

DIALOGUE

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**SPANISH  
PARTICIPATION IN  
THE EFG 1914 PROJECT**

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Interview with

**JUAN IGNACIO  
LAHOZ RODRIGO**

Chief Curator,  
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SANTIAGO BARRACHINA ASENSIO

After two years and with considerable effort and coordination on the part of various institutions, the European Union's EFG1914 Project (<http://project.efg1914.eu/>) culminated in February 2014 with the online exhibition of footage related to the First World War preserved in film archives across Europe. The project involved the compilation and digitisation of more than 700 hours of films that can now be found in a huge online inventory, available to anybody wishing to view them. The catalogue includes films of all kinds: fiction, documentaries, newsreels, etc., taken from more than twenty archives from different countries, as well as files in other formats, such as photographs and posters. The importance of a project like this one lies not only in the obvious need to promote the

preservation and dissemination of this sort of material, but also in reminding us, on the centenary of one of the most infamous and horrific moments in the history of our continent, that perhaps the only way that historical memory can continue to exist is through collective effort.

The film archives of Spain's Filmoteca de CulturArts-IVAC was one of the participating institutions in the project (<http://ivac.gva.es/efg1914/>), under the direction of its chief curator, Juan Ignacio Lahoz. In this interview, Lahoz discusses some of the details of the project, and talks about the activities that it involved, highlighting the originality and importance of the footage contributed by Spain and reflecting on the results and possibilities arising from participation in a project like this.

**How did the EFG1914 Project come about? What are its main objectives and how is this project linked to IVAC?**

The project came to us through an invitation in early 2011 from the Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE), coordinated by the Deutsches Filminstitut. In the beginning the idea was just proposed to find out which institutions would be interested in participating. Taking advantage of the first centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the basic objective was the digitisation and online dissemination – also linked to the Europeana initiative – of all preserved First World War footage, including films produced during the period, films referring to the conflict, and even fiction films made at that time, even if they had nothing to do with the war. The intention is to reflect how the context conditioned film production and consumption, as well as the boost that the war gave – or failed to give – to film production. Obviously, an important aspect is the use of cinema as an information and propaganda tool.

We did not have footage about the First World War, but we did have significant Spanish productions from that time, and that was IVAC's main contribution to the project. Once all the information about what each institution could contribute was compiled, a project and budget were submitted to the European Commission, which was the body that provided the grant to finance the project between 2012 and 2014.

**For many years, Filмотeca has organized and participated in different conferences and seminars related to technologies used in film archives and issues associated with cataloguing. How does the EFG1914 Project affect the task of recovering, preserving and cataloguing films and materials and the use of digital technologies in film archives?**

It represents a very important boost to the work dynamics, not only for our Filмотeca, but for



**Figure 1. Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo during the course of this interview**

film archives in general. The idea that underpins the whole project is that, after so many years of talking about digitisation and the incorporation of digital technologies into the archives, for the first time we have a large-scale project in which we are all digitising our films. Since everything is going to be on a shared platform, certain unified methods needed to be adopted. We also needed to use the same kind of digital files in order to disseminate the films and to create a single cataloguing system so that the information can be exchanged with Europeana and so that it is easy to find online. All this has helped to shape and promote the development of other programmes that have been implemented, many of which have also been funded by the European Union.

This has an impact not only on digitising the images but also on cataloguing and online accessibility. Basically it was a question of defining what we could call 'best practices', which simply means having shared standards and work patterns, what in digital environments is known as a shared workflow for the whole project. Within this dynamic we worked on methods for scanning and management of the digital images we generated, and, in parallel, the development of the cataloguing standards we had to use to provide our information to the Europeana environment. There was a pre-existing website linked to Europeana (Euro-



Figure 2. *Sanz y el secreto de su arte* (Maximiliano Thous y Francisco Sanz, 1918)

pean Film Gateway), which is where all the work we have done can be found.

**Regarding the question of the dissemination of these films, do you believe that the EFG1914 Project serves to give visibility to the work of film archives, not only Filmoteca Valenciana, but all of the participating entities? After all, it is work that is not widely known and does not receive much public attention.**

I believe so. It is very useful in terms of giving society access to such a valuable heritage. Moreover, the results have been spectacular in terms of the number of films digitised, the hours of footage accessible to the whole world on the website,

and significant effort was also made to promote the project itself, to publicise what we were doing. We organised press conferences and tried to keep the media informed every step of the way. For example, a meeting of the participants in the project was held in Valencia, with two sessions presenting some of the films that would soon be available online. And once the project was completed, Filmoteca de CulturArts and Filmoteca Española designed a film series with two objectives: on the one hand, to show the films exactly as they were originally made, with digital projections in theatres in order to reclaim the notion of cinema as a collective spectacle and to encourage debate about what these images represent; and on the other hand, bearing in mind that the issue of the First World War has had much less significance in Spain than it has had in the countries that took part in the conflict, we sought to increase the intensity and reinforce the presence and the impact of this whole project in our own theatres. This film series has been on screens for more than a year in Spain. It has been offered to all the country's film libraries, to cultural entities, to universities, etc. In fact, it has been shown in various places and it has been relatively successful, as much as the screening of silent films can be in any film library.

**In terms of the material itself, there is a lot of digitised film footage, as well as other types of materials, like images, but all the films from this period (which covers the First World War, and films made just before and after it) form part of an era from which a very high proportion of film footage has been lost – as high as 80% or 90% in the case of Spain. Why do you think so much footage has been lost? In general terms, what measures have film archives like Filmoteca Valenciana established to address this situation and recover material that has ultimately been found, which is a lot (although only a small proportion of the whole)?**

The main problem for the preservation of our film heritage from this period basically relates to the physical and chemical properties of the medium itself. Until the 1950s, films were made of nitro-cellulose, a material that is highly flammable and prone to decomposition, and this chemical degradation has resulted in the loss of many films over the medium or long term. To preserve them they need to be kept under controlled conditions of humidity, temperature and ventilation that will prevent such chemical degradation, as well as reducing the risk of fire.

Film archives began to be established in the 1930s, precisely in reaction to the carelessness with which producers (who were the holders of the rights to the films) handled them once they were no longer commercially exploitable. The attitude was focused entirely on profitability, and the films were practically forgotten and their physical and chemical components were recycled. From the 1920s, there was a growing appreciation of cinema as an art form, and this awareness led to initiatives aimed at the preservation of this cultural heritage. So this was also the time when the idea of cinema as cultural heritage first emerged.

In terms of cultural policy, cinema is recognised as cultural heritage and therefore the State and its public institutions have the obligation to preserve this heritage, with public funds in 95% of cases, while at the same time respecting the intellectual property and commercial rights to the films, which belong to their producers, directors, etc. In practice it is necessary to have suitable facilities for this preservation. The films need to be restored in order to prevent their deterioration and disappearance, and so they can be viewed just as they were in their day. These are key points related to handling the footage that any film archive has to keep in mind.

It is also necessary to have restoration strategies in place. This restoration involves trying to find as much footage as possible that we were

unaware of or that we do not yet have preserved in the film archives. To this end, we need to develop strategic campaigns to get in touch with potential film owners, whether they are private owners, producers or distributors – basically, everybody involved in film use and exploitation in the industry – who might have copies or negatives of films that we might be interested in.

At the same time, we need to facilitate access to these films; in other words, we have to preserve them so that they can continue to be seen. As public institutions, we have an obligation to make these films known to the public. Currently, this is the most visible aspect of everything that we are doing, because digital media has come to our aid by greatly enhancing and facilitating such access.

This is where the question of respect for rights comes in. We cannot make every film instantly available on the internet because that would be giving public access to material whose rights belong to their owners. However, we need to offer these materials in conditions that allow rapid access to them. Nowadays it is easier to make video copies or to create an intranet. In short, there are a number of ways to better channel public access.

All of this was unimaginable twenty years ago. The only way we had to exhibit the archive's collection was by organising screenings at FilMOTECA's theatre, or by inviting people interested to come to the archive to watch the films on a MoViola. There was some use of video, but it was not as flexible as information technology is today. For example, we can now send a very low quality file online via email to a previously authorised user who needs to watch it occasionally. In the past this was much more complicated, much slower, and, as a result, much less material was made available.

**Let's talk now about the EFG1914 catalogue, which has also had its continuity in online film series, screenings in various theatres, etc.**

**In general terms, in the catalogue we can find documentaries, propaganda films and fiction films, we can see the development of the war, its effects, daily life, etc. What effect does this catalogue have in relation to what society had been able to see in films on the First World War, generally recreations or fiction films produced after the fact, or films from film history? What do you think this catalogue contributes to the image that society has of this historical period?**

What it contributes is a huge wealth of information and documentation for any individual interested in what happened back then. It offers countless resources to study the war from every cinematic perspective. In this sense, I think it is consistent with the contemporary information society, which places a huge quantity of documentation within our reach. In this case, it is structured in a very clear way and there is plenty of information in every area.

Each one has a guide for interpreting everything and organising the information. There is thus a specific website on preserved First World War films, which also operates in parallel with other websites with documentation on the First World War (literature, artefacts, political documents, etc.). The European Union has supported a major effort in this area and the result is very interesting, and it has also had continuity in other activities such as educational initiatives.

In this sense, an initiative like this, a tool of this kind, is extremely positive. This initiative has established a model to use for other topics, though there will probably not be another one as huge as this one. It would be complicated to find a topic of this magnitude and propose a similar project.

However, it does point out a direction to take with projects involving collaborative work between the different film archives around Europe. It also includes a virtual exhibition that offers an overview of the content and main milestones of both film production during those years and the

cinematic interpretation of the First World War, as well as the main reports on the crucial moments of the conflict.

This is everything that this virtual exhibition brings together, apart from the film series that we programmed. A project like this has established numerous guidelines for content and dynamics of action in a project of this magnitude, involving the participation of various entities from different countries.



Figure 3. *La reina joven* (Magín Murià, 1916)

**What selection criteria did Filmoteca Valenciana adopt for the selection of the eight films for the EFG1914 Project?**

The selection of content was one of the first stages of this project. The criteria were adapted to the topics determined by the project, limited to everything related to the conflict, to everything that cinema represented during the war and to the impact of the war on the evolution of the film industry. That is how we chose these films. We did have other footage such as film reports and newsreels, but since they were not Spanish productions and, in some cases, were already part of the collection of other film archives participating in the project, we decided that these films we chose were the best possible contribution to show the contrast between what was being produced



in Europe and what was being produced in Spain at that time. Our contribution included six full-length fiction films and two news reports. Of the two film reports, one (*Une reserve d'obusiers* [1914-1918]) is a very short fragment of unknown origin showing a full battery of cannons arranged on a battlefield in attack formation. The other report (*Fourth Congress of the Third International: Burial of Vatslav Worowski in Berlin*], Germany, 1922 and 1923), related more to the political consequences of the war (another topic included in the project guidelines), shows the funeral of the Russian diplomat Vatslav Worowski, who was murdered in Switzerland in 1923. This footage was found in Valencia and we restored it and have it preserved here.

**In the period that covers the production of these films there were several industrial and representational changes in cinema. In the case of fiction film the rise of melodrama is especially notable. The Filmoteca has recovered several titles of this genre: the Valencian adaptation of *Sangre y arena* (Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and Max André, 1916) and the series of films by Margarita Xirgu for *Barcinógrafo* (*Alma torturada*, 1916; *El beso de la muerte*, 1916 and *La reina joven*, 1916). We would like you to comment on the importance of melodrama and the mark that these films left on the genre.**

The two works come from different contexts. On the one hand, *Sangre y arena*, Blasco Ibáñez's film, was produced in Paris by Prometheus Films with funds from the publishing house Prometeo. It was a very personal project by the author, who turned to Max André – a French producer with experience as a film director – to help him adapt his novel for the screen. In an interview for the Madrid newspaper *El Imparcial*, Blasco Ibáñez explained his conception of cinema as a visual format for the adaptation of literature. In *Sangre y arena* the articulation of the discourse is not really cinematic; rather, the cinema is placed at the ser-

vice of rendering the details of the novel in images. Blasco's style is highly visual, which makes the adaptation process easy. Beyond that, the film is a melodrama and not a detail of the original work is left out. Consequently, the film is long and full of intertitles, which are also typical of the cinema of this period.

The films starring Margarita Xirgu were made in Barcelona and are clearly based on the Italian style predominant at the time. Xirgu is comparable in these melodramas with the great divas of Italian cinema – like Pina Menichelli or Lydia Borelli. The exaggerated performances reinforce a very theatrical image on screen, which, together with the outrageously unrealistic storylines, result in a total absence of naturalness. But it was the time when the genre was in vogue in Italy and also had a high enough profile in Spanish theatres for the style to be adopted as a result of its popularity and success. It was a decision that basically reflected the fragility of an industry which, even in the Spanish film capital of Barcelona, continued to suffer from funding problems.

***Sanz y el secreto de su arte* (Maximiliano Thous and Francisco Sanz, 1918) is a true rarity for the cinema of the time in terms of its approach and its mixture of documentary and fiction. How does this Valencian film fit into this period?**

It is a unique film to say the least. It is basically a news report about the work of ventriloquist Francisco Sanz with his dummies. Sanz produced the film himself and turned to Maximiliano Thous – a true personality of Valencian cultural life linked to the death throes of the Valencian Renaissance, who during the 1920s would become the great Valencian filmmaker – to film not only of his travelling show, but also what happened behind the scenes. The filmmaking stands out for its photographic precision throughout the different stages of the film: the show itself and the making and maintenance of the dummies. The final sequence featuring the dummies even offers a hint of some



intuitions more typical of animation films. There are, in any case, a series of cinematographic elements that are typical of the cinema of the time. On the one hand, we are given a melodramatic storyline, a drama about honour between the characters; an adventure of the main character's exploration of the world (which actually goes no further than Valencia and its vicinity), ranging from the sophisticated image of the horse races to the people's bullfighting festivities in a village with a very unique show, which also offers us images that do not appear in any other film; it is the only film testimony that we have of this celebration. The film has a lot of elements that make it extremely interesting and also very attractive. As Pilar Pedraza and Juan Miguel Company have pointed out, the film has a sinister quality. The decomposed, broken dummy, when we see a severed head or the mechanism exposed, has a very interesting sinister element. And there is also a very powerful image in the film which, in a morbid way, links it to the consequences of war. All the dummies are piled inside a van, ready to be transported to the theatre where the performance is going to take place, evoking the wartime image of a pile of corpses being transported to a mass grave. This image of the broken, dead body, even wrapped in a cloth with the head covered, is perfectly comparable to what we see repeatedly in the newsreels.

**To conclude, Filmoteca Española is the other Spanish film archive participating in the EFG1914 Project, also with a selection of films of different kinds: fiction, newsreels, reports from the period, etc., and if I am not mistaken, Filmoteca Española and Filmoteca Valenciana have collaborated on this project, as they have also done on other projects such as the restoration of Luis García Berlanga's filmography. What was the nature of the collaboration in this case?**

The two entities are partners in the project, which is a Europe-wide project. It was not a specific collaboration, but we did collaborate in the context



**Figure 4. Sanz y el secreto de su arte (Maximiliano Thous y Francisco Sanz, 1918)**

of the project when we digitised our films. We scanned our films in the facilities of Filmoteca Española because we do not have a scanner for digitising yet and we needed to do it somehow. The project organisers offered services outside Spain that were quite affordable, but transporting the films was problematic, so we contacted Filmoteca Española to sign a small partnership agreement, whereby they would provide their facilities and we would cover the expenses. This was much simpler and more economical, and we did it this way, as part of the project and using the project funding.

When the project was completed, we came together to discuss the need for additional promotion of the results, although this was not required by the organisation. We prepared a film series with the films that had been digitised and were already available on the website, as we thought that this topic had received much less attention in Spain due to having much less impact. As Spain did not take part in the war, the impact was notably limited. We believed it was important to do this, on the one hand, because of the historical importance of the First World War and, on the other, to disseminate the project and our own work. The idea was to publicise and attract attention to the

work that we are doing. It was the perfect opportunity as the two factors went hand in hand and we tried to take advantage of that. It was a lot of work to design it, because there are more than 3,000 films in the EFG1914 project and we had to reduce them to just a few sessions, which, as hard as we tried to avoid it, in the end were very long. It is hard to watch whole sessions on the consequences of the war, the casualties or the battles, as spectacular as some of them are.

We also organised a session to highlight FilMOTECA Española's contribution and another session to highlight our contribution. This is how the series was put together.

By way of conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to stress the need for the authorities to make a real effort to furnish our film archives with the necessary tools (personnel, technology, etc.), because the preservation of our audiovisual heritage depends largely on this investment, which is public, not private. This is something that UNESCO, with its "Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images" in 1980,<sup>1</sup> and the European Union, with its 2005 recommendation,<sup>2</sup> have been pointing out for decades.

## NOTES

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- 1 Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images ([http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13139&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL_ID=13139&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)).
- 2 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2005 on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:323:0057:0061:EN:PDF>).

## **SPANISH PARTICIPATION IN THE EFG 1914 PROJECT: INTERVIEW WITH JUAN IGNACIO LAHOZ RODRIGO, CHIEF CURATOR, CULTURARTS-IVAC**

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### **Abstract**

Juan Ignacio Rodrigo Lahoz is interviewed about the European Union project EFG1914, involving the creation of an online exhibition of film materials related to the First World War preserved in film archives across Europe. The conversation focuses on explaining the initiative and the involvement of the Filmoteca de CulturArts of the Generalitat Valenciana, the institution to which Lahoz belongs.

### **Key words**

Film archives; First World War; EFG1914 project; Online exhibition; Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo.

### **Author**

Santiago Barrachina Asensio (b. Valencia, 1979) holds a Bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Communication from the Universitat de València. Between 2001 and 2013 he worked for the Videoteca video library service at l'Institut València del Audiovisual and the Cinematografia Ricardo Muñoz Suay (CulturArts IVAC - La Filmoteca), and he has been linked to a range of activities to disseminate film culture, through associations such as Cinefòrum L'Atalante and the Aula de Cinema at the Universitat de València. He was also a member of the promotion team for the film journal *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*. Currently, he continues to pursue projects related to the dissemination of film culture and also participates in Ràdio Klara's culture program "Café con Vistas", which he has been involved with since 2003. Contact: santi.barrachina@gmail.com

### **Article reference**

BARRACHINA ASENSIO, Santiago (2016). Spanish participation in the EFG1914 Project: Interview with Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo, Chief Curator, CulturArts-IVAC. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 21, 121-131.

## **LA PARTICIPACIÓN ESPAÑOLA EN EL PROYECTO EFG 1914. ENTREVISTA A JUAN IGNACIO LAHOZ RODRIGO, JEFE DE CONSERVACIÓN DE CULTURARTS-IVAC**

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### **Resumen**

Entrevista a Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo en torno al proyecto de la Unión Europea EFG1914 destinado a la exhibición virtual de los materiales relacionados con la Primera Guerra Mundial conservados en los archivos fílmicos de toda Europa. La conversación se centra en explicar la iniciativa y la implicación de la Filmoteca de CulturArts-IVAC, institución a la cual pertenece el entrevistado.

### **Palabras clave**

Archivos fílmicos; Primera Guerra Mundial; Proyecto EFG1914; exhibición en línea; Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo.

### **Autor**

Santiago Barrachina Asensio (Valencia, 1979) es licenciado en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universitat de València. Entre 2001 y 2013 trabajó para el servicio de Videoteca de l'Institut Valencià del Audiovisual i la Cinematografia Ricardo Muñoz Suay (CulturArts IVAC - La Filmoteca) y ha estado vinculado a distintas actividades para la divulgación de la cultura cinematográfica, a partir de asociaciones como el Cinefòrum L'Atalante, o el Aula de Cinema de la Universitat de València. Del mismo modo, también formó parte del equipo impulsor de *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*. En la actualidad, sigue desarrollando proyectos relacionados con la divulgación de la cultura cinematográfica y, como viene haciendo desde 2003, participa en el programa cultural de Ràdio Klara Café con Vistas. Contacto: santi.barrachina@gmail.com

### **Referencia de este artículo**

BARRACHINA ASENSIO, Santiago (2016). La participación española en el proyecto EFG1914. Entrevista a Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo, Jefe de Conservación de CulturArts-IVAC. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 21, 121-131.

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Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com) MAIL [info@revistaatalante.com](mailto:info@revistaatalante.com)

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