny. This would be the biggest differential feature of archives in the modern contemporary age. In the past, they were restricted to the conservation and safekeeping of documents related exclusively to the activities of the ruling classes, but this would change with the creation of the first public registers during the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, thus beginning the long process that has led us to the current concept, based on the inalienable public function that extends this right to all citizens. In this sense, we always aim to be actively transparent with all the documents we manage, so that users can view

and thus evaluate what the authorities are doing in the fulfilment of their duties.

In the specific context of this department of the Ministry of Agriculture, the archive system is established by a ministerial order that grants it the coordination and management of the documentary material being safeguarded. We also offer technical advice to the rest of the units on the procedures for dealing with the different types of documents that they may handle in the administrative phase, and once this first duty has been fulfilled, we try to ensure the transfer of all these materials to the Central Archive, as it is the guarantor of the conservation and dissemination of this important documentary heritage for the public.

However, sometimes it is difficult to ensure full awareness of the fact that the documents have a much longer journey than the one determined by the administrative management phase, that in fact they are also useful after the ordinary proce-



Los yunteros de Extremadura (Marqués de Villa-Alcázar, 1936)

dure has been completed. We must not forget that pursuant to the Heritage Law, all publicly owned documents are part of the documentary heritage, and as such they are protected according to a meticulously regulated procedure, whereby the possibility of their elimination can only be decided by the Ministry's Higher Qualification Commission (Comisión Superior Calificadora), which is ultimately responsible for the final verdict on such questions. When it is a parchment or other document that may stand out for its age or historical and artistic value, it is usually quite easily accepted that it must be preserved and protected, but this is not always the case with a simple expenditure file, for example, or even with other photographic or audiovisual materials related to an ordinary action. From our perspective, it is important to stress that every public document must be preserved and

protected for present and future public scrutiny, and in this sense the work of raising awareness is of fundamental importance.

2. With regard to the task of communication and dissemination, the process of digitizing archival collections has facilitated public access to a heritage of incalculable value. In this sense, the abundant film and audiovisual material managed by the MAPA has benefited especially from an extraordinary degree of visibility for a type of production whose specific nature usually places it outside the mainstream film distribution circuits. But before delving into more specific aspects, what type of film and audiovisual material does the Ministry's Media Library manage? What are the main forms of action taken by the Archive and Library Area with respect to this material?

Luz Gutiérrez

First of all, it is important to mention that this is extremely diverse material, as the Ministry's established tradition of using the graphic media at its disposal as a way of documenting its activity in the different rural sectors under its responsibility has resulted in a collection summarising the actions historically taken by political leaders and experts during the evolution of the different rural sectors under their responsibility.

Thanks to this previous work, today we have more than 500 film documents in various physical formats that include the usual 16 and 35 mm, Betacam, Super-8 and VHS formats. It is material of a markedly agricultural nature, made up of didactic pieces, reports and documentaries on the rural world that are currently kept at the Filmoteca Española's Conservation and Restoration Centre. There are also more recent productions, made in the last few years for the national and in-

ternational campaigns sponsored by the Ministry, which have come to us in different digital formats that are added to the collection.

In addition, together with the film and audiovisual material, we also manage a repository of photographs with more than 100,000 images covering a very long time period, even including examples on glass plates, nearly all of which have been digitized in recent years.

Beatriz Contreras

As for the means of dissemination, although occasional exhibitions are held in collaboration with other institutions, as well as appearances in the press or in publications like the one where this discussion will be published, our main efforts are currently focused on the exhaustive cataloguing of all the material that we actually have. There is still a lot of raw material that needs to be identified and catalogued in a way that facilitates user searches and orientation. Our work is based on the maxim that to disseminate the available collections effectively, you have to work a lot with them first, and at the moment we are in that phase, developing the means at our disposal to be able to give the right level of visibility to collections that are also quite specific thematically speaking, as they are related to the action of a ministry that is highly specialised in the rural sector, and they constitute a rich heritage that must be preserved and promoted.

Rubén Justo

I think that in the cataloguing process that we are currently in the middle of, trying to give more order to the documentary collections, we also face the same problem that Beatriz referred to earlier. As is the case with a simple expenditure file, it is often difficult to make people understand the need to preserve the abundant photographic or audiovisual material that gets used occasionally as part of a ministerial initiative, forming part of some report or activity. This causes it to pile

up rather carelessly until finally we are asked to intervene to save all that documentary material from destruction, which further complicates the process, as we are then faced with a large number of usually unidentified images that we have to locate, label and systematise so that they can be made available to the public.

Beatriz Contreras

Rubén's point here is especially relevant. At a time when so many audiovisual or other types of productions are being made, forming part of the many media campaigns in ministries, departments or other public institutions and agencies, material is constantly being generated that often ends up forgotten in a box somewhere due to the sense of immediacy that defines information and our lifestyles today. In this sense, one of our main forms of action would be to retrieve all this documentary material, in any format, so that it can be suitably archived and thus continue to feed the collection with the most recent productions.

Our work is also very diverse in this respect, as we are not limited simply to the dissemination of the collections we already have, but also to the continued safeguarding of new documentary material being produced by the Ministry and its partner agencies, whether for advertising, information or training campaigns, events and activities that fall within their purview, and thus ensure that tomorrow we can preserve a complete, functional archive compiling all the stages and materials possible.

As we said, at this time our work is focused mainly on cataloguing the extensive material we have at our disposal and adapting it to an index of subjects and descriptors with the aim of designing a document search and retrieval system that meets the needs of today's users, whose philosophy has changed radically with the technological and digital advances, as is obvious. The traditional physical visit, which facilitated in-person guidance by the experts in their service to users,

has now been replaced by an online visit, where users are sitting in front of a screen, without any human element of mediation to guide them in their search and help them identify the precise pathway in order to find what they're looking for, or to suggest related documents that they may not have been aware of.

This is why the search criteria have to be adjusted as precisely as possible. More foresight is needed than ever before, and the system for labelling and describing the items catalogued has to be adapted so that the archive continues to fulfil the basic function of intermediation with the public.

3. In the film production of the Ministry of Agriculture over its extensive history, agrarian documentaries with a pedagogical aim have traditionally stood out for their practical function, summed up in the transmission of theoretical and technical knowledge promoted by the rural improvement and modernisation plans historically undertaken by the institution. Proof of this is the extensive work related to the different film services attached to the Ministry of Agriculture, whose creative staff has included illustrious names such as the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches. Now, in view of the new sociocultural context of digital connectivity, how is this didactic function of audiovisual production being tackled by the MAPA?

Rubén Justo

To begin with, the archive's Media Library, with its current name and functions, is something relatively recent. Although initially it did continue to carry out that in-house production work in a way, following in the tradition of the previous film and documentary services historically associated with the Ministry of Agriculture, in reality, it no longer has those exclusive functions in practice. Each unit, according to its specific needs, is directly responsible for hiring an external production company to take care of the production of the graphic and audiovisual material in question.

Although some productions may still have educational or pedagogical objectives, as was the case originally and in the work you mentioned of the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar or José Neches, the most common purposes now are advertising and general dissemination. However, it is true that the context of these films included in the historical collection has changed a lot at all levels. When those filmmakers were active, the Ministry was still the great central agency responsible

for all the agricultural development and training in the country. This pedagogical objective changed completely with the establishment of Spain's autonomous communities, which took over these tasks, thereby decentralising previously national responsibilities: and on the other hand, there was the professionalisation of farming and stockbreeding itself. Today it is the professional training courses or agricultural education centres that are responsible for offering regulated studies for these fields, with an integrated teaching system that no longer has so much need of the audiovisual productions that were once essential for conveying information and knowledge to a rural population that would not have had access to it by any other means.

Beatriz Contreras

Indeed, technological advances have rendered the methods used in the past obsolete. In those days, agricultural extension agents would travel with their teaching material, made up of photographs, slides, films and other resources, to provide on-site

training to farmers and stockbreeders, who would benefit from the practical application of the techniques and knowledge they learned. Today, this is no longer necessary thanks to digital media and platforms that can transfer the techniques and knowledge previously taught in practical training exclusively by the central administration. As a result, ministerial management now targets other needs, although it may still carry out part of its

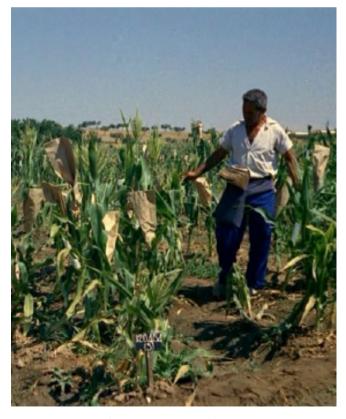
former role through institutional campaigns; for example, to cite a more or less current case, the *Alimentos de España* Spanish food campaign, and other initiatives with significant media impact.

Unfortunately, due to the complications mentioned above, we don't always have immediate documentation of all the materials that are being made by the ministry's different units and departments.

4. The evaluation of this audiovisual heritage can shed light on a type of film production that has traditionally been left out of the proposed inventories and outlines of film historiographies. In this specific case, I am referring to agrarian documentaries produced for practical purposes by a ministry, but this could be extended to other types of films created for scientific, pedagogical, advertising, propagandistic or any other kind of purposes. What place can or should this vast cinematic tradition occupy in the constant rewriting of what we generally call film history?

Valeria Camporesi

As a social historian of visual culture, I have always thought that attention to works inspired by different criteria crucially enriches the narrative we construct of the past. In any given historical period, there are many more points of dialogue between different types of cinema (industrial, auteur, documentary, propaganda, etc.) than is usually recognised. But this can be taken further: the fact that in this case, for example, we are dealing with films with no artistic intention designed for a practical purpose does not imply that they cannot be subjected to a formal analysis that could help us understand their meaning and how they have been constructed. On the contrary, it may even be easier to understand in what sense a film is a construction, and that what is conveyed in images is a discourse about the world, as demonstrated by the articles published in this journal, as well as the many academic publications that have been analysed the materials of the Ministry of Agriculture in recent years.



El cultivo del maíz (José Neches, 1962)

5. From a formal point of view, in the fulfilment of this didactic purpose, agrarian documentaries produced under the auspices of the ministry have evolved in contact with the history of documentary and fiction cinema itself, resulting in an interesting variety of formats and styles. Considering this complexity in terms of its exact definition, what are the main criteria for cataloguing and ordering this type of documentary material? How does the differentiation between the historical and modern contexts affect this?

Rubén Justo

As Beatriz said, what is not described is not found, so our work is focused on preserving the documents, cataloguing them according to their optimal description and ordering them so that they can later be retrieved by the public through this archival service. In this sense, it is important to submit them to a basic and general description that facilitates user searches and access to the archived materials, but it must be borne in mind that users who are ultimately free to study them as they see fit, according to their objectives and particular perspective, whether that be an artistic, historical, sociological or any other kind of perspective.

Archives, libraries, museums and other institutions that perform similar functions, such as film libraries in this case, tend to adopt standardised cataloguing models, with international criteria that establish common guidelines. However, in the specific example of archives, the standard functions as a multilevel descriptor, with groups of works that are organised into collections, sub-collections, series, etc. Normally, the upper level or levels of the collection are described, while the photographic or audiovisual documents that it contains are only differentiated by the references that allow them to be catalogued as part of the set. These are hierarchical classifications that are not necessarily described in great detail at all levels. unlike museums or libraries, which work on the specific object, the book or work of art in question.

In practice, the ideal might be a combination of both methodologies, focusing on the collection as a whole and on the final document, trying to cover all the levels and sublevels that archival collections are organised into, especially graphic and audiovisual collections, where a more detailed description may be more important. It is something that is being corrected little by little, and in recent revisions it has been decided to include more descriptors and subjects to improve this identification and retrieval process. This should help enhance the existing collections, make them much more visible to the public in general, and to the potential analyst and researcher in particular.

Beatriz Contreras

We must not forget that unlike museums or libraries, in archives we understand documentation in basic terms, whereby things have their contextualisation, a serialised nature. What we analyse or study in the first instance is not individual pieces, but documentary series related to the same function or activity, this being the set to be catalogued according to a basic structure. In other words, although there is an increasing number of search criteria, or a greater number of points of access to the information, we as a management unit cannot consider individual criteria, since they fall outside our purview. We simply try to systematise descriptions to make them as functional and objective as possible, in order to ensure access to the users who want to work with the available documentary collections, as ultimately it is their task to contextualise them in a specific field of study or interest.

6. The commendable work of the Archive and Library Area to highlight this heritage and make it accessible has facilitated a remarkable increase in academic studies that focus on agrarian and rural documentaries, as this monographic issue demonstrates. In addition to the traditional media, what other possibilities and services are offered to potential researchers with an interest in this subject? On the other hand, considering the connections that the Ministry's audiovisual production establishes with productions by its European and international counterparts, are there any collaboration and exchange programs with other similar institutions responsible for the management of this cinematic material related to rural documentaries?

Luz Gutiérrez

Currently, all the available material can be viewed both in person and through online platforms, such as YouTube, where several videos and audiovisual materials have been uploaded for internal and external viewers. We are aware of our shortcomings in this regard, and we are working to improve a generic online search system for the two catalogues that can be consulted: documentaries made up to 1981 and those made since, which constitute the historical and modern catalogues under our management. As we have been saying, that would be the main objective for the near future, to be able to provide access to all the digitised collections.

As for the collaborations carried out by area, we have worked with the Reina Sofía Museum and the ICO Foundation Museum, in both cases

with exclusively photographic material. This is in addition to our collaboration with the Filmoteca Española for a possible Spanish film platform with a specific section on these rural productions.

Beatriz Contreras

Within our limitations, this unit is always happy to collaborate on activities that pursue our ultimate function of disseminating a documentary heritage that belongs to all Spaniards, and as such we must try to make people aware of it. We rely on this project together with the Filmoteca Española, with whom we have an agreement for the conservation of delicate material that is beyond our capacity to maintain, and which is now deposited with them. It is important to remember that this collection keeps expanding as we add both newly created productions and material recovered from the past.

7. This very important agreement between the Archive and Library Area of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Filmoteca Española has played a key role in the process of preserving, restoring and promoting the agrarian audiovisual heritage of its documentary collections. From the perspective of the film institution, how is this collaboration valued? What have been the main lines of action of the Film Library in the management of this documentary material?

Valeria Camporesi

The most important point to stress is that this type of collaboration is essential for the effective preservation and promotion of our cinematic and audiovisual heritage. On the one hand, the

Filmoteca Española has facilities, procedures and personnel specialising in everything related to the inspection, cataloguing, and conservation of audiovisual works in any type of photochemical, electronic or digital format. The participation of

a film library that operates according to the criteria and values of the International Federation of Film Archives is essential to guarantee the future of this film heritage. On the other hand, the collaborating institutions, in this case the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, provide the specific knowledge, network of contacts, and the general context that makes the materials meaningful, while also providing the keys to interpreting

them in a way that allows, guides and promotes their dissemination.

In this sense, the example of these documentaries is quite emblematic, although due to the characteristics of the works themselves, the interaction between the two institutions has been defined more by respect for each area of specialisation than by the construction of spaces for joint work.

8. In your opinion, what would be the biggest challenges that archives and their managers have to and will have to face in these times when so-called post-truth, deepfakes and AI are gaining ground?

Beatriz Contreras

Broadly speaking, we identify three major challenges that we will have to keep tackling in the coming years. First, as mentioned earlier, many of our efforts are aimed at enforcing the law, so that all that documentary material to which we do not yet have access is ultimately added to the rich heritage available to the public. A lot of our work is aimed at this, to convey and consolidate the idea that this reuse must be an indisputable fact, as it is aimed at fulfilling an essential right of citizens in a democracy.

Secondly, and no less important, another of the main points of attention is the process of implementing electronic administration. However, this is governed by very strict basic rules that clearly indicate its operation with respect to the case we're discussing here, as well as the inalienable values of respect for the document that ensures its reliability beyond any doubt, in a system of guarantees. Until now, the archives have been considered reliable due to their credibility and guarantees, and these factors must be maintained in this new digital era, so that we can keep trying to ensure the continuity of this reliability.

To achieve this goal, as the ones responsible for safeguarding the documents after their administrative life, we must track them back to their original production to ensure the required traceability and reliability.

Finally, although it may seem contrary to the purpose and interests of this interview, it is necessary to stress another key issue related to the objectives and general operations of archives, and that is that the safeguarded documents are



La intervención del técnico de la Agencia de Extensión Agraria en Las horas de la tierra (José Neches, 1965)

not merely cultural objects. Their value transcends this concept, as they form an essential part of a democratic State governed by the rule of law, where administrations are obliged to be accountable to citizens. The Archive is an essential institution in this sense, and it has an obligation to play an important role in the principle of transpa-

rency on which it is founded. However, in reality we achieve a very limited influence, so the limitation to the purely cultural factor can act to the detriment of this other function, or at least overshadow it. From our perspective, both functions must be conscientiously complied with, since they constitute our raison d'être as an institution.

9. Returning to the case of agrarian documentaries, the work of the Filmoteca Española has been essential for the revaluation of truly creative figures such as the Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches, who are emblematic of the extraordinary formal richness that these films have been able to achieve over the course of their historical evolution. Thanks to the combined efforts with the Archive team of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the researchers, analysts, historians and others involved in this object of study for the purposes of research and dissemination, today we can access complete filmographies, restored and interpreted according to their historical, political, social and cinematic contexts. Considering the long way there is still to go, what would be the major themes or filmmakers that still require in-depth study?

Valeria Camporesi

Precisely taking into account that the road ahead is long and wide, I think that the most interesting approach might be not so much to identify great figures, although obviously it can be an effective starting point, but to aim instead to broaden our view of film history, and based on this very specific, productive field, to propose a revision of canons and narratives that may in fact be concealing fundamental aspects of the history of culture.



clausura

FERNANDO LUQUE GUTIÉRREZ

There is no doubt that the arduous task carried out in recent years to digitise the documentary collections kept by ministries of agriculture and other institutions involved in the sector has contributed decisively to the dissemination and recognition of a cinematic heritage that is practically unknown outside its traditional circles of direct influence. Thanks to this effort, we find at our disposal a remarkable quantity of audiovisual resources and materials hosted on online platforms, ready to be viewed, downloaded and shared by users who, with the click of a button, can quickly and easily access the essential filmographies associated with the historical and formal development of this particular type of agrarian cinema.

However, none of this would be possible without the active work carried out by the Archive, as an institution designed to ensure the survival of the documentary memory to which the film production discussed here belongs. The fact that today we have access to productions made under the auspices of the Spanish Agricultural Extension Service, the French SCMA (Service Cinématographique du Ministère de l'Agriculture) or the Italian

Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa), to cite particularly outstanding examples both in quantitative and qualitative terms, is a direct consequence of the commitment of the respective archives responsible for protecting, preserving and organising them, and making them available to the public. They thus stand out as centres of indisputable importance for research on the object of study that is the focus of this issue of L'Atalante.

Through our dialogue with Beatriz Contreras, Luz Gutiérrez and Rubén Justo, professionals responsible for the management of the Archive and Library Area of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and with Valeria Camporesi from the Filmoteca Española, we have sought to acquire a first-hand perspective on the functions of and challenges affecting archival practice today, with special attention to the repercussions this has on its role as an intermediary for users or researchers.

Their contributions point towards a series of ideas and reflections that are invariably based on one inalienable principle, which is reflected in the exercise of their public vocation and their vital

importance to the functioning of a fully-fledged democratic system. The true objective is not merely to amass the documentary material generated in the course of the government's ordinary activity, but ultimately to place it at the disposal of the public as a guarantee of transparency in management and the possibility of rigorous scrutiny, which applies to all documents that fall under its authority for whatever reason.

The participants' conclusions highlight an important point in this respect, since the exhaustiveness required in the effective fulfilment of this vital purpose entails the safekeeping and management of all registered documentation, without the application of any other circumstance or subjective consideration to screen the material, for example, in view of a possible added technical or artistic value. The Archive thus fulfils a universal objective that would explain the physical survival of film productions that had no commercial release, no mention in the press or attention from film critics, and (theoretically) no apparent narrative or aesthetic value. Its activity therefore has the merit of preserving the memory of an agrarian, industrial, scientific, urban, educational or promotional kind of filmmaking-in short, subordinated to another profession or field of knowledge and therefore relegated by traditional historiography to a corner of minimal significance. The intention here is to correct this by recognising these films within the historical processes of cinema and of the image in general (Sánchez Noriega, 2021: 9).

In response to this intention and favoured by the advent of digital connectivity referred to at the beginning of this closing section, there has been a recent proliferation of research on agrarian documentary film, and with it of arguments and conclusions confirming the cinematic and interdisciplinary richness of this audiovisual heritage throughout its extensive and productive history. Little by little, a specific bibliography is growing, resulting from the individual and collective efforts organised by different R&D projects that since 2013 have been focusing on the particular cases of the aforementioned Marquis of Villa-Alcázar and José Neches, as well as the intersections of this possible Spanish model with those of other national film traditions. 1 We are gradually gaining greater knowledge about the documentary forms that structure the agrarian documentary, its narrative and semantic systems, its staging, editing, music, propagandistic and pedagogical components, and other parameters that define its identity and its historical and cinematic contextualisation. However, there is still much to be done in a field of study as open and relatively unexplored as this one.

In this context, the Archive is joining the film library in its essential role as an intermediary between researchers and the primary sources that make up this documentary legacy. This is demonstrated by the outstanding example of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, which has been the focus of this section, and the keen sense of public duty shown by the professionals of the Archive and Library Area who have participated in this discussion. We sincerely thank them for their invaluable contributions, and above all for their commitment as managers of the agrarian documentary memory to ensure the survival of all the human knowledge housed in their archival collections—of course including the film collections. We have sought to showcase their efforts in this issue of L'Atalante, participating in the dissemination and recognition of an audiovisual heritage that is essential to a comprehensive vision of the cinematographic image, documentary or otherwise, of the 20th century. \blacksquare

NOTES

The R&D research projects referred to here are those directed by Pedro Poyato and Ana Melendo: La obra del marqués de Villa-Alcázar (1934-1966): Un eslabón necesario en la historia del documental cinematográfico en España, active from 2013 to 2016; La contribución de José Neches al documental agrario español del Franquismo (1945-1976), from 2017 to 2019; and Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudio comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultura de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1979), currently active.

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THE ARCHIVE AND THE AGRARIAN DOCUMENTARY MEMORY

Abstract

The (Dis)Agreements section proposes an approach to the role played by public archives in the management and diffusion of film heritage linked to agricultural and rural documentary. For that purpose, we have met with Beatriz Contreras, Luz Gutiérrez and Rubén Justo, professionals responsible for the Archive and Library Area of the Spanish Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, and Valeria Camporesi, current director of the Filmoteca Española, with the aim of establishing a dialogue that sheds light on the main functions and challenges faced by the institution in the current context.

Key words

Agrarian documentary; Rural Cinema; Archive; Ministerio de Agricultura.

Authors

Beatriz Contreras Gómez is the Head of the Archive and Library Area, Studies and Publications Division, at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Luz Gutiérrez Porras is the Head of the Media Library and Photo Library Section at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Rubén Justo Álvarez is the Head of the Technical Section of the Archive and Library Area at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Valeria Camporesi holds a PhD in History and Civilization from the European University Institute of Florence (IUE) and is a professor of History of Cinema and Visual Culture at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). Since her appointment in 2023, she has held the position of Director of the Filmoteca Española (Spanish Film Library).

EL ARCHIVO Y LA MEMORIA DOCUMENTAL AGRARIA

Resumen

La sección de (Des)encuentros propone una aproximación al papel que desempeñan los archivos públicos en la gestión y difusión del patrimonio fílmico y audiovisual, especialmente el vinculado al documental agrario y rural. Para este fin, nos hemos reunido con Beatriz Contreras, Luz Gutiérrez y Rubén Justo, responsables del Área de Archivo y Biblioteca del Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, y con Valeria Camporesi, actual directora de la Filmoteca Española, con el objetivo de establecer un diálogo que arroje luz sobre las principales funciones y desafíos afrontados por las instituciones archivísticas en el contexto actual.

Palabras clave

Documental agrario; cine rural; Archivo; Ministerio de Agricultura.

Autoras

Beatriz Contreras Gómez es Jefa del Área de Archivo y Biblioteca, División de Estudios y Publicaciones, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación.

Luz Gutiérrez Porras es Jefa de la Sección de Mediateca y Fotoeca, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación.

Rubén Justo Álvarez es Jefe de la Sección Técnica del Área de Archivo y Biblioteca, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación.

Valeria Camporesi es Doctora en Historia y Civilización (Instituto Universitario Europeo de Florencia, IUE) y Catedrática de Historia del Cine y de la Cultura Visual (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, UAM). Tras su nombramiento en 2023, desempeña el cargo de dirección de la Filmoteca Española.

Fernando Luque Gutiérrez holds a PhD in Art History and is a professor of Film History, Spanish Cinema and Photographic Art in the Department of Art History, Archaeology and Music at Universidad de Córdoba. He is a contributor to the research project Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudio comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultura de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1979) and the author of chapters and academic articles related to agrarian and rural cinema, such as Formas del montage en el documental agrario de José Neches (dealing with José Neches's contribution to the Spanish agrarian documentary during the Franco regime) (Tirant lo Blanch, 2021) and Aproximación a un modelo didáctico-idealizante en el documental agrario de Armand Chartier: Palot (Ámbitos Magazine, 2023). Contact: z02luguf@uco.es.

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Fernando Luque Gutiérrez es Doctor en Historia del arte y profesor de Historia del cine, Cine español y Arte fotográfico en el Departamento de Historia del Arte, Arqueología y Música de la Universidad de Córdoba. Colaborador del Proyecto de Investigación Documentales agrarios y nacionalidades: estudio comparado de las producciones de los Ministerios de Agricultura de España, Francia e Italia (1930-1979), es autor de capítulos y artículos académicos relacionados con el cine agrario y rural, tales como Formas del montaje en el documental agrario de José Neches (Contribución de José Neches al documental agrario español del franquismo, Tirant lo Blanch, 2021) y Aproximación a un modelo didáctico-idealizante en el documental agrario de Armand Chartier: Palot (1947) (Revista Ámbitos, 2023). Contacto: z02lugut@uco.es.

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COUNTERSHOTS OF CONTEMPORARY NOIR: ANALYSING THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA AND NIGHT MOVES

Jesús Urbano Reyes

THE THAUMATROPE AS A TEXTUAL OPERATOR IN SLEEPY HOLLOW AND THE WONDER

Enric Antoni Burgos Ramírez

THE MUSICAL PERFORMER AS A
CHARACTER IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS
GARDEL AND AMÁLIA RODRIGUES:
TRANSMEDIALITY, PROFESSIONALIZATION
AND GLOBALIZATION

Dulce María Dalbosco

REVERSE SHOTS IN CONTEMPORARY NOIR FILMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA AND NIGHT MOVES*

JESÚS URBANO

I. REFLECTIONS ON A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT: SLOW CINEMA

One of the first theoretical debates related to slow cinema was sparked by an editorial written by Jonathan Romney for Sight and Sound in an issue that sought to sum up the films of the first decade of the 21st century. Romney pointed out that many of the decade's most important films were characterised by an austere minimalism, "a certain rarefied intensity in the artistic gaze, [...] cinema that downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality" (2010: 43-44). In the same journal two issues later, Nick James offered a harsh criticism of slow cinema in his article "Passive Aggressive". Thus began a critical debate between slow cinema's champions (Romney, Harry Tuttle) and its detractors (Nick James, Steven Shaviro) who would accuse it of being a mere rehash of earlier styles-especially by filmmakers of the 1960s, but

without either their political daring or formal audacity (2010).

If we accept the arguments put forward in Galt and Schoonover's Global Art Cinema, this debate was the product of an trend of geographical expansion that would finally usurp the Europe-Hollywood binary that had defined film history up until that time (Galt, Schoonover, 2010: 6) However, González de Canales argues that national film industries have been subsumed into the idea of transnationalism, a phenomenon observable in "the homogenising tendency characterised by the multiplex cinema and the rise of the internet and social media as a form of expansion and promotion of audiovisual media" (2015: 3). This homogenising process has given rise to "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1993: 23), deterritorialised communities whose members have a shared artistic interest. Slow cinema as a transnational movement is a very clear example of the rise of glocalisation, where notions of localisation and

MANY SLOW FILMS ESCHEW THE SHOT/ REVERSE SHOT ALTOGETHER OR REPEAT IT SO EMPHATICALLY THAT ITS USUAL FUNCTION IS COMPLETELY DISTORTED

globalisation converge and feed on one another (González, 2015: 3). In his prologue to Los cines por venir, Pedro Zuluaga suggests that the rigid historical dialectic between Europe and the United States gave rise to the myth of the "end of history", borrowing Fukuyama's famous assertion, and with it the definitive deflation of cinematic storytelling. But this myth is being challenged by the new historical subjects emerging from the periphery: "Is it possible to contemplate the end of time in territories and bodies that are still pure potential, whose full range of possibilities have yet to be realised?" (Zuluaga, 2021: 10). This periphery needs to be understood not only geographically but also symbolically, referring to all those subjects who have historically been pushed out of the centre of the story. The idea of the periphery can also be interpreted in industrial terms, with the digital boom that has brought about a dramatic reduction in production costs and a democratisation of the use of the technology needed to make a film.

The term "slow cinema" has provoked a number of terminological debates. The AV Festival in Newcastle titled its 2012 edition As Slow as Possible, based on a piece by John Cage, inviting filmmakers including Lav Díaz from the Philippines, James Benning from the United States, and Ben Rivers from the UK. In the academic world, the first doctoral thesis on slow cinema, written by Mike Flanagan, appeared that same year. This film movement has been labelled as subtractive cinema by Antony Fiant, neo-modernist by Rafal Syska, realism of the senses by Tiago de Luca, and contemporary contemplative cinema by Harry Tuttle. The problem of what to call the movement is important because the adjective "slow" seems

insufficient to define it clearly. Attempts at quantitative approaches, such as analysing ASLs (average shot lengths) have proven ineffective without a qualitative component. Moreover, the term has a general, abstract quality that fails to specify whether the slowness refers to minimalist editing, a lack of external or internal movement in the film, narrative minimalism, a more political or philosophical conception of time, or all of these at once (Caglayan, 2014: 9). As Horacio Muñoz points out, to "classify a cinema as slow, it should be compared or contrasted with another that is faster" (2017: 289). Schoonover and Galt differentiate "slow cinema" from faux slow, as although both styles maintain the haptic dimension that many authors identify with slow cinema, or a rhythm opposed to the imperative of narration, faux slow does not allow the experience of contemplation to dominate the film completely, as it hurries on towards some kind of change in the film in order to keep the spectator's attention (2016: 278).

In addition to the debate over the name or over what slow means and what it is being compared or contrasted with, there have also been disputes over the scope of its political dimension. Schoonover, for example, questions whether this type of cinema is politically subversive or politically decadent (2012: 68). Shaviro describes it as retrograde because of its evident inability to adapt to a contemporary hypermodernity to which it responds with self-absorbed melancholy (2010). However, it is Mark Fisher, in an effort to resurrect Derrida's notion of hauntology, who argues for the concept of productive melancholy as a politically inspired phenomenon that is incapable of letting go of a past that promised a better future (2018). This melancholy stands in opposition to what Fisher himself identifies as the only possible regime of representation: capitalist realism, which aims to impose capitalism as the only viable option and render any other political proposal unthinkable (2016: 22). Although it is purely materialist, slow cinema is a regime of representation that is

not governed by any of the mainstream conventions of capitalist realism, least of all the convention that Harun Farocki identifies as the first law of conventional cinematography: the shot/reverse shot technique. For Farocki, "the real auteurs are the ones who rise up against the shot/reverse shot" (2013: 83). A politically conceived cinema is not a cinema with political themes (2013: 71), but an approach that formally confronts this conventional syntax either through its non-use, like Godard does, exposing its absence precisely where its presence would be logical (2013: 89), or through its profound reformulation in the style of Bresson, i.e., through its intensified use (2013: 104). Thus, many slow films eschew the shot/reverse shot altogether or repeat it so emphatically that its usual function is completely distorted.

Flanagan considers what he calls durational realism to be essential to slow cinema, as it makes it possible to materialise the act of observation (2012: 213-216). This durational realism sometimes entails a temporality unconcerned with human activity, such as that of the still life shots in some of Abbas Kiarostami's films and his proposal of a cinema without spectators (Remes, 2015: 235-236), or slow cinema's relationship with environmentalism and with filming nature without human mediation (Lam, 2015: 217), an approach that Daney previously identified in Straub and Huillet's landscapes (2004: 130-133). Other authors, such as Çaglayan, highlight the importance that slow cinema assigns to existential boredom in opposition to the idea of productivity (2014: 206-207) and note its hybrid nature, blending forms associated with the documentary, fiction, genre films, video art, and museum installations-the museum in particular being a space that many slow cinema filmmakers have engaged with (2014: 25). Caglayan extends his description of slow cinema's hybrid nature to its institutional status, as a form exhibited in both mainstream and arthouse cinemas, as well as film libraries and museums, and to its national status, with its local themes

and international forms, and the important role that international co-productions and European festivals have played in its development. All these studies confirm the importance of slow cinema as an international film movement, regardless of whether or not we accept the admittedly disputable pertinence of the name given to it.

2. PROPOSED ANALYSIS

In recent years, a growing number of slow films have been adopting the features of the noir genre. Referred to as minimalist noir or slow noir (a term used by Kyle Barrowman in his 2023 article on Béla Tarr), these films constitute a unique approach to the genre that has not been given much attention in scholarly research on contemporary film noir. This small but significant number of films includes The Man from London (A Londoni férfi, Béla Tarr, 2007), Lorna's Silence (Le silence de Lorna, Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne, 2008), Police, Adjective (Politist, adjectiv, Corneliu Porumboiu, 2009), The Limits of Control (Jim Jarmusch, 2009), Aurora (Cristi Puiu, 2010), Eastern Drift (Eurazijos aborigenas, Šarūnas Bartas, 2010), Hors Satan (Bruno Dumont, 2011), Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da, Nuri Ceylan, 2011), Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013), Norte, The End of History (Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan, Lav Diaz, 2013), The Woman Who Left (Ang Babaeng Humayo, Lav Diaz, 2016), An Elephant Sitting Still (Da xiang xi di er zuo, Hu Bo, 2018), and Pacifiction (Albert Serra, 2022). All these films reinvent the noir genre through the prism of slow cinema.

The analysis described in this article involves a selection of standard-sequences from specific case studies. These sequences are analysed, exploring the form of the film (Gómez Tarín, Marzal, 2007: 44) and the materiality of the text, in order to identify implicit, symptomatic meanings, i.e., types of meaning that point to the construction of meaning in the film (Bordwell, 1995: 24-25). Standard-sequences are sequences that encapsu-

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late the film as a whole and that must meet at least three requirements: they must be clearly delimited, have a coherent internal organisation, and be representative of the film in its entirety (2007: 46). This method facilitates the analysis of the films with a focus on their syntax rather than their themes, in accordance with Farocki's conception of the true political scope of films described above. The selection and analysis of standard-sequences from significant films of the slow noir movement serves to respond to the key question of this study: What variations and innovations does this movement propose within the larger context of the noir genre?

The films selected as case studies are The Limits of Control, Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, and Night Moves. The three standard-sequences identified as paradigmatic of the films in question are clearly delimited as they contain a key narrative moment and are structurally and formally organised in an internally coherent way. In addition to being of primordial importance to the plot of the films, they also involve typical tropes of the genre and thus allow a more straightforward comparison. This article also presents these sequences in narrative rather than chronological order, as they would naturally appear in a plausible hypothetical plot structure. The first sequence selected depicts the execution of the plan in Night Moves, from the moment when the protagonists leave the camp site until they manage to blow up the dam and evade the police. The second sequence

represents a climactic moment of any noir investigation: the search for the body in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia. The third sequence selected depicts the resolution of the mystery in The Limits of Control, with the accomplishment of the mission assigned to the protagonist. These three sequences are clearly delimited blocks as each of these films has a very rigid narrative structure where each important action takes up a segment of exceptionally long duration: the sequence from Night Moves begins at 35'22" and ends at 63'55"; the sequence from Once Upon a Time in Anatolia runs from 4'12" to 55'12"; and the sequence from The Limits of Control is from 82'03" to 103'15". Due to space limitations, for each case study a detailed analysis is provided of short scenes or key shots within the general context of the sequence as a self-contained narrative section.

3. THE REVERSE SHOT HAS A TEMPORALITY OF ITS OWN: PARALLEL MOVEMENTS IN NIGHT MOVES

Kelly Reichardt's Night Moves tells the story of three environmental activists—Josh, a worker on an agricultural cooperative; Dena, a university student; and Harmon, a former marine) who decide to blow up a dam in Oregon. At the beginning of the film, Josh and Dena are at the screening of an environmentalist documentary. During the Q&A session after the screening, one of the audience members suggests that showing apocalyptic images could give people the impression that it is too late to do anything to stop an environmental catastrophe. Dena asks the filmmaker what she thinks they should do to tackle the environmental problem. The documentary director replies that she herself is focused on "a lot of small plans. I think that just coming together and sharing out concerns..." Before this sentence is completed, Reichardt cuts suddenly to a shot of a person dressed up as a cow advertising a milk brand in the street. In this abrupt cut, the fil-

mmaker presents a key dialectic in her film: the opposition of two temporalities: one imposed by late capitalism and its relentless industrial activity, and the other in resistance to it, proposing a lifestyle that con-

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forms to a different temporal regime. As Henry argues, "temporal structures are power structures, and paying attention to time makes these power structures visible through their temporal articulation" (2018: 486). Josh and Dena's frustrated facial expressions during the Q&A session reflect their impatience with this "slow" form of activism based on a sustainable lifestyle in small communities that seem to have no political impact outside their own boundaries. And it is this impatience that leads them to take the decision to blow up the dam, in an effort to take up arms against the accelerated temporal structure of capitalism, whose irreversible process of exploitation of nature never seems to stop. The very long standard-sequence selected for this study depicts their execution of this plan, an action that one environmentalist at the cooperative describes as "theatre". And it is precisely at this moment that Reichardt's film most clearly translates the conventions of the noir genre. However, in opposition to the constant movement that characterises the genre—and its suspense—Reichardt incorporates a space outside the action that is more descriptive than narrative, belonging to a different model that is both representative and temporal. Otherwise, Night Moves adheres to the conventions of a noir thriller: the first part depicts the preparation of the plan; the second part (the sequence chosen for analysis) presents the execution of the plan and the getaway; and the third part combines the attempt to return to normal with the emergence of paranoia, guilt, and fear of being discovered.

The standard-sequence begins with all three protagonists loading the trucks and boat with the explosives and driving towards the scene of the crime. There is no tension evident in these actions.

which Reichardt marks with a slow, deliberate pacing. When they reach Lake of the Woods, the camping ground that serves as their departure point to the dam, Reichardt combines two contrasting movements: in the shots of narrative relevance, we see the tense expressions on the faces of the protagonists and the instructions they exchange with each other, while in a series of different reverse shots, we see the routine activities of the other campers; the duration of these reverse shots gives them an importance equal to the main action, although they contain no specific detail of relevance to the story. Reichardt establishes a distance from the main characters in the story to focus on the ordinary anonymity of the people at the camp site (Image 1) or to underscore their insignificance in wide shots that capture the natural world around them (Image 2). The story is not imposed on the organic nature of the setting. For Reichardt, the first and most important process in filmmaking is the search for locations, as the American landscape is of vital significance for her, not merely as a backdrop, but as a specific physical, material form that reveals her characters (Atehortúa, 2021: 194).

When the protagonists leave the camping ground and head for the dam, the reverse shots will switch to images showing nature depleted by human plundering (Image 3). Up to this point, Reichardt has avoided any climactic tension while still maintaining a certain degree of suspense. "Rather than generating the tension, anticipation, and anxiety typically associated with the thriller genre's mood, the quietness in this film con-

tributes to a slow-burning suspense, an anxious waiting" (Henry, 2018: 492). When night falls, the protagonists get moving in order to carry out their mission, in a scene that underscores the relationship between the film's title (*Night Moves*), the genre to which it belongs (a new take on the

noir genre) and the climax of this long sequence (the protagonists spring into action). Nevertheless, Reichardt continues constantly to include mundane conversations between the characters and nocturnal shots that are barely visible apart from the protagonists' subtle movements and their reflections in the water. The filmmaker refuses to compromise on what a typical noir mise-enscène would demand.

There are only two moments of conventional suspense in this sequence: when a car breaks down near the dam and the bomb, with its timer displaying the countdown, cannot be switched off: and when Josh and Dena manage to get past a police checkpoint in the sequence's final scene. Apart from these two moments, this sequence is almost completely undramatic. The temporal structure is more pictorial than narrative, as reflected in the shots of anonymous people and of nature—depicting the stability of the community that is about to be disrupted and the natural temporality affected by the temporality of human action-that are given the same level of importance as the dramatic movement that typifies the genre. Although such movement does occur here (the film even plays with tropes of the suspense genre, such as the bomb timer, the police checkpoint, and chance as a potential cause of tragedy), it is constantly held up by Reichardt's editing and her particular style

of shots that linger after the appearance of the figures and actions they present. In this way, she discovers a reality outside the story, which, according to the filmmaker herself, appears by "stepping to one side [...] through the reduction of elements, certain details of the world that

Images 1, 2 & 3









Image 4

were unseen before start to become perceptible" (Reichardt, quoted by Atehortúa, 2021: 193). The reverse shot is like the temporality of the Other, of that which moves slowly in parallel with the temporality identified as useful, according to a conception of production optimisation that is now also used in parrative.

4. "YOU HAVE TO BE MORE OF AN ASTROLOGER THAN A PROSECUTOR TO DIVINE MOTIVES AND CAUSES": ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia tells the story of a murder investigation. The film is an procedural noir, depicting the investigation from the perspective of the police officer or detective. The sequence selected for analysis is the second sequence of the film, following the opening scene and title credits, dealing with the fruitless search for the body of the victim. After two attempts to find the place where the alleged murderer buried it, the search team seems to have found the place and they begin digging. The police investigations lead to a place to the side of the highway; thunder and a relentless wind serve as a soundtrack to the setting. Instead of focusing the attention on the search, Ceylan ignores the main action completely and films a mundane conversation between the doctor and a police officer with a shot/reverse shot technique showing that the doctor hardly ever returns the officer's gaze. In the middle of their conversation, Ceylan suddenly inserts a short of the wind blowing through a field of barley (Image 4). When the conversation veers into questions about humankind's evil nature and the need to carry a gun in this region, the shot moving over the barley is interspersed with two shots of the characters, their backs now to the camera. Suddenly, rather than coming from the actors'

bodies, their voices seem to be coming from the landscape, turning into inner voices. We see that the characters are not talking in the scene, yet we continue to hear them. The public prosecutor remarks: "It rains on Igdebeli. Let it rain. It's been raining for centuries. What does that change?" While these words continue a shot of the prosecutor is inserted into the scene. After this speech, the scene returns to its previous composition before the camera moved away from the landscape. The forensic expert returns to where he was in the previous shot/reverse shot series, as if what we have just seen was merely a dream. The passage of a train seems to punctuate the scene. The search has been fruitless, and everyone gets back into their cars to go somewhere else.

This strange suspension of the narration occurs once again, this time between the forensic expert and the prosecutor, who ramble on about the state of the country. Once again, in parallel with the physical search for the body, which is completely ignored, the characters, both illuminated by the lights of a car, begin talking in another series of shots and reverse shots. And again, the characters' bodies are not positioned diagonally to one another, as they usually are in shot/reverse shot series; instead, as was the case earlier, the view of the bodies is frontal. They stare wistfully into the void of nature that earlier seemed to take on a life of its own. The prosecutor suggests that sometimes when it comes to deaths, "you have to





Image 4 Image 5

be more of an astrologer than a prosecutor to divine motives and causes." This conversation, like the previous one, is suspended by a movement of the camera, which begins filming the forensic expert and then frames both characters from the other side. The real reverse shot is not the product of the characters' responses; instead, anticipated by this camera movement, the real reverse shot is a shot of trees swaying in the wind (Image 5). The landscape, the wind, the rain, and the thunder all become characters with their own points of view, non-human characters that seem to understand the causes that the prosecutor is unable to divine. This is an example of what Rosenbaum, with reference to Daney, calls "cinemeteorology" (2021): the landscape and the weather are autonomous narrators. A mere moment later, while the characters continue their investigation, an apple falls to the ground and begins rolling downstream. The camera follows it as it rolls, once again leaving the police investigation behind: "Both the visual form and the content of the film respond to the idea that resolution can emerge less through clarifications of facts and more by means of the non-discursive and poetic" (Dudai. 2019: 48). Like the end of the train's movement in the previous scene, the end of the apple's descent returns the film to the reality of the police investigation. The answers in this film noir are not provided by the plot but remain concealed within that which lies beyond the human gaze, beyond the boundaries established by the mise-en-scène. This idea is conveyed in the highly eloquent way this scene ends: a visual match-cut from the forensic expert's eyes to the headlights of a car (Image 6). The human gaze only reaches as far as that which can be illuminated.

5. A BLANK SHEET: THE LIMITS OF CONTROL

The Limits of Control is constructed entirely on the basis of the repetition of the shot/reverse shot, but it is through its intensification of the mechanism, its particular repetition of this conventional technique that it ends up distorting its normal use. As Farocki suggests with reference to the films of Bresson, this repetition is a way of reformulating its implications (2013: 104). The film tells the story of an unnamed hitman who is hired to carry out a mission that we ultimately discover is an assassination: the murder of a senior figure in the US government. To be able to carry out his task, the protagonist has to find different characters, each of whom will give him a box of matches with symbols that he will need to decipher in order to make it to the next step. All these encounters, which seem to offer nothing to advance the plot, are always filmed in the same way, with the spec-

tral appearance and disappearance of the character and a conversation presented in a shot/ reverse shot series that always begins with a kind of password: "You don't speak Spanish, right?" The protagonist's only way of getting to the next phase of his journey is to interpret the code that appears on the matchbox and identify some kind of image—in a museum, on a poster, in the street—that makes reference to the topic in which the character in question seems to be an expert: music, cinema, drugs, etc. It is a question of knowing how to learn from the other, to construct an identity from scratch—"I am nobody," says the protagonist—out of the people he meets.

The Limits of Control has a puzzle noir narrative, as the whole plotline is articulated around these encounters with informers who provide clues that need to be interpreted. In a conventional noir film of this kind, all these clues generally culminate in a final climax where the conclusions are explained and the case is closed. This is precisely what happens in the standard-sequence chosen for analysis: the final encounter between the hitman and his target, the latter protected inside an impenetrable fortress monitored by multiple cameras and armed guards. The sequence begins with the hitman travelling by car to the desert location where the target is hiding. During this journey, Jarmusch focuses on a shot on a bridge that seems to suggest an imaginary portal between realms (Image 7), the idea of a crossing that will be realised in the protagonist's subsequent "magical" journey. At this climactic moment, as in the other two cases studied, the filmmaker opts to abandon the suspense typical of the genre, which would involve showing the protagonist working out how to break into the target's office, and places him there directly after a cut. The bewil-









Images 7, 8, 9 & 10

dered target wonders, as does the viewer, how the hitman has managed to get past his security (Images 8 and 9). As a cinematographic mechanism, the shot/reverse shot technique always splits the scene into two halves (Farocki, 2013: 293), thereby accentuating an idea of separation while at the same time always assuring continuity: "It allows very different images to be linked together in succession" (2013: 83). For Jarmusch, this mechanism of continuity in rupture, a force for dialogue and at the same time a clear marker of the space of the Other, opens up the possibility of an encounter at the intersection between the two where identity is ultimately blurred. What matters is found not in each differentiated shot but in that intersection. in the imaginary liminal space that it creates. "My films are about the little things that happen between people [...]. I'm interested in what happens in the middle" (1996, quoted by Viejo, 2001: 61). In all the dialogues between the unnamed protagonist and the other characters, there is a learning experience that involves merging with the other, diluting the individual space of the shots. It is this fluidity that ultimately allows the protagonist to cross the intermediate space between two shots that separated the space in a radical way at the beginning of the sequence. And to complete the task, one last clue is needed: a blank sheet of paper that will lead the protagonist to contemplate Antoni Tápies's abstract painting Large Sheet (Image 10): what remains in the end is a blank space, a reflection of the protagonist's undefined identity, noir (black) turned into its opposite, positing the total deconstruction of any possible category.

6. DISRUPTIONS OF A GENRE: FROM SUSPENSE TO SUSPENSION

In his book on the historical variations on the Western, Fran Benavente argues that there are two types of limit-aesthetics, so called because they subvert the genre as a normalised system of representation. The first makes use of exagge-

ration: hyper-overcoming, surpassing the boundaries or exasperation. The second uses the suppression of a specific feature, i.e., a schismatic hypo-transgression that will give rise to radical catastrophes as a result of the elimination (2017: 19). Clearly, slow noir engages with this second limit-aesthetic; it is anti-genre genre cinema, a "curious negative designation that is usually a sign of interesting disruptions in the discourse of the genre" (2017: 315). It does so first by eliminating suspense entirely. The delay in Night Moves, the digressions in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, and the repetition in *The Limits of Control* all force the spectator to give up on any expectations related to the plotline, provoking what Jakob Boer calls a contemplative viewing mode, as the spectator ceases to follow the story and begins perceiving the film as artefact, so that it switches from being "film-as-fiction to film-as-film" (2016: 13). Norman Holland uses the term "puzzling films" (quoted by Bordwell, 2008: 154) to describe those films where the plot ceases to be important and the spectator begins exploring the materiality of the film itself. The narrative suspension that typifies modern cinema aims to dissolve any expectations associated with classical genres (Fillol, 2016: 46). In the specific case of noir, suspense is the key element that allows viewers to interpret the clues in order to anticipate the conclusion or to be surprised if they misinterpret them. In these slow noir films, suspense is definitively replaced, with the desire to obtain a tense resolution to the story being substituted by a narrative and formal suspension that eliminates the tension altogether. The key question is no longer who did it or why, but why is the film the way that it is. The spectator is transformed into a detective, not of the story but of the film-as-act, and the questions now are about why the director made a particular aesthetic decision, why a shot is so long, or why an unrelated shot has been inserted-in short, questions about the film itself and not about the plot or the logic of the narrative development.

IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF NOIR, SUSPENSE IS THE KEY ELEMENT THAT ALLOWS VIEWERS TO INTERPRET THE CLUES IN ORDER TO ANTICIPATE THE CONCLUSION OR TO BE SURPRISED IF THEY MISINTERPRET THEM. BUT IN THESE SLOW NOIR FILMS, SUSPENSE IS DEFINITIVELY REPLACED, WITH THE DESIRE TO OBTAIN A TENSE RESOLUTION TO THE STORY BEING SUBSTITUTED BY A NARRATIVE AND FORMAL SUSPENSION THAT ELIMINATES THE TENSION ALTOGETHER

The second disruption to the genre involves another type of suspension: temporal suspension. Boer describes the experience of slowness in cinema as the combination of three types of stillness: stillness-of-the-image, stillness-in-the-image, and stillness-between-the-images (2016: 5-10). Stillness-of-the-image refers to the absence of external movements, a filmmaking style comprised of still and static shots. Stillness-in-the image exists when the action depicted is minimal or insignificant, but it is the temporal treatment of the action that turns it into a dramatic event. Finally. stillness-between-the-images is a narrative structuring that does not connect the elements of the film together naturally, revealing it to be a series of sequences operating as autonomous intervals, units of duration where time no longer derives from movement (2016: 11). Kelly Reichardt herself defined her first film, River of Grass (1994), as "a road movie without a road" (quoted by Atehortúa, 2021: 199); the film's genre is declared, yet that genre is deprived of the possibility of movement. Deleuze argues that in modern cinema the cut no longer forms part of the image, as the end to what is leaving or as an anticipation of what is to appear; instead, it is an interstice with its own inherent value (1985: 265). This idea is expressed very graphically in the sequence analysed here from

The Limits of Control, where the fleeting moment of the cut becomes an imagined space that the characters move across. The film cut thus ceases to be continuity or transition (movement), to become instead an irrational or incommensurable entity (time). Schoonover suggests that the debate over temporality in slow cinema "may be about the question of queerness or what it means to live queerly. Queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, wasted productivity" (2012: 73). Queerness effectively proposes a new temporality in opposition to the (re)productive temporality of capitalism, advocating de-identification and fluid, uncategorised identities, and rejecting narratives with closed or self-contained denouements while defending freer narratives that challenge the dominant models of which genre cinema is a primordial example.

7. CONCLUSIONS

While all three films analysed in this article contain camera movements and frequent editing cuts, the combination of the repeated portrayal of insignificant actions and the interruption of natural continuity in the organisation of their shots offers a temporal experience that no longer relies on movement. The shots in Night Moves are not arranged to create a unified movement; rather, each cut very precisely interrupts the progress of the action. In Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, the shots of nature appear as sudden imponderables, unexpected shifts towards a natural order that has its own movement and its own temporality. And in The Limits of Control, the excessive use of the shot/ reverse shot technique, which usually controls the pacing of a film, ends up transforming the technique itself into a circumlocution. In this way, these films challenge the concept of the match cut, the assurance of continuity and of a progressive relationship between shots, suspending time and dissipating the suspense that characterises the genre. The slow everyday activity of the farming

community in *Night Moves* and the emphasis on reverse shots of the environment that serve to undermine or question the action, the non-anthropocentric temporality of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* and its multiple narrative digressions, and the repetition in *The Limits of Control* of the same sequential structure and blank-slate depiction of its protagonist are all examples of a new aesthetic and narrative approach in contemporary film noir.

This approach, associated with slow cinema, advocates a temporality opposed to narrative utility and continuity as an ideal of progress, proposing a treatment of the genre that indiscriminately embraces or eschews its conventions: the three different dramatic situations in the sequences analysed are all tropes of the genre—the execution of the criminal plan, the police search, and the accomplishment of the hitman's mission—that are all undermined and stripped of tension. These films prioritise stillness over action, the unmeasurable temporality of nature over the imperative temporality of humankind, the negation of identity over the rigid category, and none of them offer satisfying conclusions or explicit closed meanings. They all thus represent an aesthetic and narrative approach that resists or challenges normativity, which is revealed to be a form of political filmmaking. ■

NOTES

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COUNTERSHOTS OF CONTEMPORARY NOIR: ANALYSING THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA AND NIGHT MOVES

Abstract

This paper studies the innovation of noir codes in three slow movies: The Limits of Control (Jarmusch, 2009), Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da (Nuri Ceylan, 2011) and Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013). To that end, the concept of slow cinema and its significance as an international film movement are contextualized and discussed. Subsequently, in order to explore different variations on the tropes of films noir a sequence from each film is analyzed. These variations are a result of a unique use of space, new temporality, and suspended narratives, in contrast to other contemporary films that aimed at renovations of both subjects and archetypes. This study argues that challenging normative narrative –that is, defending stillness over action and excess, uselessness over usefulness, subduing human time to the time of nature, and rejecting a pre-established identity – is also a way of making films politically.

Key words

Slow Cinema; Film Noir; Shot/ Countershot; Film Space; New Temporality; Narrative Suspension.

Author

Jesús Urbano Reyes (Granada, 1993) is predoctoral researcher in the Department of Theories and Analysis of Communication at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Specialist in Film History and Aesthetics from University of Valladolid. His research focus on Film Analysis and Theory, History of Cinema, Autofiction and Authorship in Contemporary Cinema. He is the author of several papers published both in scientific journals, "Un efecto óptico (2020): ¿Existe la ficción todavía?" in Miguel Hernández Communication Journal, and monographic books, "La autoficción europea tardomoderna (1975-1989)" in Los caminos de la memoria en el cine y el audiovisual contemporáneos (Comunicación Social Ediciones, 2022). He has recently published the two volumes Conversaciones sobre cine. Del hogar a la intemperie (Confluencias, 2023). Contacto: jesusurb@ucm.es

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CONTRAPLANOS DEL NOIR CONTEMPORÁNEO: ANÁLISIS DE LOS LÍMITES DEL CONTROL, ÉRASE UNA VEZ EN ANATOLIA Y NIGHT MOVES

Resumen

El presente artículo estudia las alteraciones de las convenciones del noir en tres propuestas próximas al slow cinema: Los límites del control (The Limits of Control, Jarmusch, 2009), Érase una vez en Anatolia (Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da, Nuri Ceylan, 2011) y Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013). Para ello, se contextualiza y se discute el concepto de slow cinema y su alcance como movimiento cinematográfico internacional. Posteriormente, se propone analizar una secuencia-tipo de cada película objeto de estudio para destacar sus variaciones respecto a situaciones cliché del género noir. Variaciones resultado del tratamiento particular del espacio, la prolongación de la temporalidad o la suspensión del interés narrativo, en contra de otras propuestas contemporáneas más tendentes a la renovación temática o a la reescritura de arquetipos. Ofrecer resistencia a una narrativa normativa —defendiendo la pasividad frente al precepto de la acción o el excedente y lo inservible ante lo considerado útil, sometiendo el tiempo humano al tiempo de la naturaleza o rechazando identidades preestablecidas— es también una forma de hacer políticamente cine.

Palabras clave

Slow Cinema; Cine negro; Plano/contraplano; Espacio fílmico; Nueva temporalidad; Suspensión narrativa.

Auto

Jesús Urbano Reyes (Granada, 1993) es investigador predoctoral en el departamento de Teorías y Análisis de la Comunicación en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y Especialista en Historia y Estética de la Cinematografía por la Universidad de Valladolid. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en Teoría y Análisis Fílmico, Historia del Cine, Autoficción y Autoría en el Cine Contemporáneo. Es autor de diversos textos publicados tanto en revistas científicas, "Un efecto óptico (2020): ¿Existe la ficción todavía?" en Miguel Hernández Communication Journal, como en libros monográficos, "La autoficción europea tardomoderna (1975-1989)" en Los caminos de la memoria en el cine y el audiovisual contemporáneos (Comunicación Social Ediciones, 2022). Ha publicado recientemente los dos volúmenes Conversaciones sobre cine. Del hogar a la intemperie (Confluencias, 2023). Contacto: jesusurb@ucm.es

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THE THAUMATROPE AS A TEXTUAL OPERATOR IN SLEEPY HOLLOW AND THE WONDER

ENRIC BURGOS

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, Tim Burton released Sleepy Hollow, his personal adaptation of Washington Irving's well-known horror story. The film transports us to the late 18th century and immerses us in the story of Ichabod Crane, a police constable from New York City who is sent to the town of Sleepy Hollow to solve the murders allegedly being perpetrated by a ghostly headless horseman. Dismissing the supernatural interpretation of events embraced by the locals, Ichabod employs scientific methods that prove insufficient to solve the mystery. With the help of Young Masbath, an orphan who wants to avenge his father's death, and the support of Katrina van Tassel, to whom he feels increasingly attracted, the investigator tries to overcome his fears, open his mind, and solve the case.

Almost a quarter of a century later, *The Wonder* (Sebastián Lelio, 2022) hit the screens. This

film tells the story of Lib Wright, an English nurse sent to an Irish village to monitor Anna O'Donnell, a girl who has allegedly survived for four months without food. Lib's scientific perspective soon clashes with the village's religious mentality, which is especially marked in the case of the girl's family. Lib and Anna get to know each other and help one another to overcome the traumatic past experiences that they have been keeping to themselves. With the aid of the local journalist Will Byrne, Lib will come up with a plan to try to save the girl's life and pursue a better future.

Based on the novel of the same name by Emma Donoghue, Lelio's film is quite faithful to the original story. However, there are a few differences between the novel and its film adaptation. Notable among these are numerous reflexive (or metacinematic) strategies not present in the original. This self-conscious layer—especially identifiable at the beginning and end of the film—

revolves around the metaleptic character of Kitty, who is given a transcendent role that she does not have in the book.

Beyond the fact that both films are adaptations of literary works that draw on the Gothic folk tale tradition and that both accurately reflect the gloomy, oppressive rural atmosphere of their source material, there are narrative parallels between Sleepy Hollow and The Wonder that become especially clear when comparing their plotlines and the character arcs of their protagonists. In both films, the main character travels from the city to the countryside to solve a mystery that will put his or her scientific worldview to the test. And in both cases, the clash between this logical outlook and the superstitious inclinations of the locals is first made evident in the protagonist's initial encounter with the village's community leaders. In these scenes, both Ichabod and Lib are depicted as unwaveringly rational, while at the same time we are given the first hints of the traumatic past experiences that explain their emotionally repressed conditions. Moreover, both characters will only make progress in the accomplishment of their respective missions when they come to terms with their own past and open themselves up to a personal transformation with the help of a character who awakens their capacity to understand, trust, and love. The resolution of both mysteries is thus contingent upon reconciling the two conflicting worldviews, and also upon the protagonists overcoming their inner struggles. And in both cases the story ends with the protagonist embarking on a new life with the character they became close to in the village, along with a child who, although not theirs, ends up forming part of a new family with them.

In addition to these and other less crucial similarities, both films are notable for the repeated appearance of—as well as indirect allusions to—the motif of the thaumatrope.¹ The visual and narrative recurrence of this optical gadget at different key moments of each film invites us to

ALTHOUGH THE LITERATURE ON OPTICAL DEVICES, SPECTACLES, AND TOYS IS ABUNDANT AND THEY HAVE BEEN STUDIED FROM DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF APPROACHES, THERE IS VERY LITTLE RESEARCH TO DATE THAT TAKES THE PERSPECTIVE OF FILM ANALYSIS TO CONSIDER THE REPRESENTATION OF THESE GADGETS IN CINEMA

consider its role as a textual operator connecting various basic elements of the plot and contributes to the creation of new meanings. The objective of this article is therefore to identify and compare the rhetorical and symbolic functions of the depiction of the thaumatrope in Sleepy Hollow and The Wonder, emphasising its contribution to the main parallels mentioned above. To this end, after a description of the thaumatrope and its depiction in cinema, an analysis will be offered of the scenes in both films in which it is present or referred to. The procedure adopted for this study is thus similar to Zunzunegui's methodological approach of film microanalysis (1996: 15), involving the examination of small fragments of a film in order to study its main constituent elements in condensed form. The exploration of these scenes is also informed by the analytical model proposed by Marzal and Tarín, and especially by their suggestions concerning the descriptive-interpretative phase of this model (2007: 16-17). This article thus focuses mainly on narrative issues—and more specifically on the protagonists' character arcs and the development of the plots and subplots-without dismissing the usefulness of considering expressive resources, especially the components of the shot and the relationship between sound and image.

THE THAUMATROPE AND ITS DEPICTION ON SCREEN

The thaumatrope is an optical toy consisting of a circular disk with two strings attached to each side. The two sides of the disk bear images that complement each other in some way, one of the most common pairs of motifs being a bird on one side and a cage on the other. By twirling both strings with the fingers, the disk spins rapidly to the point of creating an optical illusion whereby the two images seem to merge into one. As is often the case with optical toys of the 19th century, there is some debate over the author and exact date of its invention, although John Ayrton Paris, who presented it publicly in 1824, is usually given credit for it. It was Paris who decided to name it the thaumatrope, a neologism resulting from the combination of the Greek words thauma (astonishment, wonder, miracle) and tropos (turn, direction, course), which would subsequently be translated into English as "wonder-turner". The name of course refers to the astonishment caused by the toy when it is turned.

The thaumatrope belongs to the long list of inventions preceding the development of the cinematograph that have commonly—and almost exclusively—been considered precursors to the motion picture (El-Nouty, 1978; Hecht, 1993; Frutos, 1996; Zotti, 1998). More recently, however, there have been a number of authors who have eschewed this historicist approach and focus instead on the study of these devices in their own right. One such author is Tom Gunning (2012), who dedicated a whole article exclusively to the thaumatrope, some of the most relevant ideas of which will be considered below.

In his article, Gunning (2012: 497-498) seeks to demonstrate the key role that the perceptual experience offered by the thaumatrope played in the new way of producing and viewing images that emerged in the Victorian era. Gunning argues that this "philosophical toy" offered a new form

of thauma by adding the possibility of transformation to the conception of the image: in contrast to the traditional static image of the painting, the thaumatrope points to the labile identity of the image and "embodies the power and uncertainty of thauma" (Gunning, 2012: 504). What it produces is not so much an image of movement as an image that involves an optical transformation, an image for which change is crucial, whose nature is not fixed (Gunning, 2012: 506). The protean nature of this image makes us feel that we are surpassing our ordinary boundaries, seeing in a different way, glimpsing another possible world (Gunning, 2012: 512). The thaumatrope thus confronts us with an image that does not strictly correspond to anything in reality and makes us believe we see something that does not exist (Gunning, 2021: 508).

In consonance with Crary's (1990: 106) observation that the thaumatrope exposes the rupture between perception and its object, Gunning (2012: 507) stresses that the special image created by this philosophical toy arises only as a result of the interaction between viewer and device. The image of the thaumatrope should therefore be understood not as a representation but rather as an event, as a process that requires the viewer's participation, as in fact this image is nowhere but in the viewer's perception (Gunning, 2012: 510-511). In relation to this viewer-device interaction, it is also worth noting that Gunning characterises the thaumatrope—as well as other inventions of the

FOR A FEW SECONDS, THANKS TO THE COMBINATION OF THE SPINNING THAUMATROPE AND THE CINEMATIC TECHNIQUE OF THE LAP DISSOLVE, THE NURSE'S FACE APPEARS FRAMED IN THE DISK OF THE TOY, TRAPPED INSIDE THE CAGE

time—as intensely self-reflective. Its simplicity makes its perceptual and phenomenological paradoxes—that is, its visual trick—more transparent and, through an experience of wonder, draws our attention to how its effect is generated (Gunning, 2012: 498, 512).

Although the literature on optical devices, spectacles, and toys is abundant and they have been studied from different disciplinary perspectives with a diverse range of approaches, there is very little research to date that takes the perspective of film analysis to consider the representation of these gadgets in cinema. González de Arce (2018: 119-120) identifies this research gap and aims to correct it with an article that analyses various films, in addition to providing an exhaustive list of motion pictures produced between 1903 and 2017 that feature inventions of this kind. Her study offers a pertinent—and necessary—overview of the question but is understandably limited by two conditioning factors. On the one hand, the fact that she considers five case studies-including Sleepy Hollow-prevents her from offering a detailed analysis of any of the scenes or of the films in general. On the other, her studies disregard certain rhetorical and symbolic functions of the devices depicted because her analysis is aimed primarily at confirming her hypothesis that cinematic depictions of optical toys, apparatuses and spectacles invented prior to the cinematograph fulfil a metafictional function (González de Arce, 2018: 120).

The rest of this article offers a comparative analysis of the various functions of the thaumatrope as a textual operator in *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Wonder*. As it is a relatively recent release, scholarly output on *The Wonder* is limited, and none of the studies that have been published so far (Fuentes, 2022; Price, 2023; Hanifah, Hkikmat & Nurholis, 2023) consider the significance of the thaumatrope's depiction in the film. *Sleepy Hollow*, on the other hand, has received considerable scholarly attention, and so this article will occa-

sionally refer to and establish contrasts with studies—mainly Siegel (2013), Benton (2014), Parks (2016) and the recently published book by Cheron (2023)—that explore the role played by the optical toy in the film to varying degrees.

SLEEPY HOLLOW

The first appearance of the thaumatrope in Burton's film takes place just after the headless horseman chases Ichabod through the forest and throws the jack-o-lantern in his hand at his head. The impact causes the protagonist to fall off his horse and hit the ground. We then discover, with Ichabod, that the rider was actually Brom, Katrina's suitor, who disguised himself as the dreaded ghost in order to taunt the investigator. Relieved, Ichabod lies back on the ground and closes his eyes. A dissolve then plunges us into a dreamlike setting with fairytale music and a treatment of light and colour that contrasts with the gloomy atmosphere of the film so far. In this scene, a very young Ichabod approaches his mother, who is spinning around blindfolded in a garden while pink flower petals fall gently from the trees. His mother kisses him, and he gives her a bouquet. Bookmarked by two very fast fades to white is the fleeting image of a red door, while the fairytale music is interrupted by a menacing motif. We then see Ichabod's mother throwing the bouquet onto the flames of a fireplace and drawing something in the ashes with a stick. Another flash—again, between two fades and with a haunting soundshows a medium close-up shot in black and white of Ichabod's grim-faced father approaching the fireplace. The next shot shows little Ichabod in his bed, frightened by a storm. His mother spins a thaumatrope (Figure 1) that blends images of a red cardinal and of a cage, and the boy smiles calmly at it. Ichabod's reverie ends with another flash of his intimidating father and some very brief shots-of the aforementioned door opening and of the interior of the room behind it—juxtapo-



Figure 1

sed in a vertiginous montage accompanied by the sound of thunder.

The thaumatrope is presented here as closely associated with the maternal figure and as a distraction that provides Ichabod with a refuge from his fears. Moreover, this scene offers the first hint of the crucial weight of the past on the protagonist. Ichabod's first experience with the supernatural in the town—even if it was not real—brings him face-to-face in a dream with the trauma that could be described as keeping him caged. Metaphorically, the thaumatrope's images of the red cardinal and the cage allude respectively to the protagonist and the prison of his trauma.² They also represent the liberating journey that will characterise his experience in Sleepy Hollow, already suggested at the beginning of the film when Ichabod himself releases the cardinal he has in his aviary just before he travels to the village. At the same time, the opening shot of this dream sequence recalls the scene in which the investigator first meets Katrina while she is playing blind man's buff, thereby establishing a connection between the protagonist's mother and the young woman that will prove important for the resolution of Ichabod's inner conflict.

After accepting—albeit with reservations the book of spells and charms that Katrina gives him, Ichabod accompanies her to the ruins of the house where she lived as a child. When the young woman approaches the fireplace and—in another sign of her connection with the investigator's mother-traces circular motifs on the floor, Ichabod reacts with a shock that is underscored by the music. The couple hears the chirping of a bird, and when the scene cuts to the shot of a cardinal perched on a tree branch Katrina's exclaims: "A cardinal! My favourite! I would love to have a tame one, but I wouldn't have the heart to cage him." Ichabod pulls his mother's thaumatrope from his pocket and shows it to Katrina (Figure 2) and replies: "Well then, I have something for

you. A cardinal on one side, and an empty cage. And now..." Ichabod spins the toy and a frontal detail shot of the object shows us the optical illusion. Katrina exclaims in amazement: "You can do magic! Teach me!" With a certain air of superiority—emphasised by slight differences in the vertical angles used in the shot-reverse shot series—Ichabod explains: "It is no magic. It is what we call optics: separate pictures which become one in the spinning... It is truth, but truth is not always appearance."

As Benton suggests (2014: 125), the thaumatrope can be understood in this scene as representing the binary thinking of an Ichabod who separates the head from the heart, the bird from the cage, one side of the disk from the other. Without contradicting Benton, and taking into account that this dichotomous view conforms to-and is part of—the epistemological model in which Ichabod takes refuge, this optical two-sided toy could be conceived of here as an illustration of the two ways of understanding the world that the scene brings into dialogue, which constitute one of the key underlying themes of the whole film: on the one hand, Katrina's emotional and magical tendency (which would converge with that of Ichabod's mother), and on the other, the rational, scientific-and, as Plate (2000: 3) suggests, even fanatical—approach embraced by the protagonist. The conflict between magic and science is reflected Ichabod's last remark—with its clear Cartesian resonances, which González de Arce (2018: 127) considers the film's hermeneutic key-underscoring his desire to distinguish between truth and appearances.4 With this remark he dismisses the intrinsic interest of the instant when the spinning of the thaumatrope combines truth and appearance and, by extension, evades the opportunity for the magical and scientific gazes to converge in order to glimpse other possible truths.

The optical toy appears for the third time in the film after Ichabod witnesses the decapitation of Magistrate Philipse by the headless horseman.



Figure 2

The encounter with the ghost (this time, the real one) leaves the investigator in a state of shock. Cowering in his bed with the bedsheet covering part of his face (like the child Ichabod during the storm), an extremely disturbed Ichabod shares his disturbing experience with Katrina, her father, and Young Masbath. The police constable fades away and we enter another dream scene that underlines young Ichabod's intimate bond with his mother, reveals the friction between his mother's witchcraft and his father's religious fanaticism, and repeats the reference to the threat lurking behind the red door. Upon regaining consciousness, Ichabod paces his bedroom as he ponders and compulsively twists the string of his thaumatrope. Finally, he leaves the room and informs those present of his decision to overcome his fears and pursue the phantasmal criminal.

The contact with the supernatural has once again dredged up repressed memories in Ichabod's dreams, while at the same time provoking a crisis of faith in his scientific procedures. This sequence is a turning point in at least two interrelated ways: first, it shows us how the event challenges Ichabod's exclusively rational attitude and opens the door for him to accept the value of the spiritual world he associates with Katrina and his mother; and second, it vests Ichabod's use of the thaumatrope with an ambiguity very much in

keeping with the metamorphosis he is beginning to undergo. In this sense, it could be argued that he continues to cling to the toy as an object that assures him of the truth of the still images on each side of the disk, just as he clings to the analytical mentality that keeps him safe from what cannot be logically explained and calms his anxiety like the gadget did in his childhood. But at the same time, there is a suggestion that Ichabod is drawing closer to what the spinning thaumatrope can offer him: the possibility of combining—for the benefit of himself and of the investigation—the scientific with that which is beyond reason.

Shortly after this scene, Ichabod's progressive transformation will be confirmed. First, when the investigator and Young Masbath venture into the forest, the red cardinal killed by the witch suggests the end of one Ichabod and the impending birth of a new one.5 Later, Ichabod's confession to Katrina reveals the depth of his transformation and also exposes the connections between the subplots and their relationship with the main plot. This confession takes place after Ichabod's direct confrontation with the headless horseman and the subsequent dream sequence that completes the recovery of his repressed memory, revealing what really happened on the other side of the red door: the murder of Ichabod's mother by his father. Ichabod wakes up startled and melts into an embrace with Katrina, to whom he explains his childhood trauma and how it undermined his faith. When Katrina asks him what he believes in now, Ichabod replies: "Sense and reason, cause and consequence." The protagonist's traumatic experience took away his faith in the spiritual (the religious, the magical) and propelled him to place it instead in science, in a hyperrationality that Benton suggests functions "as a self-defense mechanism rooted in powerful emotion" (2014: 125). Once the cage of the past is opened, Ichabod will be able to take flight. However, his words to Katrina in this scene suggest that the moment of his release has not yet come: "I should not have

come to this place where my rational mind has been so controverted by the spirit world..."

Continuing with his investigation, Ichabod concludes that Baltus Van Tassel, Katrina's father, controls the headless horseman and has been ordering the executions. Katrina tries to convince him of his mistake, but the constable is pinioned by his chain of reasoning and distrusts the young woman, believing that she has used her spells to prevent him from proving her father's guilt. When Baltus is decapitated by the horseman, Ichabod gives up on his investigation and decides to leave Sleepy Hollow. In the carriage that is taking him back home, he begins turning his thaumatrope with a thoughtful look. Through the window, he sees the supposed corpse of Lady van Tassel (who, Baltus had claimed before he himself was killed, had also been decapitated by the horseman) being taken to the morgue. He keeps turning his thaumatrope. Then suddenly, he takes out the book Katrina gave him and realises that the young woman's spell was not intended to cover up for her father, but to protect Ichabod himself from danger. He orders the driver to turn around with the intention of solving the case at last.

Ichabod's thoughts with the optical toy in his hands seem to take a different turn this time. While we might interpret that he is using his powers of deduction to consider a different hypothesis when he sees the body being taken to the morgue, his sudden realisation while still playing with the thaumatrope moments later suggests that what guides him is intuition. And ultimately, what makes him glimpse another possible truth—an alternative answer to the mystery—and turn back change direction—is his faith in Katrina and her good intentions. The thaumatrope is no longer a refuge in the cage of reason, but a trigger for a kind of thinking that is capable of combining the logical and the emotional, the scientific and the extra-scientific. This last appearance of the thaumatrope thus entails the end of the inner conflict that has afflicted Ichabod ever since his traumatic

childhood experience. With Katrina's help, he will be able to solve the case once and for all and overcome his past, taking a new direction in his life, together with Katrina and Young Masbath.

THE WONDER

The first half of *The Wonder* plunges us into the mystery that the nurse Lib will have to unravel. It introduces us to Anna, a girl who has allegedly survived for months without having eaten any food, and to her family, as well as to Lib herself. The opening sequences highlight the clash between the nurse's scientific outlook and the superstition that reigns in the village, while also offering clues to another mystery, concerning Lib's past. Will, a journalist sent to the village to cover the strange case of the fasting girl, seeks Lib's support and tries to extract information from her. The growing closeness between the two culminates with a se-

xual encounter, and the nurse's subsequent confession to him that she lost her baby and was abandoned by her husband. From that moment on, Lib and Will work together to crack the mystery surrounding Anna.

In the middle of the film, just after the scene of Lib's confession, Will is able to meet with Anna with the nurse's help. He walks with both of them through the countryside and gives the girl a thaumatrope. Following Will's instructions, Anna twists the string between her thumbs and forefingers. Watching as the images of the bird and the cage merge, the little girl asks: "Is it trapped or is it free?" Will

replies: "That's for you to decide. Inside, outside. Inside, outside..." The girl continues to spin the thaumatrope while repeating "in, out, in, out..." These words serve as an anchor for the image of the spinning thaumatrope and reinforce the diverse but interconnected meanings that the references to the optical toy convey at different moments in the film. In this particular scene, the thaumatrope serves the purpose of representing the girl's imprisonment in the religious narrative that her family and community have built around her miraculous fasting. The fact that the object is also known in English as a "wonder-turner" and that Anna herself is referred to as "the wonder" supports this interpretation and also points to the possibility of turning-changing, escaping from the cage—that is offered to Anna and, as discussed below. to Lib as well.

The thaumatrope acts as a textual operator that also illustrates the parallel situation in which







Figure 4

the nurse finds herself, shackled to a painful past from which she has yet to be freed. The transition into the next scene is particularly significant in this respect, as the scene discussed above ends with a detail shot of the gadget spinning and displaying its optical illusion. While we hear the girl repeating "in, out," the image of the thaumatrope dissolves into a medium close-up shot of Lib in the centre of the frame. For a few seconds, thanks to the combination of the spinning thaumatrope and the cinematic technique of the lap dissolve, the nurse's face appears framed in the disk of the toy, trapped inside the cage (Figure 3).

A few days later, Anna's deterioration is evident. She is no longer able to walk, and she lies in bed, suffering from severe coughing fits. Lib examines her and looks into her eyes. Anna returns her gaze, seeming to understand the seriousness of her condition from the nurse's concerned expression. The shot closes in slowly, leaving Lib out of focus and focusing on Anna, who turns her gaze to the thaumatrope in her hands and begins to squirm (Figure 4). The girl repeats again "in, out, in, out," seeming to suggest that despite her unwillingness to renounce the act of faith that her fasting represents, she would like to reverse her situation. But this will not happen without Lib's help, and that help will not be effective unless the nurse can form an empathetic bond with the girl.

After nightfall, the dialogue between the two about the circumstances of Anna's fasting reflects the clash between the rational perspective that the nurse obstinately clings to and the blind faith that the girl places in the family story:

LIB: I do understand that your mother spat chewedup food...

ANNA: Manna from heaven!
LIB: ... from her mouth...
ANNA: From God!

LIB: ... in order to sustain you.

ANNA: Manna! LIB: Food. Anna. Food.

The rapid-fire exchange that brings these opposing worldviews up against each other resembles the two different sides of the disk of a thaumatrope at rest. Only movement can reconcile them and turn the verbal exchange into a convers(at) ion—or more precisely, a conversation that makes conversion possible. Lib begins to achieve this movement when she gives in and agrees to speak Anna's language: "What if God could provide manna again?" Anna sees her demand for understanding satisfied and opens up to Lib. With her euphemistic religious rhetoric, the girl explains to the nurse that her fasting is meant to save her deceased brother from hell, which he has been condemned to because he sexually abused her. Lib then begins to be able to combine her analytical thinking with a more sympathetic gaze facilitated by her feelings for Anna. This change of perspective will enable the nurse to imagine an alternative story that will be convincing enough to Anna to bring her out of her cage, while also allowing Lib to free herself. Valuing stories and believing in their transformative power, the nurse will design a plan to flee the village with Anna and Will, assume new identities together, and start "a new story and a new life."

The film's last shot opens with the newly formed family eating in a dining room with other diners on a ship to Sydney. The girl looks at Anna and Will, smiles and raises her spoon to her mouth, confirming that Lib's story of death and resurrection has resonated with her. A waiter passes behind them both and a tracking shot follows him, continuing on where the waiter stops and revealing that the dining room to be on a film set. As was the case at the very beginning of the film, the shift from one narrative level to another occurs within a single shot. The camera keeps moving and the actress who plays the role of Kitty in the story—and who has also served as the narrator—appears on screen wearing contemporary clothes, thereby revealing the split nature of her character and her metaleptic status. Once she is in

the centre of the shot, the camera stops tracking and zooms very gradually in on her. The music stops and as she stares at the camera she utters the words: "In, out, in, out..." Then a ghostly sound coincides with a quick fade to black that effectively ejects us from the film.

The film ends by reinforcing its questioning of the boundary between the diegetic and the extra-diegetic, while also tempting us with the illusion of treating the extra-diegetic as extra-fictional. Without the need to appear on screen, the thaumatrope is invoked by the words uttered by the woman. The reference to the optical toy, which in the other cases helped us to understand the complexities of Lib and Anna's situation, serves here to explain the relationship the film seeks to establish with us. Thus, while previously the fusion of images triggered by the spinning thaumatrope was associated with the possibility of combining the scientific and religious approaches to life, this last reflexive twist now prompts us to value what unites cinema and reality above what separates them. After all, as the narrator reminds us at the beginning of the film, we, like the characters, "are nothing without stories."

CONCLUSIONS

Through the analysis of certain key scenes and their contextualisation in the film to which they belong, this article has explored the rhetorical and symbolic functions fulfilled by the depictions of the thaumatrope in *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Wonder*. As has been shown here, in each of these films this optical toy acts as a textual operator that helps connect the main plot with the subplots in a suggestive way. These conclusions summarise the results of the two case studies in order to highlight the similarities between the three main functions of this textual operator in the two films.

Firstly, the thaumatrope provides the metaphors used in both films to illustrate the personal situation of their respective protagonists. In this THE REFERENCE TO THE OPTICAL TOY, WHICH IN THE OTHER CASES HELPED US TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIB AND ANNA'S SITUATION, SERVES HERE TO EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIP THE FILM SEEKS TO ESTABLISH WITH US

case, the importance of the appearance of the thaumatrope lies not so much in the peculiarity of the optical device as in the value of the images on its two sides—the bird and the cage—for defining the character. In both films, the protagonists' painful past is a prison that impedes their progress. The masterful dissolve that places Lib's face inside the cage of the thaumatrope is a graphic representation of this. Sleepy Hollow, on the other hand, focuses more on identifying Ichabod with the red cardinal motif repeated throughout the film. It is also worth noting that in Lelio's film the images of the cage and the bird also serve to represent Anna's circumstances.

Secondly, the repeated references to the two sides of the disk—conceived statically as distinct elements—emphasise the conflict between the rational and the extrarational that both films associate with their protagonists. This conflict is made explicit by Ichabod himself when he shows both sides of the thaumatrope to Katrina in order to make a clear distinction between science and magic. The Wonder contains a similar moment shortly after Anna is shown playing with her thaumatrope in bed, in her dialogue with Lib in which Anna's religious use of language clashes with Lib's determination to give a rational translation to her words.

The protagonists of both films reach a turning point where they begin to open up to the conciliatory movement of the thaumatrope (after Ichabod's shock following his encounter with the ghost in *Sleepy Hollow* and after Lib learns of the abuse suffered by Anna in *The Wonder*). The

constable and the nurse both glimpse the value of the other side of the disk—of magic, or of the religious story—while at the same time taking the first steps to overcome their internal struggles. Indeed, the refuge that both take in an exclusive allegiance to reason is presented to us (albeit more veiled in Lib's case than in Ichabod's) as the result of wounds as yet unhealed. The outcomes of Ichabod's and Lib's stories are marked by what the spinning thaumatrope—in its dynamic conception—can offer them: the possibility of seeing in a different way, of glimpsing another possible world and of being aware of their participation in that world.

Finally, the appearances of the thaumatrope encourage a metacinematic reading of both films. However, while in *Sleepy Hollow* the thaumatrope constitutes the basis of this interpretation, in The Wonder it functions as an element that operates in conjunction with the film's various reflexive strategies. It is important to stress that the possibility of a metacinematic interpretation does not depend exclusively on the fact that the optical toy can be considered one of cinema's precursors. The self-reflexive character of the thaumatrope itself and the way this is played with in both films cannot be ignored. Thus, just as the films urge the spectator, together with Ichabod and Lib, to reconcile the two different sides of the disk (the rational and the extrarational), they also urge us to reconsider the distinction made between cinema and reality. After all, cinema is both science and magic, or alternatively, both science and storytelling.

In keeping with the messages they convey, both these films try to engage us emotionally rather than intellectually. By moving us, it could be argued, they invite us into the transformative movement of the thaumatrope, the spinning that makes us aware of our role in the film and of the fact that without our subjective perception there is no truth to hold on to; the movement that gives us the opportunity to question our beliefs and our own narratives of the past, present and future.

NOTES

- 1 As Manning (2016: 195) and Cheron (2023: 79) point out, the appearance of the thaumatrope in *Sleepy Hollow* is in fact anachronistic, given that the film is set in 1799.
- 2 Siegel (2013: 209) makes a similar observation, arguing that the caged bird implies a powerful image of Ichabod's childhood relationship with his mother and his identification with her subjectivity against the sadistic torturing father.
- 3 In light of the aforementioned association of the cardinal with the protagonist, Katrina's words emphasise the attraction she feels for Ichabod and his need for liberation.
- 4 The conflict between truth and appearances is associated with the importance *Sleepy Hollow* places on the act of seeing in the studies by Parks (2016: 66), Plate (2000: 4) and Cheron (2023: 163).
- 5 This is in line with Cheron's interpretation (2023: 231).

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THE THAUMATROPE AS A TEXTUAL OPERATOR IN SLEEPY HOLLOW AND THE WONDER

Abstract

This article aims to establish and compare the rhetorical and symbolic functions of the representation of the thaumatrope in *Sleepy Hollow* (Tim Burton, 1999) and *The Wonder* (Sebastián Lelio, 2022). In doing so, and after some brief reflections on the optical toy and its representation in cinema, we focus on the analysis of the scenes of the two films in which the thaumatrope appears. The results of the two case studies allow us to identify the three functions that the textual operator performs in both *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Wonder*: 1) to provide the metaphor that illustrates the personal situation of the protagonists, 2) to emphasize the conflict between the rational and the extrarrational and 3) to promote the metacinematographic approach to both films.

Key words

Thaumatrope; *Sleepy Hollow; The Wonder;* Film Analysis; Comparative Analysis; Tim Burton; Optical toys.

Author

Enric Antoni Burgos Ramírez (València, 1976) holds bachelor's degrees in Philosophy (1998) and in Audiovisual Communication (2002) from the University of Valencia and a PhD in Communication Science from the Jaume I University (2017). He is a teaching assistant at University of Valencia and a member of the R&D group Mediaflows. He has authored a book, numerous book chapters and several articles in scientific journals like Fotocinema, Communication & Society, Cinema. Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image, Área Abierta or Comunicación y Hombre. His research interests include subversive cinema and TV series as well as the thought of Stanley Cavell. Contact: enric.burgos@uv.es.

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EL TAUMATROPO COMO OPERADOR TEXTUAL EN SLEEPY HOLLOW Y EL PRODIGIO

Resumen

El presente artículo se propone establecer y comparar las funciones retóricas y simbólicas de la representación del taumatropo en *Sleepy Hollow* (Tim Burton, 1999) y *El prodigio* (The Wonder, Sebastián Lelio, 2022). Para ello, y tras unas breves reflexiones sobre el juguete óptico y su representación en el cine, nos centramos en el análisis de las escenas de las dos películas en las que aparece el taumatropo. Los resultados de los dos estudios de caso permiten identificar las tres funciones que el operador textual cumple tanto en *Sleepy Hollow* como en *El prodigio*: 1) suministrar la metáfora que ilustra la situación personal de los protagonistas, 2) enfatizar el conflicto entre lo racional y lo extrarracional y 3) promover el acercamiento en clave metacinematográfica a ambos films.

Palabras clave

Taumatropo; *Sleepy Hollow; El prodigio*; Análisis fílmico; Análisis comparativo; Tim Burton; Juguetes ópticos.

Autor

Enric Antoni Burgos Ramírez (València, 1976) es licenciado en Filosofía (1998) y en Comunicación Audiovisual (2002) por la Universidad de Valencia y doctor en Ciencias de la Comunicación por la Universidad Jaume I (2017). Es profesor asociado en la Universitat de València y miembro del grupo de I+D Mediaflows. Es autor de un libro, numerosos capítulos de libro y diversos artículos en revistas científicas como Fotocinema, Communication & Society, Cinema. Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image, Área Abierta o Comunicación y Hombre. Sus intereses de investigación incluyen las desviaciones del modelo hegemónico en cine y series de televisión así como el pensamiento de Stanley Cavell. Contacto: enric.burgos@uv.es.

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THE MUSICAL PERFORMER AS A CHARACTER IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS GARDEL AND AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALITY, PROFESSIONALISATION AND GLOBALIZATION

DULCE MARÍA DALBOSCO

INTRODUCTION

As the twentieth century dawned, new technologies for sound and visual production and reproduction globally revolutionized humanity's relationship with sound and image, as well as with entertainment and art. Novel artifacts -phonograph, gramophone, radio, and cinematograph shaped new consumers, new audiences, and new national and transnational connections among various artistic productions. In this context, two genres of urban popular song developed almost simultaneously: Argentine tango and Portuguese fado, between which it is possible to find some correspondences, both in their poetics and in other aspects of their artistic evolution. Among these, the use of fado and tango by silent and later sound cinema to enrich their plots, casts, and soundtracks stands out for its productivity and persistence. For this reason, we want to analyse some parallelisms in the way that sound cinema capitalized on the success of Carlos Gardel - a tango singer – and Amália Rodrigues – a fado singer — in their respective countries, to shape the figure of the musical performer as a film character and project them nationally and internationally as identity emblems. To this end, we will focus on some films starring them, where they play the role of singers. Specifically, from Gardel, we will examine Melodía de arrabal [Suburban melody] (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) and El día que me quieras [The day that you love me] (John Reinhardt, 1935), while from Amália, we have chosen Fado. história de uma cantadeira [Fado, Story of a Singer] (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) and Sangue toureiro [Bullfighter's Blood] (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Our eagerness in tracing the different affinities between tango and fado was inspired by recent artistic emergences in Argentina and Portugal, which have brought together both genres.

Among these stands out the Argentine singer Karina Beorlegui, who has cultivated a mixed repertoire of tangos and fados since 2009. Her albums -Caprichosa [Capricious] (2003), Mañana zarpa un barco [Tomorrow a ship sails] (2009), and Puertos cardinales [Cardinal ports] (2011)— and her live performances have led to the exercise of bringing together both genres, reinterpreting their traditions in dialogue with each other. In this way, her interventions have become a reinterpretation in a dual sense, as they constitute new performances and critical listening experiences that enable the discovery of connections and differences between tango and fado. Beorlegui's initiative has been followed by other local and international artists. It is worth noting that the relationships between tango and fado date back a century (Gouveia, 2013), and there are even theories suggesting possible genetic links in the origins of both music styles (Moura, 2001; Gouveia, 2013), as well as other types of intersections.

We believe that translating artistic intuition into academic research could yield fruitful results. For this reason, we frame our work proposal within Comparative Arts, a discipline that considers, among its possibilities, the confrontation of genetically independent phenomena and processes, whose study is justified because these involve common socio-historical conditions (Guillén, 2005: 96). Manfred Schmeling refers to this type of comparison as one based on "analogies of contexts" (Schmeling 1984: 23). Indeed, we start from the hypothesis that the convergences that can be found between different aspects of tango and fado are motivated by certain parallelisms in their contexts, namely: their development in urban-port cities, the perceived need to construct national identity narratives during the early decades of the twentieth century, the emergence of iconic singers of strong impact (Dalbosco, 2022), and the globalization of the mechanisms of action of the cultural industry by that time, particularly of records, radio, and cinema.

It is worth noting that this comparative tracing could well be expanded to other countries, since the use of national music and its stars was a constant in Ibero-American sound cinema between the thirties and the sixties. Silvana Flores points out that, in its beginnings, Hollywood musical cinema began to adapt musical revues from Broadway theatre, a trend soon followed by Latin America with its own theatrical productions (Flores, 2023: 258). Thus, a feedback loop was generated that promoted the advertising and stardom of singers and dancers, as the "frequent assimilation between artists and characters" in the early days of sound cinema became "a procedure for the promotion of artists in radio and in musical theatre" (Flores, 2023: 255)1. This occurred in Spain, for example, with the cuplé, the copla, and their folkloric singers and dancers, whose incorporation into the big screen gave rise to films colloquially known as españoladas. Imperio Argentina was one of the most international figures of this process (Labanyi, 2004: 2). In Latin America, Mexico and Brazil made persistent use of their national musics during the dawn of sound cinema. Mexico projected mariachi and ranchera music to the world, through singers like Pedro Infante or Jorge Negrete. Brazil, on the other hand, showcased samba, marches, and carnival in its musical films, particularly in its famous chanchadas (Paranaguá, 1985: 36-65).

Due to these parallel patterns, comparative studies have emerged that address various aspects of the relationship between popular music and Ibero-American musical cinema of this period. To mention just a few, Fernando Morais da Costa presents the analogies in the transition from silent to sound cinema in Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, Mexico, and Cuba, and asserts that in all these countries, centralized political regimes used popular music and cinema to forge national integration and identity (Costa, 2012: 51-60). In Modernidades primitivas: Tango, samba y nación (2007), Florencia

Garramuño compares how films starring Carlos Gardel and Carmen Miranda, "figures of an alternative modernity"², contributed to the nationalization of tango and samba, while constructing possible histories of these genres (Garramuño, 2007: 41). Silvana Flores, for her part, focuses on certain correlations between tango and bolero, such as their hybrid nature, which enabled a transnational exchange between Argentine and Mexican cinema (Flores, 2019: 48-72).

Because of the similarities in the connections between music, theatre, and cinema in these Ibero-American countries, it is not uncommon to find, in the early decades of musical film, the character of a singer who succeeds, portrayed by famous real-life performers. This is evident in Spanish films such as Suspiros de España [Sighs of Spain] (Benito Perojo, 1939) and Mariguilla Terremoto [Mariquilla Earthquake] (1939) starring Estrellita Castro, or Filigrana [Filigree] (Luis Marquina, 1949) featuring Concha Piquer, where the singer's journey is integrated into the storyline. We find a similar dynamic in the character played by Rita Montaner in the Cuban film El romance del palmar [The Romance of the Palm Grove] (Ramón Peón, 1938). The Mexican film Canto a mi tierra [Song to My Land (José Bohr, 1938) narrates the professionalisation of a singer, Pedro Vargas; the specular correspondence with the real vocalist is evidenced by the fact that the character in the film retains his real name.

Thus, it is patently clear that the uses of tango and fado, along with their singers, into their respective cinematographies were not merely isolated interventions. Rather, they reflect certain transmedial practices that have extended transnationally throughout Ibero-American cinema, with nuances to be considered in each case. In a first approach, we have chosen tango and fado within the framework of a broader project exploring other poetic and iconic correspondences between both musical genres (Dalbosco, 2020; 2022), which are closer than those found between

INDEED. WE START FROM THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THE CONVERGENCES THAT CAN BE FOUND BETWEEN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF TANGO AND FADO ARE MOTIVATED BY CERTAIN PARALLELISMS IN THEIR CONTEXTS, NAMELY: THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN-PORT CITIES. THE PERCEIVED NEED TO CONSTRUCT NATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES DURING THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THE EMERGENCE OF ICONIC SINGERS OF STRONG IMPACT (DALBOSCO, 2022), AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE MECHANISMS OF **ACTION OF THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY BY** THAT TIME. PARTICULARLY OF RECORDS. RADIO. AND CINEMA

other musical forms³. Moreover, we contend that these two examples, in different languages and on different continents, illustrate fully the transoceanic scope of these processes in cinema. This is primarily due to the profound impact achieved by the chosen figures—Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues—whose filmography is largely centred on the portrayal of musical interpreters.

To carry out our study, we start from Simon Frith's reflections on the vocal personality of popular music singers. The musicologist explains that this personality comprises the characters that feature in their song repertoire, the character of the singer as a star, created by publicity and advertising, and the character of the singer as a person, that is, how each one imagines the performer really is (Frith, 2014: 348). In the case of Gardel and Amália⁴, to this complex interaction of personalities are also added those of them as film artists and those of the characters played by them in their films. Consequently, we will focus on the cinematic resources employed to shape the singer as a film character. This feedback loop was

such an effective marketing strategy that it was sustained for several decades in Ibero-American cinema.

TANGO AND FADO AT THE EMERGENCE OF SOUND CINEMA

The rise of the phonographic and discographic industry brought about a radical change in the relationship between the listener and the performer, as it transformed the way of listening by making live performance dispensable: the physical presence of the singer was no longer a requirement to hear their voice. This situation, so natural nowadays, was almost magical for audiences in those early days. In her book Fábricas de músicas (2017), Marina Cañardo explains that, while at the beginning of the phonographic industry performances were anonymously disseminated without reference to the singers, concepts such as "high fidelity" or "faithful copy" began to spread, and advertising started to regain the performer's identity and visual aspect. Thus, from 1890 onwards, a star system of the record industry began to develop, leading to the "idolatry of the performer", which Cañardo sees as a continuation of "the cult of genius within the romantic tradition" (Cañardo, 2017: 73)5, further fuelled by specialized magazines, radio, and, fundamentally, by cinema. Alina Mazzaferro summarizes how Argentine publications of the time reflected the growth of the local star system, nurtured by some artists who were both singers and actors/actresses of theatre and cinema: "at first, they would talk about 'figuras'; by the mid-twenties, 'estrellas' would emerge and [...] with the rise of studio cinema, 'astros' would become popularized" (Mazzaferro, 2018: 21)6.

As we have previously discussed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when various countries began producing silent films first, and later sound films, they immediately made use of the flourishing national music and its artists. This happened with tango and fado, which soon inte-

grated into an increasingly extensive transmedial network, where song lyrics, theatrical and film scripts, and literary narratives exchanged plots, characters, and settings. For instance, in Argentina, many silent films by José Agustín Ferreyra had titles and stories directly extracted from tango songs⁷. Similarly, in Portugal's silent cinema, the emblematic film O fado [The fado], directed by Maurice Mariaud (1924), was inspired by José Malhoa's homonymous painting (1910). Later, just as the first Portuguese sound film, A Severa [The Several (José Leitão de Barros, 1931), used fado and the figure of the fadista as symbols upon which to build its narrative, the first Argentine sound film, ¡Tango! (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933), did the same with tango and its artists. Argentine films started featuring tango figures such as Azucena Maizani, Tita Merello, and Charlo; in Portuguese cinema starred fadistas like Ercília Costa, Fernando Farinha, Hermínia Silva, and Carlos Ramos. The key factor was that sound cinema not only combined the singer's voice and image but also made them accessible to a much larger audience. The singer soon became a frequent and appealing cinematic character in the accelerated production of scripts⁸.

Given these conditions, sound cinema took advantage of the figures who embodied the maximum expression of the cult of the performer of tango and fado: Gardel and Amália. It should be noted that their careers did not coincide in time, as they emerged at different stages of the musical development of their respective genres. While Gardel was the creator of the tango song singer, from his first performance of "Mi noche triste" [My sad night] in 1917 until his premature death in 1935, Amália appeared in fado in 1939, when it was already quite established as a musical genre. Nevertheless, like Gardel, she was the great vehicle for the international projection of fado and its "civilising hero", in the words of Joaquim Pais de Brito (1983: 160). Thus, numerous correspondences can be found in the career path of these two

artists: from their role in the evolution of tango and fado, the way the media and they themselves constructed their public biographies, to their national and international symbolic projection. Both represented the professionalisation and internationalisation of their respective music styles⁹. Although the film careers of the two artists did not occur simultaneously, there is a striking similarity in their film narratives and the consequent construction of the singer figure as a character.

Already established as Argentina's greatest national singer, between 1931 and 1935 Gardel starred in seven sound feature films made for Paramount abroad, in Paris and New York: some even preceding the production of sound cinema in Argentina. Although he plays the role of a singer in almost all of them, this role stands out in Melodía de arrabal (1932) and El día que me quieras (1935). In these films and their soundtracks, the attenuation of local colour is often noticeable. The fact that an Argentine product – Gardel and his songs – was captured in its own language but filmed in other countries and projected to the world directly impacted the spatial and verbal configuration of the script. Filmed entirely in studios with artificial set design, even when referring to supposedly real locations in Buenos Aires, these are symbolically suggested spaces. Conversely, Amália Rodrigues' films were mostly shot in Portugal when fado and its artists already had a significant presence in national cinema. In almost all of them, she plays the role of a fadista, with this figure being most prominent in Fado, história de uma cantadeira (1947) and Sangue toureiro (1958).

Despite the differences between Gardel's and Amália's films, both functioned as metadiscourses, tracing "a triangle of blurred boundaries between the film character, the public life of the artists, and the real people" (Dalbosco, 2022: 13)¹⁰. Indeed, the scripts often dialogue with the artists' real journeys, reconstructed in biographies and interviews, and disseminated by specialised magazines and radio. In the four selected films—and in others

as well— the character of the musical performer is constructed around four interconnected axes that shape them both as a cult figure and as a social mediator, akin to ancient cultural heroes: the spatial displacement as an initiation journey, the personal image metamorphosis, the social marginalisation, and the moral and emotional integrity. We will now examine how each of these operates in configuring this film character, focusing primarily on the first two, as they involve a greater deployment of cinematic resources. The other two pertain more to the character's traits as developed in the plot. Spatial Displacement as an Initiation Journey and the Personal Image Metamorphosis.

Both in the poetics of tango and fado from the twenties to the forties, and later in the films based on them, space acquires a significance beyond its value as territory. Consequently, the cities of Buenos Aires and Lisbon, along with their connections between neighbourhoods, the centre, the peripheries, the interior spaces, and even the transatlantic countries, are re-signified as places of identity construction or deconstruction, redefining their boundaries as affective topographies. Numerous studies highlight the importance of space not only as one of the most recurrent poetic themes in tango (Bergero, Matamoro, Ulla) and fado (Eliott, Gray, Queiroz), but also because the relationship between subject and space is crucial in the genesis of both musical genres and in the interweaving of all their components: lyrics, music, instrumentation, and performance.

Noemí Ulla and Matthew Karush, for example, have argued that at least a substantial part of tango lyrics from the twenties and thirties revealed a "Manichean logic of society" (Karush, 2013: 36), where the suburb—a lost paradise—was opposed to the centre—perdition (Ulla, 1982: 36). The ecological displacement from the neighbourhood to the centre carried out by tango itself in the second decade of the twentieth century was, however, what enabled its musical expansion. Similarly, in tango lyrics, such a journey implied certain op-

portunities for social mobility for its characters, so the dualistic vision of space also offers ambivalent interpretive keys. What is clear is that this cartography was not representative of Buenos Aires' socio-environmental reality of the time, which was much more complex.

In the same vein, fado, as a strongly situated music, shapes an affective cartography through the symbiotic relationship established between lyrics, body, voice, song, and space (Gray, 2013: 106-108). Lila Ellen Gray argues that fados whose lyrics celebrate aspects of Lisbon and its neighbourhoods are so frequent that they constitute a poetic subgenre. They often evoke a city suspended in time, viewed through a lens imbued with nostalgia and saudade (Gray, 2013: 108-110). Richard Elliott, on the other hand, considers that whether speaking of Lisbon as a whole or of its fado neighbourhoods-Alfama, Mouraria, Bairro Alto, Madragoa - fado lyrics "provide topographies of loss, that place the city as an object of desire or lack, or as the backdrop to another lost, remembered or desired object" (Elliott, 2016: 66).

In the four selected films, the basic plotline is similar: a talented but local singer transforms into a music star while becoming entangled in a

IN THE FOUR SELECTED FILMS —AND IN OTHERS AS WELL—THE CHARACTER OF THE MUSICAL PERFORMER IS CONSTRUCTED AROUND FOUR INTERCONNECTED AXES THAT SHAPE THEM BOTH AS A CULT FIGURE AND AS A SOCIAL MEDIATOR, AKIN TO ANCIENT CULTURAL HEROES: THE SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT AS AN INITIATION JOURNEY, THE PERSONAL IMAGE METAMORPHOSIS, THE SOCIAL MARGINALISATION, AND THE MORAL AND EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY

romantic relationship. Much like cultural heroes, spatial displacement is the milestone marking this transformation, redefined as an initiation journey. The characters portrayed by Gardel and Amália in these films undergo a dual journey: from the suburbs — the periphery — to the theatre — the city centre — and from the national to the international arena. As previously mentioned, this journey reflects the actual path taken by both the music and its protagonists, evolving from local products to national symbols.

Due to the demands of his international projection and the urgency with which the scripts were conceived, Gardel's films rely on simple plots, where spaces are reduced to cardboard scenery and generic labels such as "neighbourhood café", "university bar", "theatre", "suburbs", etc. Yet, they do not lose their contextual value. In fact, in Melodía de arrabal, the space is the first thing that is shown. The film opens with a panning shot intended to represent the hustle and bustle of neighbourhood life until the camera stops to zoom in on the "record shop", which attracts a large crowd, positioning music as an essential element of neighbourhood life. The next scene already takes us inside the neighbourhood bar, where the camera once again moves around to capture the place's liveliness: musicians, dancing couples, card games, men with suspicious looks.

The script, written by Alfredo Le Pera, is structured around binarisms and duplications, evident in both the spatial settings and the characters' identities. Gardel simultaneously embodies Roberto Ramírez, "the café singer" situated in the suburbs, and a white-collar swindler who cheats at card games, a skill he later exploits under the name of Torres. Likewise, the neighbourhood and the café possess a dual valence. On one hand, they are celebrated by the eponymous song, "Melodía de arrabal", which serves as a leitmotif, integrated as both diegetic and extradiegetic music throughout the film.

Neighbourhood... neighbourhood... you have the restless soul of a sentimental sparrow.

Sorrows... plea...
Is this whole thug neighbourhood, melody of the suburbs!

Neighbourhood... neighbourhood... forgive me if, when I recall you, a tear escapes me, which, rolling down your cobblestones, is a prolonged kiss that my heart gives you¹¹.

On the other hand, the neighbourhood and the café are also denigrated by some inhabitants. For instance, Marga, the tough woman of the café, declares that the "dirty and gloomy suburbs poison her soul" and "trap her in its vice-ridden prison", or even Alina, who stands in contrast to Marga as a positive female figure. Alina, the virtuous girl and the neighbourhood music teacher, suggests to Ramírez that "to be someone", "to succeed", he must cease being the "café singer" to become the "city singer", whose stage is the theatre. Indeed, it is Alina who intervenes with a theatre entrepreneur, enabling Ramírez's transition from a local singer to a professional, as highlighted in the second axis marking the singer's recognition: the metamorphosis of his personal image. While Ramírez sings in the bar dressed in a suit and tie with a handkerchief, neat but suburban, in the theatre he performs in a tuxedo and bow tie, internationally recognized attire symbolizing social mobility (Karush, 2013: 134). Off-screen, Gardel's image dressed in this way was the most frequent; thus, there is a nod from the fictional character to the real person [IMAGE 1]. The singer's humble origins —like those of Amália Rodrigues—were, according to Matthew Karush, a central component of his image, so that "Gardel in his tuxedo was the quintessence of the poor boy who made it" (Karush, 2013: 134)12. The same applies to tango and fado: their popular and suburban roots are neither silenced nor discarded in these films: rath-



Image I. Carlos Gardel dressed in a tuxedo in Melodía de arrabal

er, they remain the source of their appeal, which is refined and legitimised as they move to the city centre.

Just as the ability to project the singer's image and voice nationally and internationally fostered a cult of the performer, cinema exploited its technical capacities to manipulate sound and visual aspects, thereby achieving various effects on the audience. A prevalent technique in films depicting musical stars involves the deliberate disjunction between image and sound, serving to highlight one or the other. In the film, during Gardel's initial performance of "Melodía de arrabal", the camera only pulls away from him to direct its focus onto the captivated audience, thus emphasizing their admiration for his performance.

Gardel's journey expands and becomes more complex in *El día que me quieras*, also by Paramount but filmed in New York with a script by Le Pera. Julio Argüelles (Gardel) leaves his wealthy paternal home to marry an aspiring actress from a lower social class. From singing in cafes just to barely subsist while his wife agonizes, he becomes a celebrity of the tango and the creole song when, alongside his daughter Marga, he triumphs abroad under the new name of Julio Quiroga — that is, with a new identity—. First in Europe — Paris, London, Berlin— and later in Hollywood, where the metadiscursive circle is completed:

Julio, like tango and Gardel himself, is recognised abroad and becomes a film artist. The singers' journeys are suggested through vertiginous dissolves of images of trains, planes, ships, building facades, and newspaper headlines, a technique inherited from silent cinema.

This international move also brings about a change in the singer's image: while Gardel, portraying Julio Argüelles, consistently dons a suit, reflecting the typical attire of a tango singer, when Julio Quiroga performs in the mise-en-abyme scene set within the film, he appears dressed as a gaucho (Image 2). The widespread practice of dressing tango singers as gauchos on the international stage is well documented. However, there is deeper significance here: just as tango lyrics and Argentine films often highlight the dichotomy between the city and the country, and between the centre and the neighbourhood -with its rural roots— in several of his films, Gardel personifies "both rural folklore and the urban traditions of tango" (Karush, 2013: 84). Indeed, he launched his career singing creole music, a genre he nev-

Image 2. Carlos Gardel dressed as an Argentine gaucho on the film set simulated by the film $\,$ El día que me quieras



er abandoned. As Karush argues, it was "Gardel's, and by extension tango's, ability to mediate between the countryside and the city, tradition and modernity" that made the genre a powerful symbol of national identity (Karush, 2013: 85).

As we can see, the dualistic cartography sung by tango and reinterpreted in these filmic geographies, which in turn was re-signified in its international projection, was far from representing the actual spatial layout and population composition of the neighbourhoods and the city of Buenos Aires. Instead, it aimed at constructing various narratives about the music, its artists, and national identity.

In the films starring Amália Rodrigues, the journey of the fado singer mirrors that of fado itself and that of the real Amália. In Fado, história de uma cantadeira, Ana Maria, an amateur cantadeira, transitions from singing in the intimacy of her home in Lisbon's Alfama neighbourhood to local venues, where she catches the attention of entrepreneurs who persuade her to perform in theatres in central Lisbon. Thus, she turns into a profes-

sional artist. Michael Colvin argues that this film depicts the emergence of novo fado, the evolution of fado from its origins as the nineteenth century "song of the defeated", rooted in Lisbon's marginalized areas and popular neighbourhoods, to becoming a nationally recognized genre performed by professionals and projected internationally (Colvin, 2016: 106).

By becoming professional, Ana Maria undergoes a transformation into a celebrity figure: at the beginning of the film, she dresses simply in house aprons and performs at local venues draped in a black shawl, adhering to the traditional conventions of fado. However, as her career ascends, she emerges

as a glamorous diva, draped in silk and sequins, attended by a retinue of domestic staff. A pivotal scene depicts Ana Maria awakening in the late afternoon, nestled in a sumptuous bed, engaging in conversation on a pristine white telephone —an overt homage to Hollywood icons like Jean Harlow (Image 3). Through this evolution, cinema, as a transmedial genre, crafts a novel type of artist, a sort of total figure articulated at the intersection of different genres: Ana Maria/Amália emerges as a multifaceted persona, embodying simultaneously the roles of a professional singer, a theatrical luminary, and a cinematic star.

However, Ana Maria's initiation journey does not stop there. Following a breakup with Júlio, her former guitarist and neighbourhood sweetheart, stemming from a misunderstanding, she relocates to Brazil, where she experiences her breakthrough as a singer. Unlike Gardel's journey, the theatre is a place of simulation, with stage designs underscoring their artificial nature, while the retiro —akin to the Buenos Aires' café—is depicted as the bastion of authentic fado. Júlio, according to Colvin emblematic of fado tradition and its "fado castizo" (Colvin, 2016: 113), reproaches Ana Maria for no longer singing as she used to since departing Alfama. Several scenes show the theatrical frenzy backstage, among scaffolding and ropes that expose the artifice, in stark contrast with the film's opening scenes set in the Alfama neighbourhood, where characters wander through its sunlit streets, open-air markets, and local houses and taverns.

Nevertheless, the journey of this fado singer comes full circle as Ana Maria returns to the *retiro* where she started and sings the central fado of the soundtrack, "O fado de cada um" [The Fate of Each One], to honour Júlio, in what constitutes a double return with ideological undertones: from the singer to Alfama and from the woman to the man. This fado runs through the entire film and offers an interpretive line, as Ana Maria sings it at the beginning when she is an amateur fadista,



Image 3. Amália Rodrigues in the style of a Hollywood diva in Fado, história de uma cantadeira

and then at the end, already a celebrity. The lyrics of "O fado de cada um" reinforce the film's ideological reading, as well as the self-definition of fado in its projection as a national song towards Portugal and abroad. It is one of the many metadiscursive fados that define the genre at the intersection of the word fado as destiny and as music: "Well thought out, we all have our fate / And those born ill-fated, will have no better fate / Fate is luck, from the cradle to the grave / No one escapes, no matter how strong / The destiny that God gives!"13. In this final scene, the disjunction between image and sound is used to emphasize the spectacular nature of the return. While the camera focuses on Júlio on the retiro stage, playing the guitar with indifference and bitterness, Ana Maria's powerful voice is heard in the background until the camera finally focuses on her walking towards the stage to reunite with her former love, dressed in the classic black fado shawl and not in her diva attire.

The ideological background is more evident in Amália's films than in Gardel's. Regarding this, it is important to note that while Gardel's films, filmed abroad, seemed driven by commercial interests and a somewhat superficial desire for exoticism, the Portuguese films starring Amália Rodrigues were shot during the Salazar regime. Neither fado nor Amália could escape the uses of popular cul-

ture carried out by the Estado Novo, synthesized in the famous slogan of the three F's: Fado, Fátima, and Football (Nery, 2004: 241). If in its early days, around the thirties, Salazar's dictatorship implemented measures to sanitise fado, which stimulated its professionalisation and poetic crystallisation (Brito, 1983), later the regime relied on the suggestive alliance of this music with cinema to promote its value system. As Rui Vieira Nery explains, from the fifties onwards, the Estado Novo gradually began to overcome its initial ideological distance from fado, seeking to incorporate it into a populist image strategy that extended to all domains of cultural industry, including cinema (Nery, 2004: 238). The prominence and celebrity achieved by Amália as a fado star and a film actress were exploited by the dictatorship to such an extent that this connection overshadowed her career, especially after the Carnation Revolution¹⁴.

In Sangue Toureiro, the ideological use of fado intensifies; Adriana Martins states that this film "takes advantage of the fame and social representativeness of the bullfighter and the fadista to convey the values of a rigidly stratified patriarchal society with well-defined gender roles, resistant to the transformation of mentalities" (Martins. 2017: 100)15. This content contrasts with the cinematographic modernity of Sangue toreiro, promoted as Portugal's first colour feature film, and characterized by skilful camerawork and lavish use of various cinematic visual and sound resources: panoramas, low-angle shots, voice-overs. The journey of the fadista is linear, intertwined with a love story of a different nature, much more connected to the etymological and tragic sense of the word "fado" as fatum ('ominous fate'), which both the fado poetics and the discourses about fado and its own artists have drawn upon. Amália Rodrigues embodies a fadista named Maria da Graça, already acclaimed by the local audience, who sings in various venues in Lisbon. In one of them, she meets Eduardo, the son of a traditional landowner from the rural area of Ribatejo, who becomes a

bullfighter to win her over, until their love turns into a passionate romance, and they begin an extramarital cohabitation. The young man's traditional family repudiates this situation to such an extent that Eduardo's mother convinces Maria da Graça to leave him, arguing that he should take care of the family estate so that they could continue hiring local workers. The fadista then decides to secretly leave Eduardo, sacrificing her love for the sake of others, and accepts a contract to sing in Brazil and later in New York, which propels her to international celebrity. Maria da Graça's journey mirrors that of Amália herself: after her debut in 1939 in Lisbon's venues. Amália travelled to Brazil in 1944, where she recorded her first albums, thus beginning her internationalization phase (Ferreira, 2009: 47-58). At the same time, it could be seen as a nod to the origins of fado, as some musicologists place them in Brazil (Nery, 2004). In addition, in the early fifties, Amália spent more than three months performing in New York.

In Sangue Toureiro, the plot's conflict is resolved when each character returns to their original physical, social, and symbolic space: Eduardo to the countryside and the fadista to the stage. Space takes on a special role, manifested not only in the plot but especially in the imagery. Indeed, the film aims to showcase a prosperous Portugal proud of its popular culture: rural dances, fado, bullfighting. However, it simultaneously promotes a rigid and conservative social model. The film begins with a long panning shot starting from the river Tagus, to display the local colour and splendour of the Ribatejo, a Portuguese agricultural region. Meanwhile, Portuguese rural music of extradiegetic origin is heard, and a voice-over refers to the symbiosis between the landscape and the Ribatejo people. Another panoramic shot shows the extent of the land, pausing on its traditions and typical dances. Due to the importance attributed to life in the Ribatejo and regional identity as components of an ideological apparatus, Martins categorises Sangue Toureiro as a Lusitanian

BEYOND THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH OF THE FILMS DISCUSSED AND THEIR UNDERLYING IDEOLOGICAL AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS. THE SPATIAL CIRCULATION IN ALL OF THEM SYMBOLISES THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF BOTH THE ARTIST AND THE MUSIC. THIS CIRCULATION ACTS AS A MECHANISM OF LEGITIMISATION, COMPLETED WHEN NATIONAL BORDERS ARE CROSSED. THEREBY SOLIDIFYING THE GENRE AS A NATIONAL SONG, HOWEVER, THE APPRECIATION OF THIS PROCESS IS AMBIGUOUS, AS IT INEVITABLY INVOLVES UPROOTING THE SINGER AND THE MUSIC FROM THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT. THUS PARTIALLY SACRIFICING THEIR **AUTHENTICITY**

western (Martins, 2017: 102). Throughout the film, this place contrasts with a supposedly modern and sanitised Lisbon. A significant low-angle shot emphasises the height of the building where Maria da Graça and Eduardo live together. Then the camera explores its interior, revealing decor typical of the sixties, which is very up-to-date for the time and aligns with the free and modern way of living love that the film presents as a threat to the traditional family. Moreover, Lisbon's tourist appeal is embodied in the secondary character of a somewhat clumsy American journalist and tourist, who travels around Lisbon documenting its attractions and lightens the tragic plot by causing a series of misunderstandings.

Beyond the specific characteristics of each of the films discussed and their underlying ideological and commercial interests, the spatial circulation in all of them symbolises the professionalisation of both the artist and the music. This circulation acts as a mechanism of legitimisation, completed when national borders are crossed, thereby solidifying the genre as a national song. However, the appreciation of this process is ambiguous, as it inevitably involves uprooting the singer and the music from their original context, thus partially sacrificing their authenticity.

SOCIAL MARGINALISATION AND THE SINGER AS A SOCIAL OUTCAST

As discussed, spatial displacement serves as the catalyst that transforms the amateur singer into a professional performer, a transition manifested through a metamorphosis of their personal image. However, the singer, as a filmic character, also depends on the construction of a specific social and emotional personality. In this section, we will briefly address this social personality.

Even though the change in attire for the male singer and the cantadeira symbolizes their progress and upward mobility, such a shift does not imply integration into the upper class. They may become wealthy, but they do not become aristocrats. Indeed, another mechanism that propels the singer to celebrity status is the process through which the musical performer in the film becomes a kind of social outcast—not in the sense of pejorative marginalisation, but as a figure who, due to his or her unique status, transcends social class distinctions without fully integrating into any. This process operates in two directions: on one hand, it deifies the performer, placing them outside certain social norms applicable to ordinary individuals; on the other hand, it positions them as a mediating figure, a conciliatory presence between classes, capable of generating admiration across social boundaries.

In *Melodía de arrabal*, this process is quite straightforward: through fraudulent means, Ramírez transitions from being a resident of the neighbourhood to living as a wealthy man, but without integrating into the upper class. He assumes a false identity—Torres—which he constantly disavows. His triumph as a singer redeems

him from that reprehensible life, although it does not return him to his place of origin. In El día que me quieras, Julio Argüelles's social path is inverse: the son of a heartless businessman becomes a hardworking man-Julio Quiroga-renouncing his inheritance and class affiliation in exchange for emotional and professional independence. The circle closes, however, when Marga, Julio's daughter—also a singer—marries a wealthy young man whose father only accepts her upon discovering Julio's true lineage, which is a concession to the traditionalist conventions of the time. According to Karush, these types of contradictions in the discourse on social mobility were common in radio and cinema. On one hand, mass culture often adhered to a classist and Manichaean moral vision, which privileged the poor and rejected the rich, while on the other hand, it celebrated individual social mobility (Karush, 2013: 35-36).

A similar dynamic is evident in the portrayal of the fadistas embodied by Amália Rodrigues, who, upon becoming celebrities, remain outside traditional social classes. When Ana Maria in Fado. História de uma Cantadeira achieves success in the theatres, she begins to receive invitations to events held by the Lisbon upper class, such as the reception at the Spanish embassy. However, her elusive behaviour at these events reveals her lack of integration. For instance, when she learns that a girl from her original neighbourhood-Alfama—who is under her protection is gravely ill, she leaves the party to be by her side. Later, her definitive return to Alfama at the end of the film, in what constitutes a classic Hollywood-style scene, confirms her detachment from social classes: the acclaimed star no longer fully belongs to that neighbourhood either. Maria da Graça in Sangue Toureiro, the most tragic figure of the four films, is an outcast from the beginning: admired by the Portuguese upper class, especially by men, yet rejected by Eduardo's traditional and wealthy parents. Their union proves impossible and breaks apart. As Martins states, "Maria da Graça accepts

the fate that society and her condition impose on her and turns to singing fado as a way of atoning for her pain" (Martins, 2017: 113).

MORAL INTEGRITY AND EMOTIONAL SUPERIORITY

Another attribute used to shape the singer as a cinematic character in these films is their inherent kindness and emotional sensitivity, virtues that align them with the cultural hero. The driving force behind the singer's journey is fundamentally emotional; there is no initial excessive ambition for success or desire to make money through singing. Both the male singer and the fadista are depicted as characters with exceptional nobility of heart and moral integrity, even when they have exhibited socially or ethically questionable behaviour. For example, Roberto Ramírez, who sheds his false identity as Torres and, with a pure heart, becomes deserving of Alina's love, or Julio Argüelles, who steals from his wealthy father to save his dying wife. Among the characters analysed, the epitome of kindness is represented by Maria da Graça, a nineteenth-century-style heroine who sacrifices herself for the benefit of others, even at the cost of her own happiness [IMAGE 4].

The film's conclusion portrays Maria da Graça in her apotheosis as a fadista, yet paradoxically miserable, as evidenced by the last fado she sings, "Um só amor" [A Single Love], and as narrated by an off-screen voice at the end of the film: "Here ends our story. He followed a path of tradition, she chose her destiny as an artist, carrying with her the sorrow of the great and only love of her life". The story of this character ultimately evokes and revives the tales of two fado icons: the mythical Maria Severa Onofriana and her love affair with the Count of Vimioso¹⁶, and Amália herself, who in numerous interviews aligned her life path with the etymological meaning of the word fado, a strategy also employed by many other fadistas (Jerónimo and Fradique, 1995: 91-107).

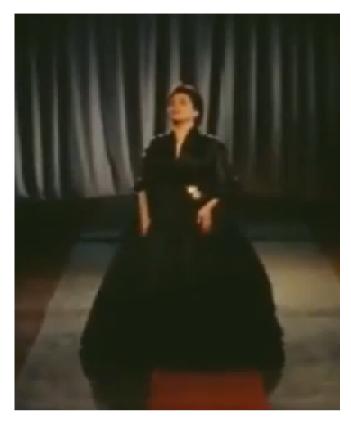


Image 4. Maria da Graça as a triumphant yet unhappy artist in New York, in Sangue toureiro

The construction of the musical performer as a personality with an extraordinary heart was demanded by the cult of the singer as a comprehensive figure, with clear Romantic roots, admired not only for their talent but also for their human virtues. much like the ancient cultural heroes.

CONCLUSION

The technological revolution that erupted at the beginning of the twentieth century permeated generic, medial, and spatial boundaries, while enabling the creation of new genres characterized by their intermediality, such as cinema. Sound cinema capitalized on the possibility of capturing sound and image simultaneously and integrated already idolized singers from the early decades of the twentieth century into its star system. Within this framework, the musical performer not only

transformed into a cult figure but also became transmedial, evolving into a regular cinematic character. Thus, the uses of professional singers' voices, bodies, and biographies multiplied. In this context, Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues emerge as emblems not only of tango and fado but also of a new era of cultural industry. Indeed, as outlined at the beginning of this article, if this analysis were extended to other Ibero-American films, it would soon be discovered that several of the coincidences mentioned here were recurring themes in the region's cinematography. Tango and fado, in this sense, were part of a much broader transnational network.

In crafting the portrayal of the singer as a cinematic character, our aim was to illuminate the intertwining of real and fictional journeys within these musical genres and the lives of the artists themselves, as they converge within the emotional geographies traced by cinema. In these cartographies, the triangulation between the national and the international is pivotal: while traversing national borders serves as a means of validation and artistic projection, international travel operates as a definitive act of legitimization, revealing to which extent the globalization of the music and film industries undermines and reshapes spatial boundaries.

NOTES

- 1 "Frecuente asimilación entre artistas y personajes", "un procedimiento para la promoción de los artistas en la radio y en el teatro musical". Translation by the author.
- 2 "Figuras de una modernidad alternativa". Translation by the author.
- 3 Already in 1983, anthropologist Joaquim Pais Brito referred to tango and fado as "parallel forms", both stemming from an urban popular culture (Brito, 1983: 171). Daniel Gouveia, on the other hand, highlights the closer relationship between both musical genres and outlines some of their affinities (Gouveia, 2013: 236-241).

- 4 We will mainly refer to these artists by the names by which they are most known: Carlos Gardel as 'Gardel' and Amália Rodrigues as 'Amália'.
- 5 "Idolatría del intérprete", "la tradición romántica del culto al genio". Translation by the author.
- 6 "Al principio se hablaría de 'figuras'; a mediados de los años veinte surgirían las 'estrellas' y [...] con el auge del cine de estudios se popularizarían los 'astros'". Translation by the author.
- 7 Such is the case of films like *El tango de la muerte* [The Tango of Death] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1917), *Perdón, viejita* [Sorry, mom] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1927), or *Melenita de oro* [Golden Locks] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1923), whose titles come from popular tangos.
- 8 It is worth noting that the first American sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland,1927), is also based on the story of a man who becomes a professional singer.
- 9 For further exploration of the parallels between Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues, we refer to our previous work (Dalbosco, 2022).
- 10 "un triángulo de borrosos límites entre el personaje de la película, la vida pública de los artistas y las personas reales". Translation by the author.
- 11 "Barrio... barrio.../ que tenés el alma inquieta/ de un gorrión sentimental./ Penas...ruego... ;esto todo el barrio malevo/ melodía de arrabal!/ Barrio... barrio.../ perdoná si al evocarte/ se me pianta un lagrimón,/ que al rodar en tu empedrao/ es un beso prolongao/ que te da mi corazón". Translation by the author.
- 12 "Gardel con su smoking era la quintaesencia del chico pobre que lo había logrado". Translation by the author.
- 13 "Bem pensado, todos temos nosso fado/ E quem nasce malfadado, melhor fado não terá/ Fado é sorte, e do berço até à morte/ Ninguém foge, por mais forte/ Ao destino que Deus dá!". Translation by the author.
- 14 For further exploration of the relationship between Amália and the Salazar regime, we refer to the revisionist work of Miguel Carvalho (2020).
- 15 "saca partido de la fama y de la representatividad social de la figura del torero y de la fadista para transmitir los valores de una sociedad patriarcal rígidamente estratificada y con papeles de género bien delimitados,

- que se resistía a la transformación de las mentalidades". Translation by the author.
- 16 Maria Severa Onofriana, born in 1820, is remembered as the first and most celebrated fadista of the nineteenth century, prior to the era of phonographic recordings. Her mythical story gathers all the ingredients of a romantic heroine: a prostitute who has a love affair with an aristocrat, the Count of Vimioso, and dies of illness at the age of 26.

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THE MUSICAL PERFORMER AS A CHARACTER IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS GARDEL AND AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALITY, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Abstract

The emergence of sound cinema around the thirties drew plot inspiration from various urban and popular musical genres that were flourishing at the time. Cinema quickly seized the opportunity to capture sound and image simultaneously and integrated singers who were already idolized during the early decades of the twentieth century into its star system. In this context, the musical performer not only became a cult figure but also became transmedial, regularly appearing as a cinematic character. On this occasion, we aim to analyse some parallelisms in how sound cinema capitalized on the success of Carlos Gardel — tango singer — and Amália Rodrigues — fado singer - in their respective countries, to shape the figure of the singer as a film character and project them nationally and internationally as identity emblems. To this end, we will analyse some films starring them, where they play the role of singers. From Gardel, we will take Melodía de arrabal [Suburban melody] (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) and El día que me quieras [The day that you love me] (John Reinhardt, 1935), while from Amália, we have chosen Fado, história de uma cantadeira [Fado, Story of a Singer] (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) and Sangue toureiro [Bullfighter's Blood] (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Key words

Tango; Fado; Singer; Character; Argentine cinema; Portuguese cinema.

Author

Dulce María Dalbosco (Buenos Aires, 1984) holds a PhD, Bachelor's, and Professorship in Literature from the Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA), and a Master's in Comparative Literatures from the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA). She is a member of the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo and the research group "Precarious Atlases: Affective Cartographies in the Literature and Cinema of Latin America". Her research focuses on the poetics of tango and fado, with academic publications on these subjects. She has contributed to various group research projects and serves as a professor of Tango Lyrics in the Diploma in Tango (Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, FCE, UBA). Additionally, she holds positions as a full professor of Popular Cultures (UCA) and adjunct professor of Theory and Analysis of Literary Discourse II (UCA). Contact: dulcedalbosco@uca.edu.ar

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EL INTÉRPRETE MUSICAL COMO PERSONAJE EN LAS PELÍCULAS DE CARLOS GARDEL Y AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALIDAD, PROFESIONALIZACIÓN Y GLOBALIZACIÓN

Resumen

El surgimiento del cine sonoro en torno a la década de los treinta del siglo XX encontró inspiración argumental en distintos géneros musicales urbanos y populares, que se hallaban en auge por ese entonces. De este modo, el cine pronto aprovechó la posibilidad de recoger sonido e imagen de manera simultánea e integró a su star system a los cantantes ya idolatrados durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX. En este marco, el intérprete musical no solo se transformó en una figura de culto, sino que él mismo se vuelve transmedial y se convierte en un personaje cinematográfico habitual. En esta ocasión queremos analizar algunos paralelismos en la forma en que el cine sonoro sacó ventaja del éxito de Carlos Gardel -cantor de tangos- y de Amália Rodrigues – fadista – en sus respectivos países, para modelar la figura del o de la cantante como personaje cinematográfico y proyectarlos nacional e internacionalmente como emblemas identitarios. Con este fin, analizaremos algunas películas protagonizadas por ellos, donde representan el papel de cantantes. De Gardel tomaremos Melodía de arrabal (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) y El día que me guieras (John Reinhardt, 1935), mientras que de Amália hemos escogido Fado, história de uma cantadeira (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) y Sangue toureiro (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Palabras clave

Tango; fado; cantante; personaje; cine argentino; cine portugués.

Autora

Dulce María Dalbosco (Buenos Aires, 1984) es doctora, licenciada y profesora en Letras (Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina, UCA) y maestranda en Literaturas Comparadas (Universidad de Buenos Aires, UBA). Es académica de número de la Academia Porteña del Lunfardo y miembro del grupo de investigación Atlas precarios: cartografías afectivas en la literatura y el cine de América Latina. Su área de investigación son las poéticas del tango y del fado y cuenta con publicaciones académicas sobre dichas materias. Ha participado en diversos proyectos de investigación grupales. Es profesora en la materia Letras de tango en la Diplomatura en Tango (Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, FCE, UBA). Es profesora titular de Culturas populares (UCA) y profesora adjunta de Teoría y análisis del Discurso Literario II (UCA). Contacto: dulcedalbosco@uca.edu.ar

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