

# L'ATALANTE

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CINEMATOGRAFICOS

## Dialogue

Marlen Khutsiev:  
How It All Began.  
A Conversation with  
the Georgian Filmmaker

## (Dis)agreements

Germany, Italy, and Spain:  
Eroticism and Desire  
under European Fascism



## DESIRE & EROTICISM IN DICTATORIAL TIMES

FILM STRATEGIES AGAINST CENSORSHIP IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES



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# DESIRE AND EROTICISM IN DICTATORIAL TIMES. FILM STRATEGIES AGAINST CENSORSHIP IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES \*

NÚRIA BOU  
XAVIER PÉREZ

“But is sex hidden from us, concealed by a new sense of decency, kept under a bushel by the grim necessities of bourgeois society? On the contrary, it shines forth; it is incandescent”  
(Foucault, 1978: 77).

Every totalitarian regime sustains the weight of its oppressive force with a powerful censorship apparatus. As the great dictatorships of the twentieth century were contemporaneous with the rise of cinema, the use of moving pictures became a preeminent propaganda tool, and a motive for repressive action against all who opposed their ideology. Censorship was not—and is not—a phenomenon exclusive to such regimes, because there is no national film industry that has not turned its attention, in its manner of mediating between product and public, to content that could potentially challenge certain ideological principles, or undermine the ordinary certainties that those principles upheld. Cinema was nevertheless a revolutionary invention that challenged many commonly held conceptions, and which, beyond any doubt, normalised an activity as traditionally deviant as the guilty pleasure of voyeurism. The

ambiguity of the images (and the immediate control of those images by the vigilant guardianship of the State or the parallel institutions that serve it) aroused a debate that still rages on between the hypothetically educational nature of films (KHUN, 1990: 105), and their subversive underbelly (which, as the surrealists understood quite early on, was present in the very nature of the invention).

With respect to morality, and the sexuality associated with it, restrictions arose just as quickly in countries operating on a modern democratic model as they did in the dictatorships that flourished in the age of cinema. Some form of institutional censorship was established in China from 1905, in the United Kingdom from 1909, in Canada in 1910, in Mexico from 1911, in Nigeria from 1912, in Italy and Spain from 1913, in Germany from 1920, in the Soviet Union from the year of

the Revolution (1917), in Belgium from 1921, and in Turkey from 1932, to name a few of the geographically and politically diverse nations that succumbed to the same temptation to control the new medium. And while beyond the government restrictions the Puritan leagues became an active front against film production from its very origins, the Hays Code, self-imposed by the Hollywood film industry in 1934, completely blew apart the utopian notion that a democracy could self-regulate moral content without a super-structure of censorship to watch over it.<sup>1</sup>

The three major fascist regimes of the first half of the twentieth century (Spain, Italy and Germany) combined propaganda and censorship as two sides of the same coercive coin, overseeing all aspects of the political, and also, of course, of the erotic. As eroticism was already an issue in film prior to the rise of these regimes, their codes of censorship were not necessarily structured by explicit legislation. Implicit self-censorship emerged as early in Italy as it did in France, in the same way in Germany as it did in Britain, and in Spain just as it did in the United States.

In the traditional dictatorships, the prohibition of the erotic was always related to religious tutelage. In the communist dictatorships, however, the same censorship was also present, as if the need for order were a feature of these regimes regardless of traditional dogmas or the body-soul debate. Any distortion of the functional uses of sexuality was also subject to fierce vigilance in the communist totalitarian regimes. Along with the political uses of censorship, the repression of eroticism was thus imposed as one of the key pillars of the dictatorships' authoritarian policies.

But cinema, due to its heterogeneous nature, the haphazard construction of its images, and the complexity of its techniques, could always elude the vulgar obsessions of the censors. In his study of the contradictions inherent to the repressive system of the Hays Code in the United States, Greg Tuck (2007: 13) draws on the phenomenological

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### IN FILMS MADE IN CONTEXTS OF DICTATORSHIP, THE METAPHORICAL FORM TURNS INTO A SOURCE OF LIBERATING DISCOURSES, FAR REMOVED FROM THE CERTITUDES OF THE RULING POWERS

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ideas of Merleau Ponty to remind us that the metaphorical capacity of cinema makes us perceive its expressive potential with our whole body: "films are not merely showing or implying sex, they are also evoking it at a sensory level, so we are made not merely to see that which we cannot see, nor simply to 'imagine' it, but to be 'touched' by it. This is the pleasure of invisible sex." This overwhelming force of the cinematic spectacle is an invitation to turn the coercion of the censor into a stimulus for the imagination: "limits do not merely proscribe, they can equally channel and inspire." Here, Tuck (2007: 2) explicitly evokes the ideas of the scholar Lea Jacobs, when she suggests that "censorship as an institutional process did not simply reflect social pressures; it articulated a strategic response to them" (JACOBS, 2000: 94). To articulate a creative response to censorship represents both a challenge and a distancing strategy that directors can use with greater freedom than might be expected, precisely because of the effective indeterminacy of the film images that flow with the ambivalence of life that passes before our eyes. While in his landmark work *Hollywood Censored* Gregory D. Black (2012: 323) suggests, much to his regret, that "we will never know how many films that were never made could have been made, or how different those that were filmed could have been" (an assertion that could be extrapolated to any country that has been subject to some form of censorship), we might propose a less pessimistic alternative: a re-reading of the images that we do have available to identify not only what escaped the repressive coercion, but rather what the films



themselves could offer as a form of subtle subversion.

In this respect, it is obvious that a film made in the context of a dictatorship does not necessarily adopt the ideology of the regime. It may be conceived from a position that definitively opposes the implicit repressive aims of the state propaganda apparatus. Films always contain a tension between what is meant and what is shown, and, as noted above, they resist a monosemic interpretation of their images. Because of cinema's vibrant and free nature, films made in totalitarian contexts have not always served the dictates of the censorship apparatus to which they are subjected. Indeed, there is clearly a game of cat and mouse between censor and filmmaker,<sup>2</sup> which was taken to the extreme in the well-known episode of censorship of the screenplay to *Viridiana* (Buñuel, 1961), in which the *ménage à trois* clearly identified following the card game that ends the film was the optimal (and without doubt more provocative) solution to the simple ending in the film's original script.<sup>3</sup>

The key to this penetration of the subversive lies in the adoption of metaphor as the perfect instrument for pushing beyond the wholesome content on the denotative level ensured by the censorship system. It is worth recalling here that the Greek word *metaphorá* comes from *meta* (over) and *phora* (carrying), and thus refers etymologically to transportation; as Chantal Maillard suggests, it invites us "to build abstract worlds" (1992: 97). Maillard, following the reasoning of Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, points out that the metaphor does not have to transport us to a similar image, because the ultimate aim of the metaphor is to create a new space: "both objects are fluidized, losing their natural boundaries to acquire the qualities of the imagination" (1992:108). The metaphor therefore "draws us into another world", as Ortega y Gasset (1964: 258) reveals with an expression that denotes movement, transportation, to another universe.

In films made in contexts of dictatorship, the metaphorical form turns into a source of liberating discourses, far removed from the certitudes of the ruling powers, in filmmakers as significant as Carlos Saura in Spain or Andrei Tarkovsky in the Soviet Union. This metaphorical quality that opens a film's content up to universes beyond what is visible (or what is explicitly stated) can fill the meaning of a whole film—like *La caza* [The Hunt] (1966), to name one of Saura's most paradigmatic works—or symbolically unlock a detail of the action (as the example of the ending to *Viridiana* sums up paradigmatically). At the same time, metonymy and synecdoche will shift the imagination in all kinds of directions, from the visible to the merely imagined, constituting a complex vocabulary of strategies that have turned film rhetoric, almost intrinsically, into a space for the unbridled expression of the forbidden.

The repressive system cannot counter this metaphorical register because, paradoxically, it is present in all its devices. As Foucault noted with such sharp insight, sex is a carefully conceived piece in the organization of the State, mediated and consolidated according to a series of relational mechanisms that ultimately uphold a social organization that cannot do without it. Carolina Meloni (2012: 65) sums up the matter by paraphrasing the philosopher when she suggests that "sex is not repressed, it is administered", and Annette Kuhn makes it her own (1990: 6) when she takes up Foucault's notion of censorship as a *device*. The organization of the film narrative is not immune to this idea of controlled dissemination that underlies the filmic art itself, and which, precisely because it is an indispensable structure, permits (or even instigates) the pleasures of displacement.

It is clear that Foucault, in his penetrating analysis, does not reject the view of censorship as an institution designed to prevent the expression of sexuality itself, based on a "logical sequence that [...] links the *inexistent*, the *illicit* and the *inexpressi-*

ble in such a way that each one is at the same time the principle and the effect of the others" (2006: 88)<sup>4</sup>. However, cinema is a space that evokes contradictions because the image is itself polysemic, and because its meaning is always located in the imagination of the audience: that which is required *not to exist* would find, even in the most heavily censored films, strange *re-expressions* under a *licit* appearance that is nevertheless open to the powers of the imagination.

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### THIS EROTICISATION OF THE BODY, EXPANSIVE BUT NOT NECESSARILY ASSOCIATED WITH PROHIBITED ELEMENTS, WAS PROMINENT IN THE RISE OF THE CULT OF THE PHOTOGRAPH THAT WAS CONSTANTLY PROMOTED BY THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

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An eroticism always existed, exists and will exist, in spite of censorship, because it is really an eroticism that is necessarily inscribed into that censorship. The purpose of this issue of *L'Atalante* is to offer a critical contribution to this hypothesis, explored from different perspectives. First of all, we take Spanish cinema during the Franco regime as a generic starting point and a primordial exemplary model, as the monograph begins with a university research project dedicated to the erotic body of the actress during the fascist period in Spain, Italy and Germany (Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness Project CSO2013-43631-P), although not all the articles limit their analysis to that period or to those countries.

If we take Francoism, due to its historical and geographical proximity, as a privileged space for an exploration of this issue, we will discover two co-existing phenomena: in a sense, the filmmakers of the period, even those most complicit with the regime, could not avoid the forced tension between

implicit censorship and the need to feed the erotic desire of the audience as one of the essential goals of the classical film narrative (both comedy and drama), to which the entire rhetoric of the films ultimately yielded. The most representative actresses of the early years of the dictatorship (Conchita Montenegro, Ana Mariscal, Amparo Rivelles, Mercedes Vecino, Isabel de Soto) were stars in the conventional sense of the word (and thus filled the covers and picture spreads of film magazines like *Primer Plano*) because the film industry viewed erotic desire, voyeurism and all sexual aspects of human relations as an indispensable internal structure, albeit adorned with all manner of elliptical subterfuges. Film directors continued to use their creativity, and since the main object of the voyeuristic attention of the film spectator was the female figure, in terms already analysed in depth in the studies of Laura Mulvey (1975), and subsequently nuanced by Gaylyn Studlar (1988), it is clear that filmmakers had to use all kinds of expressive strategies to draw out what lay beneath and turn eroticism, and all expressions of sex, into an integral element of a film tradition that could never completely do without it.

This role of the woman as the catalyst of erotic desire has a twofold rhetorical dimension: it represents the construction of the visual narrative based on the female body (which may be restricted but never entirely ignored), and at the same time, for that very reason, it represents the assumption by the female of a certain seductive power. The question of whether behind this idea of the female body as an object of desire for the male gaze there lies an autonomous desire is now one of the areas of concern in star studies from the perspective of gender theory. And to address this question in relation to national film traditions marked by censorship means to push to the limit the tension between what is deemed forbidden and that never entirely silenced erotic impulse that is triggered by the female subject herself. This issue of *L'Atalante* proposes, among other

things, a dialectic between the censorship model of Francoism and its hypothetical subversion as a case study that could be methodologically extrapolated to other film industries operating under totalitarian regimes.

The article by Carlos Losilla that opens this issue, "Seeing Inward, Looking Outward: Female Desire in Francoist Cinema", presents a general overview of the variations and complexities of erotic desire, with the intention of exposing the nuances (and the underlying crises) concealed behind the mere assumption of a standardised morality. This overview posits a spectrum that ranges from the outspoken exaltation of the body-nation of the Cifesa film studio heroines in the early years of Francoism (where the erotic is replaced by the zeal for imperial conquest) to the mystical internalisation contained in a withdrawal to the life of the inner world and the home, as revealed in the best dramas of the 1950s (for example, *Black Sky*). Against this forced fluctuation between boundless distance and domestic seclusion (from the "body-nation" to the "body-home"), the new pop heroines of the 1960s, in a mimesis of trends in international cinema, presented a new openness that was no less problematic. Thus, in the musical film model begun with *Las chicas de la cruz roja* [Red Cross Girls], "the woman's desirous gaze falls more on objects than on bodies", with the result that "the eroticism of consumerism has taken possession of the imagery of female passion, as the perfect halfway point between mystic rapture and domestic vulgarity." While the prototype of the new strong and self-sufficient woman embodied in Teresa Gimpera in the 1960s ended up being isolated from the world to constitute an autonomous and somewhat sterile image, Losilla turns to an analysis of the most apparently mundane products in this context (the musical comedies of Pili and Mili, Marisol or Rocio Durcal) as a means of determining whether this outburst of dreamlike exoticism could be where the simplest expression of the erotic imagination of femininity in Francoism might be found.

Female desire, as an anomaly proscribed by Francoist cinema, is thus sublimated with substitutes (either neurotic or playful) upon which an alternative history can be constructed based on the observation of the images. In this sense, the application of iconographic models to cinema, as proposed by Jordi Balló and Marga Carnicé in their article "Visual Motifs in Cinematic Eroticism under Fascism: Spain and Italy (1939-1945)", makes it possible to identify how eroticism was expressed in fascist films through the repeated use of certain devices of representation. Based on a study of films starring Spanish folk divas like Imperio Argentina and Estrellita Castro, the authors of this article identify spaces like *bars on a window* (separating the female star's gaze from any desiring subject) or *the tavern* (a privileged space for song and dance whose popularity allows for certain choreographic depictions with an unequivocally erotic sheen), as well as gestures (the embrace) and parts of the body treated as provocative synecdoches (the white-toothed smile). As for Italian models (erotically more permissive, in spite of the paradoxical presence of the Vatican influence), the hypothesis of a diva model that appeals to sensuality as a quintessential part of her media power makes it possible to identify three prominent iconic elements, all of them related to the body of the actress: the long black mane of hair, legs suspended in the air and even, occasionally, bare breasts. Based on this choice of icons and on the analysis that follows it, the article effectively confirms the hypothesis around which this monograph is organised: the impossible nature of repressing the metaphorical and metonymic capacity of film images, and the existence of a sexuality underlying the filmed body that reaches beyond the repressive context of the country where the film was made.

This eroticisation of the body, expansive but not necessarily associated with prohibited elements, was prominent in the rise of the cult of the photograph that was constantly promoted by the

illustrated press. Albert Elduque's article "Primer Plano: The Popular Face of Censorship" explores the use of a Spanish film magazine established at the beginning of Franco's regime and initially linked to the Falange as an informational platform exposing the implicit restrictions of the censors that any producer would have to confront in a context in which there is no official censorship code: in other words, a critical education in the morality of film narratives, mostly exemplified by Hollywood and international films which (in spite of the already unequivocally repressive Hays Code) were deemed to go far beyond what the new Spanish film industry should permit in moral terms. However, the ambivalent capacity of the magazine's pictures to reflect various manifestations of an eroticism inherent to the allure of cinema, very clearly embodied by its female stars, should not be underestimated. It is perhaps because of this inevitability of the visible that these texts for censors tend in general to display more concern with the morality of the story than of the images themselves, and propose, in response to all the dangers of debauchery brought by foreign films, a specifically Spanish model, based essentially on the chastity and sacrificial capacity of women, revealingly identifying above all with the Nazi productions of the era.

Without a doubt, alongside the repression of female desire (and the metaphorical expression of the problem of that desire), another major element that was silenced throughout the Francoist period was homosexuality. The article by Beatriz González de Garay and Juan Carlos Alfeo, "Portraying Homosexuality in Spanish Film and Television during the Franco Regime", offers a revealing overview of the evolution and limits of such representation, based on three possibilities: concealment (requiring the consequent elisions and veiled insinuations), caricaturing (the only form of allusion to homosexuality that was really permitted under the discriminatory patriarchal model), and appropriation, a strategy of

homoerotic satisfaction that does not arise from the films themselves, but from the capacity of the homosexual gaze to assimilate certain icons (from Spain's folk divas to the military imagery of the Spanish Legion) into its freely subjective perspective. The article, which also explores television production (and its much more limited possibilities for touching on this topic), ultimately offers, from a diachronic perspective, an overview of the meta-discursive re-reading of Francoism in relation to homosexuality in the films and television productions of the post-Franco era: a transition that should be considered a legitimate form of redress and liberation.

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### ALTHOUGH THE EARLY YEARS OF FRANCOISM COINCIDED WITH THE PERIOD OF THE FASCIST DICTATORSHIPS IN GERMANY AND ITALY, THE MODELS OF REPRESSION AND SUSPICION OF EROTICISM WERE NOT ENTIRELY THE SAME

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Positioned on the boundary between the castrating space of Francoism and the openness represented by the films of the transition to democracy is *The Cannibal Man* (La semana del asesino), a film made in 1972 whose reference to homosexual is only tangential, but which nevertheless constitutes one of the films of the late Francoist period that offered one of the most forceful messages challenging the social conventions of its day. In "Subversive Effects of Perversion: Sexuality and Social Construction in *The Cannibal Man*", Carlos Gómez shows how the use of perversion in Eloy de la Iglesia's film facilitates a subversive deconstruction of the certainties of sociological Francoism. And this is not only through the evolution of a narrative whose protagonist turns into a serial killer as the story unfolds, but (and this is an essential point for the purposes of this monograph) through

decisions related to the *mise en scène*, which “in iconographic terms offers a series of inversions of particular motifs on which the dominant ideology is sustained.” As the international version of the film contains various scenes cut from the Francoist version, a comparative analysis reveals the degree to which certain scene cuts can alter the content of the discourse, as is particularly the case with respect to the representation of homoerotic desire in the film. However, the subversive element is still conveyed in the images that were not cut, to constitute a metaphorical condemnation of the repressive nature of Spanish society in those years.

Although the early years of Francoism coincided with the period of the fascist dictatorships in Germany and Italy,<sup>5</sup> the models of repression and suspicion of eroticism were not entirely the same. The conversation between Alejandro Montiel, Gino Frezza, Raffaele Pinto and Marta Muñoz in the “(Dis)agreements” section, discussing eroticism and desire under the European fascist regimes and, in particular, the treatment of femininity in these repressive contexts, reveals significant contrasts between the three countries; the differences in the treatment of the erotic between the diverse repertoire of the Italian divas and the categorical repression of Spanish women, or the use of nude images in Germany by a director of the regime as paradigmatic as Leni Riefenstahl, again highlight the need to differentiate between the emergence of the visible and the moral drift of the narrative, which in all three cases condemns behaviours alien to the ideology of the family order.

While Francoism and its geographical and political neighbours constitute the focal point of this monograph, the perspective is extended to other historical models of repression in totalitarian contexts, offering examples of new tensions and strategies of expressive liberation. The comparison that can be made with Brazilian cinema during that country’s dictatorship (the first ten years

of which overlap with the Francoist period) confirm that film production inside the system does not always equate with submission to the dictates of the censors: resistance and the revelation of the concealed continue to be indispensable travel companions. However, Emma Camarero’s article “From the Banal to the Indispensable: *Porno-chanchada* and *Cinema Novo* during the Brazilian Dictatorship (1964-1985)” also focuses our attention on the differences that articulated this battle. This is firstly because the genre of *porno-chanchada* (the erotic film style that experienced a boom during the years of the dictatorship) would have been unthinkable in the Francoist context; it is reasonable to assume that the Brazilian State was more concerned with political rather than sexual repression, to the extent that it allowed this type of erotic film consumption perhaps as a form of “distraction”. But as the author of the article proposes, “concealed behind the eroticism and the sex there was also a furtive ideological revolution that not even the censors and the tools of repression could restrain.” In this sense, both the commercial productions that enabled the government to promote an image of tolerance towards eroticism and the *Cinema Novo* productions that were rarely allowed to be screened in Brazil itself but that brought the country prestige at international festivals, and that also included an erotic strain, turned Brazilian cinema into a unique and paradoxical space where eroticism was an ambivalent testing ground for introducing the idea of social liberation.

Equally paradoxical was the repression of sexuality in the communist states, unrelated to any religious coercion. Secularism is not synonymous with sexual liberation, and governmental fears of the disorder that eroticism could provoke played a decisive role in this alternative historical context. In their article “Eroticism and Form as Subversion in *Daisies*”, Orisel Castro, York Neudel and Luis Gómez make a case study of one of the masterpieces of the Czech New Wave that took place in

the years leading up to the Prague Spring, before the Soviet occupation silenced many of its directors or forced them into exile. However, this film movement occurred in a communist state that already had a censorship bureaucracy and was therefore prone, as the authors suggest, to the “game of hide and seek between the artist and the official.” Their case study demonstrates the extent to which Vera Chytilová saw in eroticism a mechanism for criticising a system characterised by the conservatism of 1960s Czechoslovakia, where etiquette and good behaviour were to be observed at all times, especially by women. The openly subversive nature of the actions of the two heroines of this film is founded on the utterly futile nature of their wild and mischievous pranks in terms of what they contribute to society. The article, based on George Bataille’s theories on eroticism, examines how Vera Chytilová nevertheless channels all this squandered energy through two elements of distraction which, although the film would later be banned by the state altogether, got it past the censors the first time around: ambiguity and formal experimentation.

Implicitly related to the theme of censorship, although not the question of eroticism, the interview included in this issue, conducted by Carlos Muguiro, documents a revealing encounter with Georgian filmmaker Marlen Khutsiev, whose emblematic film *I Am Twenty / Ilyich’s Gate*, was forcibly re-edited after completion of its original version. A first-person testimony to the eternal clash between a creator and the suspicious bureaucracy of a totalitarian system, Khutsiev reveals, in this exciting discussion, the origins of the controversial film and the moral objections it incited from the repressive apparatus that he had the misfortune to confront, while also offering us a priceless chronicle of his training and evolution as a filmmaker in the historical context of the former Soviet Union. The sober clarity of his testimony serves as a valuable complement to the different explorations of the clash between creators and

censors that constitute the core of this issue of *L’Atalante*. ■

## NOTES

- 1 For a comparative study of national censorship policies in film history see the anthology *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship around the World* (2013).
- 2 On the question of the censor-auteur relationship, see Chapter 15 of DOHERTY, Thomas (2007)
- 3 That *Viridiana* was subsequently banned does not undermine our view that it was *thanks* to censorship, or more precisely, in the challenge of *outsmarting the censors*, that the cinematic image of the Francoist film tradition found one of its most subversively erotic representations.
- 4 Underlining is ours.
- 5 And also of course with the Portuguese dictatorship, although the Portuguese film industry in this period was considerably less productive.

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## DESIRE AND EROTICISM IN DICTATORIAL TIMES: FILM STRATEGIES AGAINST CENSORSHIP IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

### Abstract

Along with the use of censorship as an instrument of political repression, dictatorships have also tended to censor expressions of eroticism. In the realm of cinema, this repressive tendency has sometimes been challenged by creators, by means of rhetorical devices of a metaphorical nature. This article traces the theoretical bases that can explain this clash between what the authorities attempt to prohibit and what nevertheless emerges in the artistic expressions of cinema. Based on Foucault's definition of censorship as a *device*, this article explores the degree to which that device has the effect of bringing out on the imaginative level what the censors sought to prohibit, as revealed, in relation to diverse totalitarian contexts, in the different filmmakers referred to.

### Key words

Eroticism; Censorship; Dictatorships; Francoism; metaphor; female desire; homosexuality; Foucault.

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## DESEO Y EROTISMO EN TIEMPOS DICTATORIALES: ESTRATEGIAS CINEMATOGRAFICAS CONTRA LA CENSURA DE LOS REGIMENES TOTALITARIOS

### Resumen

Al lado del uso de la censura como instrumento de represión política, las dictaduras han tendido a censurar también la expresión de lo erótico. En el campo del cine, esta tendencia represiva ha sido a veces contestada por los creadores, mediante procedimientos retóricos de carácter metafórico. El artículo rastrea las bases teóricas que permiten explicar este choque entre lo que se pretende prohibir y lo que sin embargo emerge en las manifestaciones artísticas del cine. Se parte de la consideración foucaultiana de la censura como *dispositivo*, para dilucidar hasta qué punto dicho dispositivo hace surgir imaginariamente lo que se pretendía prohibir, tal como demuestran, con relación a diversos contextos totalitarios, los diferentes autores a los que se hace referencia.

### Palabras clave

Erotismo; censura; dictaduras; franquismo; metáfora; deseo femenino; homosexualidad; Foucault.

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# NOTEBOOK

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## **DESIRE AND EROTICISM IN DICTATORIAL TIMES FILM STRATEGIES AGAINST CENSORSHIP IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES**

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### **SEEING INWARD, LOOKING OUTWARD: FEMALE DESIRE IN FRANCOIST CINEMA**

Carlos Losilla

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### **EROTISM AND FORM AS SUBVERSION IN DAISIES**

Orisel Castro, York Neudel, Luis Gómez



# SEEING INWARD, LOOKING OUTWARD: FEMALE DESIRE IN FRANCOIST CINEMA\*

CARLOS LOSILLA

1. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Spanish cinema depicted female desire from two complementary perspectives: on the one hand, from what we might call the body-nation, i.e., the body of the actress, of the character she is portraying, devoted to the worship of a concept or idea associated with the Spanish nation, which is viewed erotically; and on the other, from a mystical impulse which, derived from the culture of the Spanish Golden Age, from Teresa of Ávila to John of the Cross, turns this same idea, or the thinking to which it gives rise, into a surrender to the inner world, a turning inward that finds pleasure in self-contemplation. In the first group, the imperial films by the Spanish film studio Cifesa, ranging from *Madness for Love* (*Locura de Amor*, Juan de Orduña, 1948) to *Dawn of America* (*Alba de América*, Juan de Orduña, 1951), depict an aggravated desire whose object is the idea of home itself, transformed into something much bigger, the collective home of the Spanish nation, which must be preserved at

all costs, as if it were a kind of virginity as defined in Spanish Catholic ideology. The second group constitutes a trend that culminated in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, Víctor Erice, 1972) and that began both with religious films in the style of *La señora de Fátima* [*Our Lady of Fatima*] (Rafael Gil, 1951) and with the melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s, among which *Black Sky* (*Cielo negro*, Manuel Mur Oti, 1951) would represent a high point, before giving way to a female archetype for whom the home, once again, the house or the apartment, constitutes an irreplaceable sanctuary, once more the repository of a desire that is never ultimately released. On the basis of these parameters, the purpose of this article is to trace the circular path taken by female desire in Spanish cinema during the Franco regime, ultimately returning to the same point of self-repression where it began. The 1950s would be quite different, as will be explored below; but first, I must begin not at the beginning, but at the end.

2. *The Spirit of the Beehive* contains one of the most expressive images of female desire in Spanish cinema during the Francoist era. It is not a provocative gesture, nor does it have anything to do with physical sexuality. On the contrary, it is a kind of turning inward, a *seeing oneself and for oneself*: Ana (Ana Torrent), the young female protagonist, wants to conjure up the monster that has seduced her, and to do she shuts her eyes and whispers her own name ("I am Ana, I am Ana"), in a kind of incantation that might lead her into an amorous reunion beyond the grave. Indeed, the object of her desire is none other than Frankenstein's monster, embodied first in the wandering figure portrayed by Boris Karloff for the film directed by James Whale in 1931 (which Ana watches in an improvised movie theatre in a small town in the years just after the Spanish Civil War) and then in a resistance fighter who appears in the vicinity of her house and is shot down by the members of the Guardia Civil shortly after she finds him, identifies him, feeds him and worships him as if he were a kind of totem. Ana thus feels an absence. And to this absence she directs her desire, as if she were making love to the void by imagining the primordial darkness of the cinema in which she first saw the desired body and also the gloom in which she subsequently recreated it, in a kind of abandoned house in the middle of the countryside where the resistance fighter fled to and met his death.

It is no accident that the scene from *Frankenstein* chosen by Erice for the ritual of the seduction, for the moment when Ana's infatuation and fatal attraction is born, is that in which the monster plays with a little girl by the side of the river, which ends unexpectedly with the girl's death. Ana, in the darkness of the theatre, opens her eyes as wide as she can in an effort to take in the full intensity of the erotic ceremony unfolding on the screen: the monster tossing flowers into the water imitating his little playmate, the girl who invites him into her dreamlike world, the young

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## LOOKING INWARD IS THE FIRST STEP FOR THE MYSTICAL EXALTATION OF DESIRE

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female body hurled into the river, as if her absurd death were a substitute for an impossible coitus... *The Spirit of the Beehive* is a film about the end of childhood in a strictly sexual sense, about innocence tarnished by the carnality of the cinema and the awakening of desire, all encapsulated in that final image: in view of the impossible nature of a physical union, Ana closes her eyes and turns in on herself, in a kind of mystical masturbation that ultimately deifies the body being recalled and conjured up again. It is Saint John of the Cross's "Dark Night of the Soul", or even the "body so wounded" that Teresa of Ávila admired in Christ. As a climax to another dark night, that of Spanish Catholic Fascism, Erice proposes and depicts the only place where a female gaze of desire could rest in late Francoist Spain: turned inward, to a here-after that is a here-and-now and that is short-circuited in its own contradiction.

3. This impassioned and focused gaze was not new to the Spanish cinema of those gloomy years. Several decades earlier, a certain "imperial" discourse had associated the nation and its people with an intensely desired body. In Juan de Orduña's *Dawn of America*, Queen Isabella I of Castile (Amparo Rivelles) fixes her gaze, arches her eyebrows, thrusts forward her breasts and flushes her rosy cheeks every time she speaks of the possibility of Spanish colonisation across the seas. In *Agustina of Aragon* (Agustina de Aragón, 1950), also by Orduña, the heroine of the title (played by Aurora Bautista) confronts Napoleon's troops with fiery eyes, with a gaze always fixed on the distance, as if Spain were at once a territory without boundaries, a vast mental space, and a spiritual idea made flesh. This is quite unlike John Ford's women, who look at the world with a patient hardness, with a humble resignation. Or-

duña's women waver between desire repressed to the point of bursting and a kind of lusty hyperactivity that fills the void left by sex with an unbridled love of the land understood in a sense that transcends myth and legend, that enters fully into the territory of delusion (FREUD, 1993). In *Madness for Love*, another film by Orduña, Joanna of Castile (again played by Aurora Bautista) equates love fully with possession, and the result is a sadomasochistic fantasy in which sexual frustration leads to a visionary state capable of transforming reality, one of the most apt metaphors ever conceived of Francoist ideology. In any case, female desire is always mystical and is constantly reconstructed through successive negations: of the other as a body and of the female's own body, which are substituted by a gaze that looks beyond the scenery and the landscape to seize upon the conquest of something always far away and unattainable. When Ana closes her eyes and looks within, she is in fact subverting the longing of the Cifesa heroines by turning it into a fire that is no longer directed at the masses conceived collectively, at the idea of an idealised nation, but at the exploration of her own ego viewed as a place of desire.

However, it is important to separate this mystic impulse from its supposed transgressive power. While the Baroque allows the loss of oneself in death-thought, in the delusional stillness that leads to an idleness that is counterproductive for the hyperactivity of power, in the countless folds of a subject already forever fractured (DELEUZE, 1989), the Francoist Neo-Baroque uses this flight from the world for a passionate conception of a body-nation that both begins and ends in itself, turning into the receptacle for an ascetic zeal that does not seek to forget the world (and therefore deny its laws) but to transform it to its fancy (and therefore accept it as a point of departure for a dream). The women's eyes open imposingly and this delusional gaze is not the product of desire because it is intransitive, because it always comes up against the wall of its own reflection, once it

has scanned the territory that it seeks to make its own: a lust for conquest, for material possession, that does not seek self-satisfaction or pleasure but instead revels in their impossibility. The body cannot have gratification, but neither can the soul, devoted to circling its own inner world endlessly and irrevocably. Merely watching a few of the melodramas of the 1950s is enough to confirm this hypothesis of desire denied and turned into something like a black bile that rots the inside of the body while leaving the outside intact: in the Spain of the period, it is appearance that matters. In Manuel Mur Oti's *Black Sky* (1951), a woman desires a dress, to use it to cover her insignificance, until she wakes up from her futile dream and decides to remain alone with her body, running on and on, in the end believing she has found redemption but in reality doomed to *inhabit* this circular path forever. In Rafael Gil's *La señora de Fátima* (1951), the shot-reverse shot between Lucía (Ines Orsini) and the Virgin Mary, between the face exalted by mystical elation and the face covered by a veil that inhibits the free expression of desire, suggests an amorous connection that becomes sexual when the camera pans from Mary's praying hands to her immaculate, naked foot, a pan that would have appealed to Buñuel in his representation of an unmoving passion doomed to decomposition.

4. The trajectory of female desire in Francoist Spain thus inherits the mystic attitude of the Baroque aesthetic to turn it into a melancholy obsessively turned in on itself, creating murky mental worlds that hinder access to the real one.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, it is not strange that we might speak of "loss", "solitude" and "melancholy", and even of "wounds of desire" in relation to the cinema of the period, or at least part of the period (CASTRO DE PAZ, 2002: 213-214). But nor is it strange that this desolate landscape should take another form when it moves beyond the rapturous gazes of Aurora Bautista or Amparo Rivelles, sliding down a slippery slope from ethereal phantasmagoria to the vulgarity constituted by the other side of the

ecstasy of those other women possessed by a patriotic ideal that stood in for sexual fetishism. In the comedies of the 1940s, the compulsive longing of the male (to work, to find a better life; in short, to create a new society out of the destruction of the old one) finds its support in devoted women who act as a reflection of a beauty at times unattainable in the context of the pervasive moral squalor. This is the case of Rafael Gil's *Traces of Light* (*Huella de luz*, 1942), or Edgar Neville's *Life on a Thread* (*La vida en un hilo*, 1945), in which Isabel de Pomés and Conchita Montes, respectively, play two women who are similar in their brilliant sophistication. Although in the second film the woman seems to be the centre of the story, this is a false impression, because both the pretty daughter played by Pomés and the heartbroken widow portrayed by Montes exist only in relation to the male figure: the first will be the trophy won by Antonio Casal, in his role as a faithful employee, opening the doors for him into high society; the second will not acquire substance until she is defined by two men between whom she has been torn all her life without knowing it. Compared to the physicality of the Hollywood heroines of the period, from Katharine Hepburn to Jean Arthur, the Spanish comedy stars display a very particular *charme*, a dispassionate beauty that never manages to emerge from its shell.

This is perhaps why, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the influence of Italian neorealism gave rise to a different female archetype, very obviously distanced from the realm of the sexual to conform to a grey, vulgar banality, which is turned into the objective of a libido that has been redirected towards home and married life. In Fernando Fernán-Gómez's films *La vida por delante* [Life Ahead of Us] (1958) and *La vida alrededor* [Life Around Us] (1959), the lively Analía Gadé, a paragon of the new woman of Francoist developmentalism, wants only to live her life by her industrious husband's side, always prospering in spite of the precarious nature of the labour market. In

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## FROM EROTIC DESIRE FOR THE IDEA OF THE EMPIRE-NATION IN THE 1940S, IN THE 1950S SPANISH CINEMA MOVED TOWARDS THE DESIRE FOR DOMESTICITY

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Marco Ferreri's *El pisito* [The Little Apartment] (1958), the long-suffering Mary Carrillo (whose character is not based on the traditional canons of beauty, but on the banality of the almost asexual female who has grown up under rigid religious dogmas and strict moral standards) seeks only a roof under which to rest her weary body, in what constitutes "a bleak and hopeless portrait of a loving relationship whose sexual and emotional aspirations have been starved by the material hardship and moral squalor of the social context" (HEREDERO, 1993: 336). In Luis García Berlanga's *Not on Your Life* (*El verdugo*, 1963), the affluent Emma Penella's sole objective is to get away from her elderly father and she fiercely resists the approaches of her passionate boyfriend, although she ends up succumbing to a "sexual indiscretion" from which desire appears to be completely absent (ZUNZUNEGUI, 2005: 170). While certain heroines of the 1940s reduced their hopes of finding a substitute for erotic satisfaction to the expansion and defence of the glorious nation, as if it were a virginity that was at once vigilantly protected and voluptuously exhibited, the heroines of this "realist" cinema had lowered their aspirations in relation to sexual desire to such an extent that they ultimately locked it up in squalid microcosms in the form of subsidised apartments. And the vestal virgins of Spanish comedy disappeared once and for all into their own ethereal, unreal dream world.

Then in 1958 came Rafael J. Salvia's *Las chicas de la Cruz Roja* [Red Cross Girls], in which fashionable trousers, light dresses and a certain air of self-confidence characterised a new type of woman who strolls in a group through an urban en-

vironment that is turned into the setting not so much for the war between the sexes as for husband hunting. It is true that these women take the initiative, but without a single explicit erotic gesture, or a single insinuation of a desire for physical contact, as was typical of their Hollywood contemporaries: *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) and *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), both by Jean Negulesco, and Howard Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). In these Hollywood films, the use of colour vests the image with a highly sensual appearance, not only enhancing the erotic appeal of the actresses (from Marilyn Monroe to Lauren Bacall, from Jane Russell to Jean Peters), but also offering them the world that surrounds them as a *desirable* object in its most physical dimensions, in its purely *material* manifestations. Conversely, in Fernando Palacios' *Las chicas de la Cruz Roja* or

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### THE "SUPERWOMAN" OF FRANCOIST DEVELOPMENTALISM AS AN ICON, SIMULATION AND ABSTRACTION

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*El día de los enamorados* [Valentine's Day] (1959), the colour treatment tends to recreate a kind of squeaky clean quality mimetic of a daydream, as if it were a hazy photocopy of the original. And this effect comes not only from the different *brightness* of the image, but above all because the woman's desirous gaze falls more on objects than on bodies: gleaming urban landscapes, luxury hotels, sports cars and huge department stores are all depicted at once as representative of the uniquely Francoist concept of capitalism and as phony substitutes for sexual allusion. In a certain way, the eroticism of consumerism has taken possession of the imagery of female passion, as the perfect half-way point between mystic rapture and domestic vulgarity.

5. The female body is thus taken in two different directions: as the privileged target of the spectator's gaze (JOHNSTON, 1973; MULVEY, 1999) and also as the longing subject that moves from one representation to another trying to fill an absence; the absence of that desire that the story itself will not allow her to feel. In this sense, the Francoist diegesis is merciless: the female gaze wanders aimlessly inside it with no possible escape, doomed to inhabit a universe in which sex appears only in the form of neurotic images. In this sense, it is not surprising to find the ubiquitous presence, in that era and in subsequent years, of an element that has been turned into a basic obsession of the female psyche: the home, whether as an objective that must be achieved to enjoy a certain economic status or simply to survive, or as a neurotic cloister or metaphor for isolation; from Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1960), which portrays it as a hell that ensnares its inhabitants like a spider's web, to Fernando Palacios' *La gran familia* [The Big Family] (1963), which depicts it as the refuge of Spanish-Catholic morality, which by this stage had already passed through the strainer of Opus Dei, and which in its sequel, *La familia y... uno más* [The Family... Plus One] (1965), also directed by Palacios, would condemn the woman directly to nonexistence. The death of the protagonist's wife in between the two films (due simply to the fact that the actress who had played her, Amparo Soler Leal, declined to take part in the sequel) established a macabre tradition in Spanish cinema related to the dead body of the woman representing a being incapable of desire.<sup>2</sup> And this, curiously, would find its flip-side in the horror films of the late-Francoist period, in the early 1970s, when the desiring female is turned literally into a monster: the zombie countess in León Klimovsky's *The Werewolf vs. Vampire Woman* (*La noche de Walpurgis*, 1971) and the female vampires in Vicente Aranda's *The Blood Spattered Bride* (*La novia ensangrentada*, 1973) are two examples that are sufficiently distinct, both in terms of the inten-

tions behind them and the traditions they draw on, to be quite significant.

In a television commercial in 1963 for the Punto Blanco brand of socks, the actress Teresa Gimpera effectively normalised an attitude towards the male that somehow sanctioned the woman's liberation from domestic dependence and her entry into other territory, her discovery of a kind of desire in which, without being explicit, exposed certain deviations. In this commercial, Gimpera is on screen for 22 seconds, in a close-up and looking into the camera. There is no *provocative* gesture whatsoever, no direct *call* to the male TV viewer, but the targets of her questions represent three young male age-groups (boys, adults, mature males), who are called on to be asked what their favourite socks are. The disappearance of the male, his absence from the visible image, facilitates the woman's control through her gaze, her smile, her blinking, even her grimace, and thus establishes the most complete representation of female sexual domination: the woman no longer needs to make her desire explicit, as her overwhelming presence, including the concealment of her body, which is left out of the frame in a strategy of erotic suggestion, is enough to make it clear that, with the slightest movement of her face, she is capable of transforming the accepted rules of desire. Thus, in Francoist Spain, explicitness forms part of a great ellipsis that leads directly to the appearance of a kind of "superwoman" who is at once an icon, a simulation and an abstraction of the capacity for desire, so that any erotic gesture is ultimately inscribed in the territory of myth. Teresa Gimpera herself, with her cool and distant beauty, would portray this new archetype in various films made by the Barcelona School, especially in Aranda's *Fata Morgana* (1966), but would also connect it with the monster-woman of the Spanish horror genre in *Feast of Satan* (*Las amantes del diablo*, José María Elorrieta, 1970) or *La casa de las muertas vivientes* [House of the Living Dead Women] (Alfonso Balcázar, 1972) and,

finally, with the woman isolated in the oppressive home in *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

6. We do not know whether it was mere coincidence that Víctor Erice happened to choose Teresa Gimpera to play Ana's mother, and her counterfigure, the woman who wanders like a spectre through the big country mansion in the film, writing letters to an old lover who perhaps never existed, or taking them herself to the local station to deliver them to the mail wagon and watch as the train disappears into the distance, far from the house/beehive and the ghosts that dwell in it. While Ana turns her gaze inward, in a wilful negation of the mystical gaze of the imperial heroine, in an internalisation of the desire that proudly proclaims its insurmountable and subjective nature, Teresa (Gimpera's character) establishes a moving circle that attempts to sanction a desire *in absentia*, as if her constantly open and wandering eyes were the only possible guarantee of survival of the erotic female gesture, reduced here to a few small movements with a minimalist tone: writing in silence, lifting her head reflectively, carefully sealing an envelope, riding through the town on a bicycle, looking wistfully at the departing train... Amorous gestures that wait for a physical union which—we can be sure—will never happen again, but which are presented as a *resistance of desire*, the seed of Ana's rebellion, the inalterable position of these two women in response to the emotional collapse of Ana's father, who is locked away in his beehive, walking mechanically from one end of his study to the other, and destroying the mushrooms which—like his wife and daughter—try to spread their poison into the body of a society paralysed by fear.

In a way, Ana and Teresa are the heiresses of other heroines of a certain kind of "modern" Spanish cinema that could be said to include characters ranging from Betsy Blair in Juan Antonio Bardem's *Main Street* (*Calle Mayor*, 1956) to Aurora Bautista in Miguel Picazo's *La tía Tula* [Aunt Tula] (1964). On the one hand, these heroines are



their precursors, as their desire is always constrained in a suspended, frustrated state. On the other, they stand in opposition to these archetypes when they conceive of solitude, of the absence of the male, as the liberation of another type of more expansive, perhaps omnipresent desire, which goes beyond the state of melancholy to “disappear into the infinite space of an accursed act”, an “impossible space of all the desires yet to be realised”, in which “the act is no longer a mere occurrence, but the threshold of the impossible” (PERAN, 2016: 82-83). Beyond the neo-Baroque mysticism of Francoism, this new gesture of turning inward paradoxically directed towards an *outside* that the character wants *to possess, to abuse, to take*, is revealed as an expression of sexual desire that is also ultimately a political and economic response to the regime: to the demand for productivity to help sustain the new developmentalist ideology, these women respond with inactivity, with a silence that (safe)guards their desire and that is opposed to any kind of showy display of power. Female desire preserves its power in a closed circle that opens up invisible, camouflaged, subversive escape routes. And this points to an unsettling flashback, because there is *another cinematic form* that requires further analysis.

In 1967, the former child star Marisol was no longer a child and began to display her erotic potential in Luis Lucia's *Las cuatro bodas de Marisol* [The Four Weddings of Marisol], which includes a memorable scene: rehearsing a musical number, the female protagonist reveals with a gaze her desire for the body of a man, the director of the film within the film itself, and she does this through a *mise-en-scène* inherited, of course, from the Hollywood musical, which exposes both sides, what is in front of the camera and what is behind it—a self-consciousness that a few years earlier had been popularised by filmmakers like Godard. Thus, out of the territory of the musical bursts forth the opulence of the physical that reproduces itself through cinema, that is reflected as in a mir-

ror which in turn reveals an unsatisfied but persistent desire, and which is *self-conceived* as a new desirous gaze. Might it not be that the trace of the female has ended up producing a truly *modern* Spanish cinema in this trans-genre explosion, in this outburst of mystical rapture that brings together the gaze towards the *hereafter* intercepted by the *here and now* of the everyday, but also a carnal, explosive sexuality, that affects not only the bodies but also the lushness of the *mise-en-scène*? Perhaps this is a mistaken conclusion. Perhaps the modernity of Spanish cinema lies in the austerity of Basilio Martín Patino's *Nine Letters to Berta* (Nueve cartas a Berta, 1966), of course, but also in the films of Marisol, Rocío Durcal or Pili and Mili: female gestures in pursuit of a desire that could only materialise in the dream realm outside an asphyxiating universe.

7. As outlined in this article, female desire in Spanish cinema during the Franco regime followed a series of convolutions and detours that has turned this theme into an extraordinarily complex labyrinth. From the body-nation of the 1940s to the body-home of the 1950s, the woman longs only for that which surrounds her like a phantasmal perimeter: a map turned into an imperial symbol and, as a result, reaching far beyond mere geography; a domestic space produced out of the mixture of that ideal extension promoted by the prevailing ideology and also by a cultural tradition based on mysticism which at simultaneously serves to support it and to call it into question. Teresa Gimpera, the new cosmopolitan woman of the Barcelona School and of the advertising boom who ultimately became—under Víctor Erice's direction—the female closed in on herself and taken back metaphorically to the beginnings of Francoism in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, acts as a privileged example of a modernity cut short. And it is from this that I draw my hypothesis, by way of a provisional conclusion here with the hope of pursuing it further in future investigations: on the one hand, the eruption of that mystical tradition in a carnal and festive rapture that appears in

a certain type of (musical) comedy in which women are the protagonists; and on the other, the intersection of this trend with a formalist modernity that has developed in the cinematic traditions of other nations and that may have reached Spanish cinema through a new generation looking beyond Spanish borders and discovering other visual horizons, outside a long and painfully institutionalised reality. ■

## NOTES

- \* This article forms part of the research project of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness *El cuerpo erótico de la actriz bajo los fascismos: España, Italia y Alemania (1939-1945)* (CSO2013-43631-P).
- 1 Alonzo de Santa Cruz's *Sobre la melancolía* (On Melancholy, 1569) and Andrés Velázquez's *Libro de la melancolía* (Book of Melancholy, 1585) fell within the Baroque tradition and left their mark on Spanish culture for centuries to come, around the same time that Saint John of the Cross wrote his *Spiritual Canticle* (1578) and Teresa de Ávila gave shape to her *Way of Perfection* (1562-1564). All these predate the work considered the masterpiece of the genre: *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) by the English scholar Robert Burton.
- 2 Conversely, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), for example, the dead woman not only feels desire, but somehow returns to fulfil her desire, a very different tradition drawn from the literary heritage of authors like Edgar Allan Poe or Sheridan Le Fanu.

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## SEEING INWARD, LOOKING OUTWARD: FEMALE DESIRE IN FRANCOIST CINEMA

### Abstract

Contrary to appearances, female desire not only existed and evolved in the cinema of Francoist Spain, but also acquired disturbing and unsettling forms. From the erotic desire for the idea of "Empire" in the patriotic films of the 1940s to the desire for a certain kind of domesticity in the comedies of that same period and also in the films influenced by neorealism, culminating in the ambiguous development of a different film tradition that moved towards the idea of a mythical woman who gradually became more mundane, but also more intuitive of her new desires, in certain comedies and musicals of the 1960s. Spanish cinema moved from its Baroque and mystical heritage toward a glimpse of a "modern cinema" style based on international models.

### Key words

Film Aesthetics; Film History; Francoist Cinema; Female Desire; Baroque; Melancholy; Classical/Modern Cinema.

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## VER HACIA DENTRO, MIRAR HACIA FUERA: EL DESEO FEMENINO EN EL CINE DEL FRANQUISMO

### Resumen

En contra de lo que pudiera parecer, el deseo femenino no solo existe y evoluciona en el cine de la España franquista, sino que también adquiere formas inquietantes y turbadoras. Del deseo erótico hacia la idea de «Imperio» de las películas patrióticas de los años 40 pasamos al deseo de una cierta domesticidad en las comedias de esa época y también en las corrientes influidas por el neorrealismo, para luego culminar en la equívoca gestación de un cine distinto que va creciendo hacia la idea de una mujer mítica que poco a poco se hace más cotidiana, pero también más intuitiva respecto a sus nuevos deseos, en ciertas comedias y musicales de los 60. De la herencia del Barroco y la mística se pasa al atisbo de un «cine moderno» basado en modelos externos.

### Palabras clave

Estética del cine; historiografía del cine; cine franquista; deseo femenino; Barroco; melancolía; cine clásico/moderno.

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# VISUAL MOTIFS IN CINEMATIC EROTICISM UNDER FASCISM: SPAIN

JORDI BALLÓ

MARGA CARNICÉ

## NARRATIVE VEHICLES AND FICTIONAL BODIES

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In spite of their sporadic presence in the historiography of cinema, actors' bodies constitute an intriguing object of study. Throughout the history of classical cinema, the star system tended to create centripetal models of representation, based on the malleability of the star to sublimate the features of certain human archetypes (MORIN, 1972). Rather than disseminate ideas that were alien to the canon, this process of mythical identity construction was based on an imposition of homogeneous models on the specific qualities or charisma of the actor (DYER, 1979). Contrary to the diversity of the theatre, classical cinema sought to flatten the differences between performers by adapting them to the symbols of a hegemonic culture, a phenomenon that Jacqueline Nacache (2006) defines in terms of the attenuation of the unique presence

of the actor by the industry, which attempts to shape the actor with a single nature with which the audience can identify. Along these discursive lines, based on the idea of the adaptation of the performer as a cultural emblem, it may prove useful to analyse certain actresses of Spanish and Italian fascist cinema as objects of study of this process. According to Nicole Brenez (2013), in the analysis of the cultural and anthropological challenges of the cinema of a particular era, the action of the performer can be observed on the basis of the dichotomy of porosity versus resistance of his/her body to the embodiment of the symbol, an extremely useful hypothesis for the analysis proposed here. Contrary to other star models of this era, which could be defined by their capacity to push beyond the aesthetic limits of their time by encouraging the creation of new paradigms, the four actresses chosen for this study all represent a model of permeability with the cultural

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**THE REPETITION OF CERTAIN MISE-EN-SCÈNE STRATEGIES CENTRED ON EROTICISM IS AN ELEMENT TO CONSIDER WHEN ANALYSING HOW THE REPRESENTATION OF DESIRE CAN BE FOUNDED ON A DIALECTIC BETWEEN REVELATION AND CONCEALMENT**

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and ideological canon of fascism that makes them, in historical terms, significant stars of the political regimes that they promoted.

This was a period in film history when the parameters of production reflected an industry focused on the construction of a national image and the promotion of a patriotic film tradition. As noted in contextual studies of the period in both countries (ARGENTIERI, 1974; AÑOVER DÍAZ, 1992; GIL, 2009), the central concern of censorship activity, consisting of the preventive examination of scripts and a subsequent review of films by censorship committees, was to prevent the circulation of any ideas inconsistent with the official ideology, especially in terms of respect for the fatherland, the government and its authorities and representatives. The arbitrary nature of censorship criteria in the absence of a specific code for the mechanisms of expression in terms of public morality and decorum, and the rigid application of Catholic principles on the films released, turned sex and eroticism into feared taboos. While religious leaders warned of the dangerous effects of the new art form on the public psyche, the rhetorical power of cinema attracted the attention—in some cases feeding the cinephilia—of the dictators who regulated the autocratic production system. The propagandistic and economic potential already foreseen by Goebbels in his conversion of national film production into a powerful weapon of Nazism, did not go unnoticed by the respective

governments of Franco and Mussolini. In this context of preventive censorship, somewhat random regulatory standards, and the need to promote an autocratic star system that could compensate for the absence of the international stars, the actor's body became an essential point of reference for the phenomenon analysed here: the promotion of an erotic imaginary within the ideological and aesthetic limits of the national image of fascism.

In parallel with the analysis of the bodies of certain major actresses, a study of the use of certain visual motifs in the films of fascist Spain and Italy could help us identify some significant recurrent features. The repetition of certain mise-en-scène strategies centred on eroticism is an element to consider when analysing how the representation of desire can be founded on a dialectic between revelation and concealment. Cinematic motifs (derived from an object, a situation, or a mise-en-scène strategy) have ambiguous characteristics and are open to suggestion, but never represent something completely fixed, limited to its own symbolic meaning; rather, they have the ability to leap from one film to another, making it necessary to analyse the expressive and narrative function of their repetitive nature, of the creation of a narrative form that becomes a communicative mechanism (BALLÓ, 2000).

The most important studies of the star in classical cinema (MORIN, 1972; DYER, 1979) place part of their attention on their erotic potential, which partly explains our interest in the key role played by the female performer in this specific context. The figure of the actress brings together the idea of a pleasure associated with the expressiveness of the gesture and its veneration from afar through the isolation created by the stage or the pedestal of fame. The importance of the female body in the erotic imaginary and the impact of the figure of the performer on the development of the main aesthetic canons associated with twentieth century film culture invite us to explore the question of eroticism in cinema through visual motifs

composed around the charismatic presence of the diva. Taking into account the expressive restrictions of the fascist context in Italy and Spain, and in view of the implicit censorship of carnality and its phantasmagoria (the kiss, the caress or the embrace of the lovers in the image as forms inciting physical contact), the figure of the performer (actress, dancer or singer) in the popular images of the Spanish *folclórica* or of the Italian *diva* are inscribed with a veiled eroticism, often based on the presence of the star as a landscape of sublimation of the racial. Imperio Argentina and Estrellita Castro, as ambassadors of the first, and Clara Calamai and Doris Duranti of the second, represent four cases of actresses of considerable popularity in their respective homelands, whose emblematic presence in the fascist period and adaptation to the poetic possibilities and plain mythology of fascist cinema facilitated the dissemination of a particular visual glossary of desire. Without transgressing the hegemonic ideology, and largely favouring the construction of an especially patriotic imaginary, the autonomy of their presence in the establishment of certain recurrent images points to the expressive power of their figures over the moral limits of a film industry heavily constrained by the enforcement of propriety and sexual repression.

### THE SPANISH FOLCLÓRICA AND THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC IMAGINARY

At the end of the Spanish Civil War, the promotion of a patriotic film tradition and the consequent renaissance of a popular imaginary associated with entertainment promoted the transmigration of the performer from the musical stage to the cinema through the figure of the Spanish *folclórica*, or female folk star. This phenomenon of adaptation of popular culture to a hegemonic formula capable of uniting the Francoist spirit took the form of a specific shift between two Spanish styles of popular song: from the risqué style of the *cuplé*

to the more conservative *copla* (ALBERTÍ and MOLNER, 2013). This shift involved a stylistic mutation that occurred between the 1920s and the 1950s, from the theatrical variety acts of the beginning of the century to the development of Spanish cinema, and essentially concerned the body of the actress and the attenuation of her eroticism on the screen. Framed within the context of European popular entertainment of the 1910s and 1920s, various cultural studies identify an outbreak of the phenomenon of *sicalipsis* or playful displays of eroticism,<sup>1</sup> which makes the body of the performer the visible landscape for a “process of sexual emancipation or liberation” (SALAÜN, 2007), which was cut short by the rise of fascism. With the possibly polar points of reference of Raquel Meller and Concha Piquer, this shift can be seen as a specific metamorphosis: from the performative body as the epitome of cultural modernity at the turn of the century, in which “dance and eroticism co-exist with the many innovations of the era” (BARREIRO, 2007:1) to their homogenisation into a cultural symbol of a National Catholic imaginary. In this context, Imperio Argentina is a foundational figure. So named by Jacinto Benavente in tribute to two performers of the turn of the century who were recognised for a stylistic refinement of flamenco dancing (Pastora Imperio and Antonia la Argentina), she represented the Spanish star with an international reach and reflected the promotion of the *folclórica* as an essential erotic icon in Francoist cinema. At the level of cultural signification, Argentina would be followed in popularity by her contemporary Estrellita Castro.

Specific studies of the Spanish star system of the early twentieth century, like the analysis by Eva Woods (2012), support this theory and suggest an exploitation of performers like Argentina and Castro in the name of the nationalist project. Taking the exoticism of the *folclórica* as an erotic device, the regime used the specific magnetism of the actresses to sublimate, through their charisma, the idea of racial otherness. This sublimation

would include the rhetorical use of certain physical and expressive features in support of a process of archetypal conversion that would not transgress the fascist racial codes. Through the eloquent oxymoron of “white gypsies,” Woods uses the idea of racial whitening as an omnipresent metaphor in titles of the era, like the film that represented Imperio Argentina’s rise to international fame as Florián Rey’s *Morena Clara* [literally “light-skinned brown girl”] in 1936, the year of the military uprising in Spain. The success of this film, which remained in theatres in Spain during the war, demonstrates not only the effectiveness of this practice on the national imaginary, but also its international potential, which would lead to a period of collaboration between Spain and Nazi Germany in the productions of the Argentina-Rey duo.

The titles starring Argentina and Castro in the period 1939-1945 and the constellation of visual motifs brought together around charismatic qualities like gesture, voice, smile and control of presence in the dangerous territory of dance all point to the erotic potential of the *folclórica*, partly inherited from the stage context of the 1920s. Through an apparent ingenuousness and submissiveness, the presence of these actresses would give rise to certain constants in the *mise-en-scène* related to the female body and desire that acquired special importance in the performative practices of dancing and singing as rituals of attraction, in the context of the transition from *cuplé* to *copla*. While in the latter style of song the eroticism is less evident than in the former, there are certain devices of seduction that are telling for their insistent nature. The most revealing aspect of this series of films is that some of them relate back to images produced in periods prior to the Civil War, but which obtained a more obvious and meaningful quality in the period analysed here.

## SONG AND DANCE

The centrality given to female seduction through popular song and dance gives rise to the recur-

rence of a moment of apotheosis that nearly always occurs in relation with the musical numbers choreographing the moments of revelation of the body and its function as a trigger for desire. As demonstrated in the study by Charnon-Deutsch (2004) on the importance and dissemination of the figure of the Spanish gypsy in the Western imaginary, the myth of Carmen is a foundational point of reference for this device, whose international reach would be confirmed by the double version of *Carmen la de Triana* (1938) directed by Florián Rey, with footage shot in Germany under the auspices of the Nazi regime. In this double edition of Carmen, in Spanish and German versions, with the song “*Los piconeros*” Imperio Argentina undertakes a musical spectacle that involves a complex process of seduction and vigilance of her female rival in the presence of the beloved. From the stage Carmen sings, dances and watches, and her body in action shows the full deployment of her erotic activity to assert the primacy of the female protagonist over the seduced male who watches. Shortly thereafter, also in Berlin, Imperio Argentina and Florián Rey filmed *La canción de Aixa* [Aixa’s Song] (1939), where this same seductive device appears in several sequences. In some moments the song or the dance resorts to Andalusian clichés, such as when Imperio Argentina sings “*Ruiseñor enséñame a cantar*” in a setting imitative of the style of Nasrid architecture. But it is without doubt the song “*Entre las gasas de tus velos*” where the system of depiction of revelation and concealment is fully deployed, tinged in this case with the Oriental allusion to the dance of the veils. In another film, directed Benito Perojo, *Goyescas* (1942), the actress plays two characters in conflict with one another, two rivals for love who are also from two very different social backgrounds: the singer of popular *tonadillas* and the aristocratic countess, in an iconographic display that attempts explicitly to transcribe certain *costumbrista* and Rococo paintings of Goya. In one moment of the film, the two women, who are in



fact the same actress, confront one another in a singing duel, in which the popular songstress sings in a public space while the countess responds from an indoor location. In another sequence, the songstress dances to the music of Granados in an effort to seduce an army officer and obtain a safe-conduct for her beloved. The seductive song is also a vehicle in other films with different geographical settings: in *Bambú* [Bamboo] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1945), Imperio Argentina dances around a Cuban street to tropical rhythms, arousing the admiration of some Spanish soldiers stationed there. Once again the song will spark a rivalry for her affections between two men (Luis Peña and Fernando Fernán Gómez in this case), which the female protagonist attempts to alleviate while singing “*A los dos os quiero mucho*” [I Really Love You Both]. The song is the vehicle for the seduction, as made explicit in some lines of dialogue: “What have you got Bambú that excites me so much...?” to which she responds: “I love you... in song, I’ve told you many times.”

Estrellita Castro also uses song and dance as an agent of mayhem. In *Suspiros de España* [Sighs of Spain] (Benito Perojo, 1939), the exotic nature of the *folclórica* in a Cuban setting underscores her presence in a foreign space that enhances the resonance of patriotic memories and longing for home. In *Whirlwind* (Torbellino, Luis Marquina, 1941), a character from southern Spain sings on the national radio station Radio Ibérica, giving the song a presence and a recognition of popular Andalusian folk as an essential weapon of the erotic, in contrast with the neutrality of Madrid. In *La patria chica* [Little Homeland] (Fernando Delgado, 1943) Estrellita Castro portrays the same feeling of ambivalence between song, eroticism and fatherland: she triumphs as a singer in France, but this doesn’t prevent her from wanting to go home. It is worth highlighting the explicit message in this film of the metonymic identity of the *folclórica*: embodying the Andalusian temperament, Castro represents the Spanish spirit, conveying the con-

centric expansive effect of national identity in the suggestive power of its erotic potential. This effect is confirmed in the voice of the character Mr. Blay, a rich French Hispanophile, who expresses his love as follows: “I have always said that if Spain is a beautiful woman, her eyes are Andalusia. You to me are all Andalusia. And now it seems to me that Spain and you look at me through your eyes.”

## COPLAS THROUGH THE BARS

The cinematic motif of the woman in the window is a recurrent image in film history, particularly in melodrama. As a legacy of the development of this image in central European painting, the widespread use of this motif in cinematic traditions worldwide posits tensions between enclosure in the home and the dream of movement outwards, as an open space that is at once a hope and a threat, acting as in impetus for a reflective pause and for decision-making. In the films starring the two Spanish actresses analysed here, one variant of this motif appears repeatedly: the window is fitted with bars that separate the lovers, acting as an obstacle that highlights the distance of the bodies between inside and outside. The presence of this set detail is already observable in some *costumbrista* films from the earliest days of Spanish cinema. It appears in Raquel Meller’s first film, *Los arlequines de seda y oro* [The Harlequins of Silk and Gold] (Ricardo de Baños, 1919). The bars appear in the scene of the encounter between the bullfighter and the cabaret singer portrayed by Meller, a “white gypsy” who could be considered a direct precursor to *Morena Clara* (CLAVER ESTEBAN, 2012). The woman behind bars also appears in the first film versions of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez’s landmark novel *Sangre y arena* [Blood and Sand]. In the first of these (1917), co-directed by the author himself, it is through the bars that shut in the young Carmen that the promise of marriage is given by the bullfighter who is the story’s protagonist. Significantly, this ambiguous use of bars as an expression



Scene from *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey, 1938)

of female eroticism restrained appears in the U.S. version directed by Fred Niblo in 1922. Like the earlier film, the encounter between the bullfighter and the woman includes a chaste declaration of love through the bars of the balcony of her house. Immediately thereafter, the film cuts to the scene of the wedding: the couple go up to their rooms in a shot seen through the arabesque grill on the window. This image constitutes a foreshadowing of a home that will become a domestic prison for the wife, in anguish over the errant desires of the husband, who will fall into the amorous temptation of a *femme fatale*.

The profusion of this variant of the motif in the films of the period analysed here is probably due to its suitability for the censors, who went after any outpourings of love to ensure, as Añover Díaz (1992: 1065), suggests “[a] male-female relationship [that] appeared totally cold on the screen.” In this sense, the bars take on the role of a boundary imposed to prevent physical contact between bodies. Unlike the visual motif of the woman in the window, the bars as part of the set not only represent a space for dreaming, but are also a meeting place between the inside and the outside, mediated by an imposed obstacle. The bars at the same time serve to establish a unique female space that places a distance or prohibition separating the two bodies from their desire. In the case of Imperio Argentina, it already appears explicitly in *Sister San Sulpicio* (La hermana San Sulpicio, Florián Rey, 1934), in the scene where the female protagonist, who had already performed the same

role in its silent version (Florián Rey, 1927), goes over to the bars with her guitar to sing a *copla* in a man’s presence. The dialogue of Argentina’s character verbalises what might be the spectator’s interpretation of this visual motif: “Aren’t you holding me captive? Like any prisoner, I have to cheer up my cell!”

The bars reappear in other Imperio Argentina films, reinforcing the expression of seclusion inherent to the female figure as static archetype. In *Morena Clara*, the young Trini sings the *copla* “*El día que nació yo*” while sewing next to the bars through which she gazes wistfully on the world outside. As a form associated with Andalusian architecture, the bars in this scene also suggest the ideas of boundary and isolation of an inside realm associated with the female. The motif can also be used to express the opposite situation, as evoked in Julio Romero de Torres’ painting *La carcelera* (1918). Here it is the woman who has come to visit the man at the window of the prison, conveying the sorrow over a loving encounter rendered impossible. In the two versions cited above of *Carmen la de Triana*, this same dramatic situation is reproduced, establishing a direct shift to the imprisoning function of bars: Carmen/Imperio Argentina strolls through the prison, and sings and talks with one of the prisoners in front of the iron bars of his cell. Throughout the sequence the repressive function of this set device turned into a visual motif is made clear: the voice and the gestures of the seductive singer arouse the passion of the prisoner, who is unable, however, to consummate the physical encounter.



Scene from *Mariquilla terremoto* (Benito Perojo, 1940)

The presence of Estrellita Castro in *Mariquilla terremoto* [Mariquilla the Earthquake] (Benito Perojo, 1940) gives a particular pictorial dimension to the bars motif. The actress is part of a curious frame in which this element takes the specific form of a heart. Her singing attracts the attention of a painter who, spellbound by the girl's beauty, begins to paint her on his canvas. This diegetic detail reinforces a *mise-en-scène* that intensifies the desire to capture a visual expression of all the variables that comprise the motif: the female body, the erotic symbolism and the distance between the lovers sublimated by the presence of the picture portrait as an encapsulation, memory and foreshadowing of the love story.

## THE TAVERN

Another privileged space for the action of song and dance in this series of films is the tavern, turned into a public space for the creation of a Spanish identity, where the arts of female seduction are unleashed upon a predominantly male audience. The tavern motif is notable for its reminiscence of the original stage settings for the performance of the *cuplé*, where the ritual of seduction enacted by the body, voice and gestures of the female performer reflect paradigmatic cultural aspects of the aesthetic mutation that occurred on the European stage at the beginning of the twentieth century, turning the woman of the stage, as Serge Salaün

(2007: 82) suggests, into the true heroine of modern times. Going back to the case of *Carmen la de Triana*, the key scene of "Los piconeros" occurs in the tavern, which represents an intermediate space between the stage and the intimate song sung to the person for whom it is intended. The descent from the stage to come to the table where the conflict between men and women occurs turns the tavern into a truly identifying feature of the Spanish films of this era, with the intention of creating a collective stage that can connect with the quest for the genuine. Similarly, in the Cuba recreated in *Suspiros de España* with Estrellita Castro, as in *Bambú* with Imperio Argentina, spaces resembling the tavern are reproduced to serve the same function: a group of men who witness the seductive effect with a certain aftertaste of longing.<sup>2</sup>

The tavern also creates a space of exclusion, sometimes imbued with a sense of the forbidden. In *Mariquilla Terremoto*, the seduction is followed by a scene of alcohol-induced daydreams, with a series of fragmented shots of faces, legs and mouths which, imitating the relaxation of the senses, underscores the resonance of the tavern as a clandestine setting for desire. This rebellion against propriety in the embrace of the forbidden will have its consequences for the chaste character of Castro, who after this scene will be kicked out of the house. Another exemplary case of the nature of the tavern as a place of exclusion can



Scene from *Carmen, la de Triana* (Florián Rey, 1939)

be found in *Goyescas*, where Imperio Argentina performs the dual role of popular songstress and aristocrat. As often occurs when this device of the acting double is used, in one of the scenes the aristocrat has to dress up as the singer, so that she can escape from some bandits in the tavern where the woman is being held captive. The decision to disguise herself, to turn into her own double in order to escape, has an explicit function: to flee from a dangerous situation, she will transfigure into the other, sing like her in an inn filled with less-than-friendly bandits who will nevertheless admire her skills of seduction. In a way the space of identity offered by the tavern also serves to foreshadow an integration of the classes: there is no essential difference between the women in spite of their different social status. And it is pop-

ular folk culture, singing and dancing a *copla* in a tavern understood as the filmic space, that unifies their discourse.

### THE WHITE-TOOTHED SMILE

The female body in the films of Imperio Argentina and Estrellita Castro is generally dressed up, flowery, decorated, sometimes with a hint of cleavage, and bearing a white-toothed smile, an especially distinctive feature of both stars, as a genuine expression of a state of constant excitation based on the openness conveyed by the actresses to the act of love. The expressive ambiguity of the smile as a paradigm of the star presence of both performers (it could be argued that it is their personal signature) allows a mutation of lewdness into grace,



turning the aesthetic heritage of the *cuplé*, through the performer's charm, into a highly effective formula that constitutes a sign of decency, and even an act of escape from the lover's flirtation.

This outpouring of gestures tends to extend to different stereotypes of the different regions of Spain, to the style of the series painted by Joaquín Sorolla for the Hispanic Society of America in New York City, in which he offered a "Vision of Spain" based on a *folklorisation* of its various cultures. While Estrellita Castro focused mainly on depicting the Andalusian image, the performative versatility of Imperio Argentina ranged from Aragonese Spain in *Nobleza Baturra* (Florián Rey, 1935), to Gypsy Spain in *Morena Clara* and to the Madrid region in *Goyescas*. In all of these films, the female body is always discreetly concealed,

with the display of the desire supplanted by the outpouring of charm, at times nuanced by the excuse of a foreign locale: the occasional roles played by both actresses set in Paris (*Mariquilla terremoto*) or Cuba (*Bambú*) appear to be sufficient reason to trigger a less prudent display of the female body. Significant in this respect are the har-em scenes in *La canción de Aixa*. As also is the case in the history of painting, from Ingres to Fortuny, the motif of the odalisque has always been a vehicle for allowing the depiction of the nude female body in the West, in a cliché which, according to Moroccan writer Fatema Mernissi (2001: 112), responds to the construction of the imaginary of the Western painter, who projects onto this submissive, silent, naked woman the representation of his own desire. This film of Florián Rey's operates

Scene from *Mariquilla Terremoto* (Benito Perojo, 1940)



in the same way, based on the imaginative power of exoticism. The key scene in *La canción de Aixa* from the perspective of the female body involves a dance by the women of the harem, with chiffon veils, in a choreography that would probably have been unacceptable according to the censorship codes if not for its Oriental setting. Meanwhile, Aixa gazes sorrowfully on the bed as she prepares for her imminent wedding, putting on her make-up in front of the mirror and expressing doubt about the marriage. She is wearing a transparent dress, and walks over to the bathroom where two female attendants await her; then the dress falls, although her nudity is only hinted at. The scene cuts suddenly and to a shot of her bare feet, which serve as a part representing the nudity of her whole body. In this melodramatic film, which does not fit the model of the lively folkloric comedy, the constant smile has disappeared and the body appears to seek exposure, although the effect of the editing ensures its concealment.

## FORMS OF EMBRACE

In all of the films analysed here, the main plot is a story of love and its hardships, expressed in the distance between the lovers and the constant appearance of rivals. But how do they address the question of the encounter between the desiring bodies? The use of the kiss on the lips, which in these years operated internationally as a sign of the promise of love, is not present in these films, as if such a prohibition were the product of a moral code specific to National Catholicism. Alberto Gil (2009: 18-20) speaks of the elimination of kissing as a habitual practice of the censors, who paid very particular attention to its presence on screen, including attention to repetition, intensity and visibility (close-ups or frontal shots were considered more offensive). Serving as a narrative substitution for the kiss on the mouth was a kiss on the hand, a gesture at once passionate and



Up. Studio image of Imperio Argentina  
Down. Studio image of Estrellita Castro

restrained, as can be seen in *Goyescas*, where this motif is the climax of the love scene between the Countess and her lover in the palace, with a direct and quite explicit amorous dialogue: “I am waiting for you to look at me to obey.” Also in *La canción de Aixa*, the protagonist finally kisses the hand of her betrothed in a gesture of acceptance of the marriage and renunciation of the other love that has proven impossible, and as a promise of future fidelity. Meanwhile, the final scene in *Bambú* ends with an amorous meeting between the protagonist and her lover in a forest in the middle of the battlefield where the Spanish and the Cubans were fighting. In a gesture typical of classical cinema, she holds the wounded body of the soldier in her arms to create a composition of mercy, which feeds into the apotheosis of love at the end of the film, connecting, as is always the case in the passionate dimension of this composition, the tragic foreshadowing of love after death. It is an ending in which *Bambú* will die so that the man can survive, in an expression of female generosity. This final reckoning for the transgression committed during the film gives the female character a multiplicity of meanings, as protective lover and sacrificial victim; free love and excess of passion must ultimately be punished. With her death, the merciful woman redeems the impossible love with a ghostly echo: her song goes on after she herself is gone.

*Bambú* was not only Imperio Argentina’s last charismatic film as a star of fascism, but also the début of Sara Montiel, an actress who in the terms outlined here, took up the baton and established a continuity within certain aesthetic parameters that followed a path in the opposite direction: from the *copla* back to the *cuplé*. Montiel’s significance for the recovery of a national eroticism in films of the 1950s like *El último cuplé* [The Last Torch Song] (Juan de Orduña, 1957) or *La violetera* [The Violet Seller] (Luis César Amadori, 1958) suggests an interesting connection with the developments of the 1920s to the 1930s that hints at a

generational transfer between the performers of the first half-century of Spanish cinema.

## THE RACIAL DIVA OF ITALIAN FASCIST CINEMA

The context of Italian censorship was very similar to that of Spain. Controls on morality and propriety essentially involved preventive censorship of the screenplay and a subsequent review by committees made up of senior Fascist Party officials. The release of a papal encyclical by Pius XI in 1936, urging Catholic authorities to counteract the effects of cinema on the preservation of public morality gives an idea of the laxity of government censorship of certain images that compromised decorum. One overwhelming piece of evidence of this is the fact that in the early 1940s the actresses Clara Calamai and Doris Duranti each played in semi-nude scenes in *La cena delle beffe* [The Jester’s Supper] (Alessandro Blasetti, 1942) and *Carmela* (Flavio Calzavara, 1942), respectively, in what represented the paradigmatic image of eroticism in the Fascist era. The violent and provocative eroticism that we find in these nude scenes and the status of these actresses as divas favoured by the regime point to a fascination for carnality as an idea derived from one of the clichés of fascist ideology: racial pride. Sergio Vicini’s (2008) detailed study of the actresses of the Fascist *Ventennio* shows how the southern eroticism of Calamai, Duranti and Luisa Ferida and the fascination they held among certain members of the fascist hierarchy operated as a complement to the shaping of the star system in an era when Italy sought to promote its superiority abroad. In contrast with the steely neutrality of Assia Noris or Isa Miranda, Clara Calamai and Doris Duranti, from a marginalised position within the canon, articulated practices of performance and bodily display that used eroticism to fill in the gaps in identity and representation that a spectator might find in the shapeless utopia constructed by the official star



Left. Studio image of Clara Calamai  
Right. Studio image of Doris Duranti



system. Based on a principle of exotic magnetism, and in clear counterpoint to the gentle beauty of their contemporaries, the regime's racial divas established a transgressive marginality of flowing manes, exposed breasts and provocative legs. Such physical attributes, associated with a southern identity, contrasted with the mainstream aesthetic of a passive femininity committed to looking after the home, challenging it with the idea of a sexuality that was free and poised to be propelled into the modern age in the diva after the fall of the regime. This is why the Mediterranean qualities of figures like Duranti and Ferida, who would not survive the fall of Fascism, would find continuity in Clara Calamai, the actress who would

embody the transition from the fascist canon to post-war realism in Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* [Obsession] (1943).

## THE LONG BLACK MANE

The voluptuous features and figures of racial divas like Calamai and Duranti were visually encapsulated in the common feature of the long, flowing black hair, whose aesthetic use in the films of this period invites us to reflect on its dimension as a visual motif. In contrast with the blonde image that characterised the official diva in the *Telefoni Bianchi* films of the 1930s, the racial diva's dark mane of hair was an unequivocal symbol of her



sexual power. Already present in the imaginary of symbolist painting (BORNAY, 1994), the long wavy hair that classical cinema would attribute to the devious sexuality of the *femme fatale* appeared in the careers of Doris Duranti and Clara Calamai as a sign of an inherent sexuality and a symptom of the aesthetic transition which in those years took shape in the body of the racial diva as a paradigm of change.

Perhaps because of her status as the regime's *femme fatale*, in Doris Duranti's case the hair motif is especially powerful. There is a whole series of films in which the character's power of action and attraction is associated with the presence or concealment of her hair. This is the case of the most sexually alluring figures, like the eccentric Carmela in Calzavara's film of the same name (1942) or Lola, the Sicilian vamp in *Cavalleria Rusticana* [Rustic Chivalry] (Amleto Palermi, 1939). Both are presented in an image where the female figure associated with matriarchal authority is brushing the hair of the girl who, being of marrying age, is instructed to keep up an appearance of composure and propriety. This idea of the domestication of the hair as a form of containment of desire reappears in the propaganda film *Giarabub* (Goffredo Alessandrini, 1942), where Duranti is transformed from a dark-haired prostitute into the redeemed, uniformed figure of a war nurse. In *La contessa Castiglione* [The Countess of Castiglione] (Flavio Calzavara, 1942), about the historical figure Virginia Oldoini, whose power of attraction influenced the political fate of Italy under the Empire of Napoleon III, the aesthetic use of hair and the game of the masquerade ball of the era in the characterisation of the diva intervene at the narrative level, often serving to enhance the character's mystery and her power to influence the scene. In the same way, the degree of softness of the hair will be proportionate to the sexual temperament of the character. While the hair ornament reflects the suffering of Armida, the wife falsely sus-

pected of adultery in *Tragica notte* [Tragic Night] (Mario Soldati, 1942), the final images of the film closing over her luxuriant flowing hair evoke the passion of a woman who has been wooed by another man who is not her own. The untameable hair evokes the character's wild nature in *La figlia del corsaro verde* [The Daughter of the Green Pirate] (Enrico Guazzoni, 1940) or in *Carmela*, two films whose stories are presented as quests for salvation in which, through love, the character finds a calm channel for her exasperating vital energy. As a paradigmatic film, *Carmela*'s hair expresses the overflowing sexuality of Duranti's most erotic character, forming part of an ardent performance, rife with twists of the neck and face that often result in an imbalance and oblique angles in the provocative close-ups.

In the case of Calamai, the presence of her hair would demonstrate the importance of this feature in the aesthetic transition from fascism to the post-war period. The versatility of her facial features, which give her face a potential sweetness, would allow the diva to portray archetypal ingénues during the fascist period, while at the same time enabling her hair to become one of the points of reference for the sexual power of the neorealist woman in Giovanna, the female protagonist in *Osessione*. It is curious to observe how her hair often appears mentioned as a metonym for the aesthetic change to which Visconti subjected the actress for her adaptation to a character originally conceived for Anna Magnani (VICINI, 2008: 160). If we compare the shots from the actress' screen test (BARBERA, 2015: 86) with her image in previous films, the wild, unkempt mane, as a symbol of liberation, stands out in the process of characterisation which would entail, at the aesthetic level, the imposition of a new idea of femininity in Italian cinema.

## THE BARE BREASTS

Although the first bare breast ever seen in an Italian film in this period belonged to Vittoria Carpi,

an extra who would appear uncredited in *The Iron Crown* (La corona di ferro, Alessandro Blasetti, 1941), Pandora's box was really opened by another film also by Blasetti, the director who had already faced censorship problems related to the bare breast motif in his film *Sole* (1929) (GULI, 2008: 5). In *La cena delle beffe*, Amedeo Nazzari tears off the blouse of Clara Calamai's character, leaving the actress' torso exposed for just a second. The brevity of the shot and the horror in the expression of the victim, who rushes to conceal her body with a swift, demure gesture, did not reduce the effect of the image or Calamai's subsequent reputation with popular audiences as the first Italian woman to bare her nakedness on the film screen. The incident aroused the jealousy of Durante, who had proudly held the title of Italian cinema's *femme fatale* by building the power of her star presence through her fame as an actress with no inhibitions. The diva responded with the audacious topless scene in *Carmela*, where she opens her blouse in front of the camera, inviting the female

rival who has called her crazy and ugly to look upon the beauty of her body in the presence of a stunned crowd. The wild laugh with which the actress accompanies this gesture adds such provocative force to the scene that Durante's breasts would ultimately outdo the impact of Calamai's.

This war of scenes, opening a new chapter in Fascist cinema (VICINI, 2008: 141-165), would feed Durante's legend as an exhibitionist and powerful actress, with an indisputable influence at senior political levels. Without a doubt, the fact that the protagonist of the greatest provocation of the cinema of her day was the lover of Italy's Minister of Culture, Alessandro Pavolini, did not go unnoticed in view of the hypothesis that, as Alfredo Giannetti insinuated in his fictional representation of the episode (*Doris una diva del regime* [Doris, A Diva of the Regime], 1991) it was probably the favour she had with the fascist hierarchy that allowed such a scene to make it to the screen. In her memoirs, Durante would brag of having given Italian cinema its first hardened naked breast,

Up. Scene from *La cena delle beffe* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1941)

Down. Scene from *Carmela*. (Flavio Calzavara, 1941)





Scene from *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943)

completely natural, proud and free of any make-up trickery (VICINI, 2008: 143). Beyond the rivalry between divas and the subsequent biographical repercussions, it is clear that this episode provoked a laxity in fascist vigilance which, as Argentieri (1974: 56-57) suggests, is not unrelated to questions of national pride. The veiled eroticism of Nazi film actresses like Kristina Söderbaum, hinting at nudity under chaste nightgowns, and the impact that Hedy Lamarr had on Mussolini after seeing the banned film *Ecstasy* (Ekstase, Gustav Machaty, 1933) (GULI, 2008: 1), might have inspired a step forward for Italian cinema, spearheaded by the most immodest and provocative of its divas.

The bare breast, which would continue to appear in neorealism under the euphemistic idea of motherhood and its feeding function, took on complex resonances due to its timeless and multifaceted significance in the Italian cultural imaginary. The moral immunity that the feeding function gives the female breast, from the Capitoline Wolf—the alpha female founder of the Roman Empire—to the *virgo lactans* of the Renaissance, undergoes a peculiar mutation in the myth of Cimon and Pero, the source of the *Caritas romana* motif. According to the myth, Cimon, a man sentenced to death, is breastfed by his daughter Pero, who has just given birth and is thus able to save her father from dying of starvation. This curious inversion of the virgin mother icon gives the image of the naked breast a transgressive erotic connotation in itself. The presence, concealed or visi-

ble, insinuated or displayed, of the female breast, hardened and proud, ready to be shown to the public, would be perpetuated in the importance of the breasts, the voluptuousness and the free sexuality of the modern Italian diva in the generation of “shapely actresses” known collectively as the *maggiorate*.

### THE LEGS IN THE AIR

The transition towards the final visual motif associated with the sexual power of the racial diva was introduced by Clara Calamai in *Ossessione*, through the display of the legs as physical elements of erotic movement. In the first scene revealing the attraction that the character of Gino feels for Giovanna, Calamai is sitting at the kitchen table, and it is the sight of her swinging legs, established in the image as a representation of the body, that draws Massimo Girotti over to her.

As Roberto Guli (2008: 2) suggests, the bare legs, along with the breasts, the nightdresses, the scenes with dancing, kissing and embracing, were also subject to cuts in the name of the preservation and protection of *buon costume*. *Ossessione* broke the paradigms of fascist cinema by positing the presence of desire as the foundation for an atmosphere of lust and adultery. The significance of the legs as an element of attraction in the *femme fatale* is revealed here as a metonym for a body that beckons to the male to approach it and possess it. As body parts essential to eroticism, the legs are the threshold of communication between

the man's and the woman's bodies, alluding both to birth and to copulation.

As the critic and historian Tatti Sanguinetti<sup>3</sup> observes, the legs were the quintessential representation of sex in Italian popular stage culture, which found room for expansion in the variety theatre of the interwar years. The legs of the showgirl were the element through which popular audiences connected to eroticism in the revue shows, and it was this partial element of the body that male audiences, from below the stage, established as a visual motif for their desire to touch the actress' body. In view of this visual motif of the legs of the performer suspended above the

attribute of motherhood, a foundational idea of the neorealist female archetype in actresses like Anna Magnani, the legs would be the symbol of the *popolana*, the working-class woman made visible as an emblem of the Italian resistance with the arrival of democracy and female suffrage. The bare legs would be the emblem of revelation of a figure as crucial to the Italian star system of the transition as Silvana Mangano. In *Bitter Rice* (*Riso amaro*, Giuseppe de Santis, 1946), Mangano's legs come out of the rice paddies of the south to dance the boogie-woogie, the international rhythm that allowed a captivated Italian audience to breathe in the air of openness



Scene from *La Contessa Castiglione* (Flavio Calzavara, 1942)

stage, the final image of Doris Duranti in *La contessa Castiglione* could be considered paradigmatic. Dressed as a courtesan, the diva swings suspended from the stage rigging in a theatre, displaying her bare legs to the admiring cheers of the audience, who applaud the body as it swings in and out of the scene, perpetuating with the swinging movement of the body and the playing with the visibility and concealment of the erotic trigger, and in a certain way closing the theatrical origins of the movement of desire between audience and actress.

It is interesting to observe how these visual motifs would survive in Italian cinema after the fall of fascism, and in the neorealist aesthetic. While the breast would be established as an

to modernity. The cinematic image of the post-war period would find in the body of the racial actress what Giovanna Grignaffini (2002: 257-293) defines as the landscape for an operation of change, in this case a change to modernity. Of the motifs discussed here, the *maggiorate* would inherit the voluptuousness of the breasts and the erotic power of the legs. Based on these unequivocal symbols of physical awareness, beauty contest pin-up girls like Sophia Loren, Silvana Pampanini and Gina Lollobrigida would lead a new generation of film divas who would act as ambassadors of Mediterranean carnality and modern sexual emancipation.

In summary, the analysis of the films of the four actresses discussed here points to the possi-

bility of tracing the impact of the star presence on the ideological exploitation of a visual imaginary. The positioning of the actress' body in the mise-en-scène creates certain forms of erotic movement that fascist cinema adapted to a strategy of revelation and concealment through the repetition of certain visual motifs. Many of these motifs, rooted in a national cultural tradition, had already been present in earlier periods, but it was in the fascist era when their manipulation focused on their ambiguous nature, at once expressing the erotic urge and its moral restraint, the expression of seduction and the censorship of its fulfilment. This comparative analysis of two film traditions of the same era reveals that the stylistic connection between Spanish and Italian fascism arises not so much from their similarities as from their correspondences. In this sense, an analytical model based on geographically dispersed cases raises intriguing questions for the study of cinema as a transnational phenomenon. In the cultural diversity generated by the body of the star as an emblem and the visual motif as a narrative device, the different cases analysed all reflect the essential Eroticism/Censorship dichotomy as a shared discourse. It is for this reason that the analysis of the recurrent motifs in the films of these actresses can explain how, beyond their particularities in the Spanish or Italian cultural context, they construct a unified discourse based on the persistence and repression of desire in the cinema of this era. ■

## NOTES

- \* This article forms part of the research project of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness *El cuerpo erótico de la actriz bajo los fascismos: España, Italia y Alemania (1939-1945)* (CSO2013-43631-P).
- 1 *Sicalipsis* is a Spanish theatrical and literary term used in the early nineteenth century to refer to a playful display of eroticism, with a potentially malicious, sexual intent from a moralistic point of view.

- 2 In the version of *Blood and Sand* directed by Rouben Mamoulian in 1941, this image of the tavern is established for international audiences as a typically Spanish setting for female seduction. It is here where Rita Hayworth, the film's *femme fatale*, performs her dance of attraction, which a few years later would become the actress' trademark thanks to her acclaimed performance in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946).
- 3 Audio-commentary by Tatti Sanguinetti in CineCensura (2008), a virtual exhibition organised by the Cineteca Nazionale de Roma and the Italian Ministry of Culture. Retrieved from <http://cinecensura.com/sala-i-temi/sexo/>

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## VISUAL MOTIFS IN CINEMATIC EROTICISM UNDER FASCISM: SPAIN AND ITALY (1939-1945)

### Abstract

This article analyses the use of eroticism in fascist cinema based on the repetition of certain mise-en-scène strategies in the filmography of four emblematic film actresses: two from Francoist Spain (Imperio Argentina and Estrellita Castro) and two from Fascist Italy (Clara Calamai and Doris Duranti).

### Key words

Eroticism; Censorship; Visual Motif; Fascism; Spain; Italy.

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## LOS MOTIVOS VISUALES EN EL EROTISMO CINEMATOGRAFICO BAJO EL FASCISMO. ESPAÑA-ITALIA (1939-1945)

### Resumen

El presente artículo analiza la circulación del erotismo en la cinematografía fascista a partir de la reiteración de determinados dispositivos de puesta en escena en la filmografía de cuatro actrices emblemáticas: dos del cine franquista (Imperio Argentina y Estrellita Castro) y dos del cine fascista italiano (Clara Calamai y Doris Duranti).

### Palabras clave

Erotismo; censura; motivo visual; fascismo; España; Italia.

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# PRIMER PLANO: THE POPULAR FACE OF CENSORSHIP

ALBERT ELDUQUE

## CRITICISM AS CENSORSHIP

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Any discussion of Spanish cinema in the early years of the Franco regime must necessarily include a consideration of *Primer Plano*, given its status as the regime's reference guide to cinema. Founded in 1940 by Manuel Augusto García Viñolas, a Falange member who at the time was the Director of Spain's National Department of Cinematography, the magazine served as the official channel of communication between the film industry authorities of the Spanish State and the general public. Censorship had its place in the magazine in the form of short official notices and lists of the films assessed, with the corresponding determinations. However, this was a negligible part of its content, which was amazingly varied and aimed at many different readerships: the publication included sections typical of any film magazine, such as interviews with actors and directors, reports on film shoots and short reviews,

but its content brought together many other formats at times quite disparate: texts on cinematographic techniques; reports on the recently created *Círculo Cinematográfico Español* (CIRCE), a kind of film club founded to promote quality cinema; contributions by prominent intellectuals of the era, such as Eugeni d'Ors and Camilo José Cela; an attractive repertoire of articles and photo montages on cinematic images, etc. All of this, of course, was in the interests of promoting Spanish cinema, extolling German and Italian cinema, but for the most part paying tribute to the glitz and glamour of Hollywood.<sup>1</sup>

In this article it is my intention to explore how *Primer Plano* reflected the censorship of eroticism in the early years of the Franco regime, which coincided with the Second World War, from the first appearance of the magazine in October 1940 through to the end of 1945. To do this, however, I will not examine the brief and colourless official communiques on censorship, but the publication

as a whole, from its opinion pieces to its gossip columns. Indeed, the articles dedicated strictly to censorship occupied a very small space in the 24 pages of the magazine, yet the whole publication could be considered a vehicle for censorship. As can be confirmed from the numerous official regulations documented by Román Gubern and Domènec Font in their book *Un cine para el cadalso*, film censorship in Spain was not governed by any specific rules until the order issued on 9 February 1963, with the explicit prohibition of elements such as “the presentation of sexual perversion as the focal point of the plot,” or “any images or scenes that could provoke low passions in a normal spectator” (GUBERN and FONT, 1975: 347).<sup>2</sup>

In the face of such ambiguity, *Primer Plano*, owing to its partially official dimension, played an important censoring role. The magazine’s editors were fully aware of this fact, as reflected in the editorial for Issue 46, written by Alfonso Sánchez under the title “*Peligros del espectáculo cinematográfico*” [Perils of the Film Spectacle]. In this editorial Sánchez begins by arguing that cinema is potentially dangerous for the public, both for its captivating and suggestive power and for the lack of spiritual education of its spectators, and he proposes an interesting idea: that the best weapon in this moral battle would not be censorship, but criticism: “[t]o address this peril a stringent preventive strategy is required, which cannot be limited to censorship, because it does not affect the interpretations that each spectator gives to the images he views. Rather, it is the mission of reasoned and stringent criticism, in-depth and independent criticism that dissects the specific case of each film, guiding and directing the reactions of the individual. Only in this way may the image be divested of all of its impressionistic power.” It can thus be a bulwark against all the evils that celluloid brings, but especially eroticism, which according to Sánchez was the most dangerous of all: “where the mission is most arduous, due to the vastness of the battlefield, where a just, unswerv-

ing and definitive criterion must be established with precision is on the subject of love” (SÁNCHEZ, 1941: 3).

Both the ambiguity of the regulations and this decisive declaration of principles suggest that *Primer Plano* was a valuable instrument of censorship of eroticism not only because of its official communiques, but also because of the ideology revealed in its content. In this article I will examine different editorials, opinion pieces, reports and news to consider how *Primer Plano* addressed a topic which, due to its dangerous nature and its frequent presence on film screens, simply could not be ignored. This will make it possible to sketch out the faint eroticism of an ideology, marked by firm convictions about nation, gender and the relationship between art and its audience.

## IMPORTED GESTURES

*Primer Plano* often associates sexuality with a foreign enemy that must be contained. Erotic liberation and base habits had nothing to do with Spanish identity; they belonged to other nations which, through commercial channels, were trying to attack the spiritual bastion of the Iberian Peninsula. In the second instalment of “*Manifiesto a la cinematografía española*” [Manifesto for Spanish Cinema], a kind of foundational text for the magazine, García Viñolas asserts that “[t]he vices and virtues that we find in American cinema are the vices and virtues of the United States; the charm and the danger that French cinema brought us was the dangerous charm of the whole life of France. No national cinema exists in isolation from the life of its nation; rather, it is an image of it, even when it deals with universal or foreign themes. And it is not out of cynical cost-cutting that our cinema turned to the local colour of Andalusia or sought refuge in the gloominess of rural dramas, but for the supreme reason that all Spanish life was an Andalusian comedy, when it was not a gloomy rural drama” (GARCÍA VIÑOLAS, 1940: 3). Thus, on one

side is foreign cinema, and on the other is Spanish cinema. This idea, which was fundamental for *Primer Plano*, acted as a battle cry for a crusade that was as spiritual as it was commercial. An article published in January 1944, which presented an overview of the films of the previous year, raised this issue with absolute explicitness: foreign films are a moral and economic peril, which threatened to destroy both the principles of public life in Spain and its industrial structures (1944: 5).

In the case of eroticism, this double-edged threat comes, first and foremost, in the form of gestures. Antonio Valencia, in his editorial "*Los modales del cine*" [The Manners of the Cinema], examines two of these, the kiss and the punch, to discuss how cinema, by showing them on its multiplicity of screens, has got spectators around the world trying to imitate them. Valencia thus denounces a homogenisation of the gesture, in which he also sees a strong commercial dimension (VALENCIA, 1943: 3). Along the same lines, although focused only on depictions of amorous exchanges, we find the virulent article "*La enfermedad del cine*" [The Disease of the Cinema] by Tristán Yuste, dedicated to the spectator's gestural experience. Opening with the blunt assertion that the most worn-out topic in cinema is love, Yuste suggests that this phenomenon is harmless when it constitutes merely one of many images of life, but becomes dangerous when it constitutes the main plot of the film. For Yuste, "a film with an exclusively amorous theme, in jiggling its irresistible little marionettes across the screen, bewitches and captivates the masses, a mob of simple humans who are easily excited by the performance of facile flirtations of dashing stars and stunning starlets." These public masses, acritical and easily influenced, receive a bad example from the movie screens: "what these movie spectators want is to seduce the opposite sex for their own pleasure, and here they find it seduced, not due to the proximity of its presence but due to the sight of a screen brought to life by a halo of fashionable

and carefree frivolity." And as noted above, this threat is manifested in the realm of the gesture, as young spectators want to imitate the movements of the stars so that they can seduce members of the opposite sex like those stars do: "readying themselves to catch what so excites them, our callow youth end up spending whole hours in front of the mirror practising affectations and inanities, leading them to produce a lot of foolish gesticulating and gibbering, which they believe to be so very 'interesting', whenever they want to attract attention." (YUSTE, 1942: 6).

These articles do not make an abstract attack against a foreign enemy, but an astute critique of a specific, identifiable phenomenon: gestural education through cinematic images. Yuste goes on to explore this issue by considering different countries and explaining how love is represented in each one. The references to Americans and the French that García Viñolas made in his manifesto give way here to a merciless diatribe, even against Spain's cinematic production: for Yuste, the American film is vulgar, "charming nonsense that appeals to the masses with its coarseness posing as 'straightforwardness,'" whose love stories generally involve two women fighting over the same man; the French film is "a depravity which in its passion for pleasures stops at nothing, not even at Bishop Jansen"; Spanish films are maudlin mush, "the sickly sentimentalism of sagas in instalments, squeezed into four scenes with no substance, in which the characters possess no more personality than that which the narration affords them," while their plots, characterised by villainy and muckraking, generally involve a woman being pursued by a virtuous hero and by a brazen, contemptible seducer; and Mexican films are similar to the Spanish, due to the obvious cultural connection, but without the sentimentality. Yuste ultimately gives his preference to German films, because they avoid exaggeration, sentimentality and immorality, and "speak of a more natural love, which more resembles the love of everyday life" (YUSTE, 1942: 6).

The criticism of the foreign and the rejection of gestural excesses are also the key features of the talk “*Plástica del amor en el cine*” [Expressions of Love in Cinema], delivered to CIRCE by Gaspar Tato Cumming, an abstract of which was published in Issue 67 of *Primer Plano*. Tato Cumming rounds out Tristán Yuste’s taxonomy with observations on love in Russian cinema, guided by the blind instinct of the masses, and in Japanese cinema, a vegetative film tradition in which “the actors give the impression of plants.”<sup>4</sup> However, his core idea can be found in his comparison of Charlie Chaplin, Francesca Bertini and Mae West: “Let us place Chaplin between Bertini and Mae West. Bertini flattens love through exaltation; Mae West, through depravity. They have no expressive force or forms of amorous expression... And this leaves us with Chaplin in this trio. We must

remember that although he makes a caricature of love, he *makes us feel it*: such is the expressive force in that posture of his with both hands gripping his heart, while his tilted head leans towards his beloved with an ardent gaze” (GARCÍA, 1942: 12). Bertini embodies the tragic Italian spirit (which is praised, however, by Nicolás González Ruiz in his article “*Flor al cine italiano*” [1942: 9]), while West is the vulgarity of a certain brand of American cinema. Conversely, Tato Cumming admires Chaplin, and also Valentino, seeing in the gaze of the first and the subtlety of the second the expressions of love that give his talk its title. Indeed, his argument is not an isolated case in *Primer Plano*: in an article dedicated to the cinema’s leading men (Figure 1), Antonio Walls analyses the difference between the exaggerated gestures of the Italian Gustavo Serena and the suavity of Robert Tay-

Figure 1. “Breve historia del galán cinematográfico” by Antonio Walls. *Primer Plano*, Issue 7, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1940, pp. 14-15.





Up. Figure 2. Elaine Shepard on the cover of *Primer Plano* Issue 271, 23 December 1945.

Down. Figure 3. Advertisement for Lambrequin honey and almond milk. *Primer Plano*, Issue 170, 16 January 1944, p. 17.

lor in *Camille* (George Cukor, 1936) in these terms: "Not so much as a frown on his brow or a grimace on his lips, and yet, his living, throbbing passion is reflected in his face with prodigious intensity. It could be argued that the full expression of his soul emerges from his eyes, clouded by the drama. Here we have the true secret of the cinema and the point of departure for all of its art. Minimum gesture, maximum expression" (WALLS, 1940: 15).

The expressions of love are thus to be found in the gentle gesture or the gaze, which these authors detect in German cinema or in Chaplin (albeit in caricatured form), Valentino and Robert Taylor. There would be no room here for Spanish cinema. While for Tristán Yuste Spanish films are essentially sentimental, for Tato Cumming the Spanish repertoire of gestures hinders a representation of love: "the Southern [European] women are the least fit to achieve a perfect expression of love on the film screen. Why? Precisely because of their temperamental exuberance. [...] So then, is this Southern woman of no use? Or more specifically: the Spanish woman? Of course she is; but for us, in consideration of our borders, one temperament clashes with that of international audiences, and when love is impassioned, it turns into mimicking, which is not expressive" (GARCÍA, 1942: 12). In so characterising Spanish production, Tato Cumming appears to have in mind the "*Españolada*", a genre of films that exaggerate their "Spanishness". While the assessment that *Primer Plano* offered of this genre<sup>5</sup> falls beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that the view of the Spanish and the foreign was not unanimous: although the subversive gestures apparently came from beyond Spanish borders, other countries also offered models that the Spanish approach to love, now disdained by intellectuals, should be turning to.



## BODIES DISPLAYED, BODIES DESIRING

Along with the idea of the gesture, or within it, is the human body and its physical display. However, in spite of the occasional vehement reaction (like Antonio Fraguas Saavedra's, when he decries the fact, with reference to the rise of cinema, that "our major newspapers publish wonderful pictures of the dogs and legs and other anatomical features of Mabel Normand, Musidora, Crawford, West, Realston" [Fraguas Saavedra, 1943: 3]), the main concern in *Primer Plano* with respect to eroticism was not what body parts were shown: the magazine itself was able to include a joke about the supposed censorship of Goya's *Maja Vestida* (1941: 18), a cover with the actress Elaine Shepard as a pin-up girl (1945: 1) (Figure 2), and an ad for the Lambrequin brand of honey and almond milk (Figure 3) in which a woman with a visible cleavage raises her naked arms behind her head while staring into space (1944: 17).

The problem was not really how much skin was shown, but how the characters' experience of love and sexuality was depicted, and the fact that foreign film industries were profiting from that depiction at the expense of Spanish morality. Obviously, a film like *Ecstasy* (*Ekstase*, Gustav Machatý, 1933), famous for its full nude shots of Hedy Lamarr, was condemned and deemed a dirty trick that fate had played on the actress, although the article also indirectly attacked the Venice Biennale, where the film received an international award (DEL REAL, 1942g: 9-10). The attack, in general, was always against the morality more than the images, against the behaviour more than the body. Thus, while Sol del Real jokes about the Hays Code when explaining how it had forced the makers of *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939)<sup>6</sup> to eliminate the line "There's gold in them thar hills" spoken by Marlene Dietrich while she stuffed a bag of coins between her breasts (DEL REAL, 1941: 15), Luis Gómez Mesa described the films that the actress made in the

United States with Josef von Sternberg as "fundamentally passionate works, showing contempt for the most basic moral principles", viewing them as epilogues to *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*, Josef von Sternberg, 1930) which appeared "now in Hollywood, in the ambitions and interests of its Jewish producers" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942b: 15). In this way, the author's condemnation combined moralising, anti-materialism and anti-Semitism.

The criticism of immorality and profiting commercially therefrom was thus a bigger target than what body parts were shown on screen. The clearest case of this is another article by Gómez Mesa on the film *Flesh and the Devil* (Clarence Brown, 1926), which contains no criticisms of specific images in the film; in fact, the author praises the quality of the cinematography and the performances, and notes unreservedly that "its love scenes acquire a provocative expression on the screen." The attack comes from a moral angle, when the author points out that the reality depicted in the film is "bleak, distressing and lacking in morality or exemplariness", and that its plot is "substantially and entirely negative—duels, infidelities, forbidden loves and all the emotional excesses characteristic of the passionate serial dramas of the end of the last and the beginning of this century." As in the case of *The Blue Angel*, Gómez Mesa's criticism is aimed at the "materialistic erotic aspect" used as a commercial strategy, as "the Publicity Department takes advantage of the occasion to announce it as 'the most passionate story ever brought to the big screen'. And for the first time the terms 'sex appeal' and 'vamp' are used" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942: 23). The condemnation is thus not of love, nor of its images, but of the narratives of desire and their commercial exploitation. It is therefore amusingly paradoxical that Edgar Neville, one of the key filmmakers of the period and a regular in the pages of the magazine, should respond in an interview that his awakening to his vocation as a filmmaker came precisely upon seeing this film: "that extraordinary film



Figure 4. "¿En qué aspecto de la mujer ha influido más el cine?" by Fernando Castán Palomar. *Primer Plano*, Issue 237, 29 April 1945, pp. 8-9.

made me understand what cinema was and what it was going to be" (FERNÁNDEZ BARREIRA, 1943: 11).

Moreover, Gómez Mesa considers that *Flesh and the Devil* marks a turning point in the history of Hollywood, which until then had been characterised by a certain ingenuousness of its plots, and its depictions of love. On this point, he contrasts Hollywood with Italian silent cinema, in which "love was already the protagonist of its biggest films. But it was a romantic style with women who sinned and, reconciling with honour and duty, repented and mended their ways in an act of sacrifice and of renunciation of their wayward behaviour." For Gómez Mesa, Clarence Brown's film marks the beginning of a new era of Hollywood characterised by "immoral love that forgets all else and subordinates all else to the fulfilment of

desire" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942: 23). Thus, the perceived threat from without, both spiritual and economic, is located not only with geographical coordinates, but also with historical ones; especially, beyond any doubt, for the female sex.

## THE DANGERS FOR WOMEN

While *Primer Plano* viewed the masses as impressionable and fickle, lacking any critical capacity, the preventive measures to be taken were much greater in the case of women. In "El cine como propaganda" [Cinema as Propaganda], Bartolomé Mostaza explores how cinema determines the way women act: "And what can we say of customs, of fashion, of art? Women walk, look, laugh, dress, and make themselves up in the style of their

favourite film actresses. It is pitiful, but even in their way of making love—something as private and personal as that—many women put on an act in their obsession to imitate what they have seen or heard in the cinema” (MOSTAZA, 1940: 3). This is an argument that Fernando Castán Palomar attempts to refute when, in the survey article “¿En qué aspecto de la mujer ha influido más el cine?” [What Aspect of Women Has the Cinema Influenced Most?] (Figure 4), he compiles the responses of different female professionals (a writer, an actress, a draughtswoman, a showgirl and a journalist) and concludes that “the influence of the cinema on women goes no further than outfits and hairstyles.” However, the article is positioned entirely from the same perspective: not only because of its approach, which already reveals a gender bias, but because of some of the responses given, which contradict the moral catastrophe but continue to place the woman in a subaltern position: for example, according to the writer interviewed, Mercedes B. de la Torre, women have become more hard-working because they hope to be called into the office of their manager, whose face they hope will resemble Robert Taylor’s (CASTÁN PALOMAR, 1945: 8-9).

From this perspective, several articles in *Primer Plano* identify the cinema as responsible for a historic change in the social role of women. The most significant example, with a broad historical scope, is the article “*Influencia del cine en la mujer*” [Influence of the Cinema on Women] by José Juanes, who argues that “within the realm of factors that place considerable pressure on women, the cinema occupies the largest role.” According to Juanes, the cinema has brought about a transformation unprecedented in the centuries before it: “With a few small differences of dress and forms of expression, the female identity remained unchanged throughout history. A lady of the twelfth century was morally similar to our young ladies of 1900. Nothing in history managed to change their form of behaviour like that great legend of

images that the Lumière brothers unleashed on the world, which, upon turning to human customs, with its false conceptions of love, sacrifice and ways of feeling, drastically changed the thitherto passive role of the woman, transforming her into an active subject of the interminable sentence of life. [...] The danger of this influence does not lie in the cinema itself, but in the expansion of ideas that the woman develops afterwards. With the chains of her secondary place in society now broken, the woman has completely taken over the foreground, to the point of outdoing what we see on the screen, turning modern life into the most unbelievable film of all” (JUANES, 1942: 19).

Ángel Zúñiga, on the other hand, takes this idea to the extreme when he identifies the amorous passions of American cinema with violence, and suggests the potential effects that this could have on female spectators. Drawing on Waldo Frank, Zúñiga contrasts the woman of the Western genre, the man’s companion, against the independent woman of the romantic drama, highly influenced by the female characters of Henrik Ibsen. Thus, he compares the woman in Frank Borzage’s *Secrets* (1924/1933<sup>7</sup>) with Norma Shearer in *The Divorcee* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1930), because between the two “there are abysses of dissolution in which the woman breaks every female obligation, to be dragged by the current of the cult of might”, something from which comedies like *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra, 1936), *You Can’t Take It with You* (Frank Capra, 1938) and *Holiday* (Edward H. Griffith, 1930)<sup>8</sup> “attempt to escape”. According to Zúñiga, the woman’s quest for independence, represented by the characters portrayed by Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford and Tallulah Bankhead, ends up leading her into an orbit that is not her own and, ultimately, doing her harm: “The woman, in her quest for independence—Ibsen has had a profound influence on American reality and on American fiction—loses her halo. As a result, aggressive impulses towards her are no longer contained. Her old personality is



diluted in the new world in which it is immersed. And as a defence mechanism, the female will become bolder, shrewder, with an astonishing understanding of the laws: Jean Harlow, Joan Blondell, Hedy Lamarr..." (ZÚÑIGA, 1942: 21).

Thus, according to Gómez Mesa, Juanes and Zúñiga, the rise of the Hollywood romantic drama can be viewed as a turning point in film history and in the role of the woman in society. The narratives of desire offer a bad example to spectators and, above all, spur on the female to abandon her traditional position, thereby endangering social stability and even her physical well-being. These narratives of desire, as commercially successful as they are morally hazardous, constituted the main double-edged threat—economic and spiritual—against which *Primer Plano* had to react.

## GOOD LOVE AND THE HAVEN OF HOLLYWOOD

In opposition to these narratives of desire, *Primer Plano* advocated a conception of love as commitment and sacrifice. In his article discussed at the beginning of this paper, Alfonso Sánchez distinguishes between representations of love that are harmful to youths and those that are beneficial, placing under the first heading the Austrian-Czech film *Ecstasy*, the German films *Girls in Uniform* (*Mädchen in Uniform*, Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931) and *Eight Girls in a Boat* (*Acht Mädels im Boot*, Erich Waschneck, 1932), the American film *Back Street* (John M. Stahl, 1932) and the French film *Amok* (Fyodor Otsep, 1934), and under the second, the American films

Figure 5. "El beso ante la cámara", interview conducted by Lily Wobes. *Primer Plano*, Issue 51, 5 October 1941, pp. 12-13.





Figure 6. Mae West's "favourite animal", beckoned to from outside the frame by the supposed hands of the actress. "Su animal preferido", *Primer Plano*, Issue 8, 8 December 1940, p. 6.

*The Sign of the Cross* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1932) and *Cavalcade* (Frank Lloyd, 1933), in which love can lead to being sacrificed in the Roman circus or constitute "the only refuge from the whirlwind of the times" (SÁNCHEZ, 1941: 3). Based on this morally edifying model of love, the editors had no qualms about publishing articles that dealt with the topic, like compiling artists' opinions on marriage (provided that it is not presented as a problem or an institution to be destroyed) (1941: 4), or characterising the balcony as an ideal space for poetic declarations and the final kiss (PEDREÑA, 1940: 4).

This is the type of love promoted in Spanish cinema, of which an emblematic example would have to be an advertisement for Rafael Gil's film

*Lessons in Good Love* (*Lecciones de buen amor*, 1944), which presents, in comic-book form, the story of a married couple in crisis who, after watching the film, learn how they should live together (1944: 16). The format of survey-style reporting is, in this sense, an ideal medium: the Spanish actors are questioned about kisses and love scenes in "*El beso ante la cámara*" [A Kiss on Camera] (WOBES, 1941: 12-13) (Figure 5) and "*El amor en la pantalla*" [Love on Screen] (DE LA TORRE, 1942: 4-5), but in neither case does desire go further than a simple, innocent joke. In the first, actors were asked about the sensation of kissing while being filmed, whether they preferred romantic kisses or fatal kisses, who they would prefer to film a kissing scene with, which kiss left the biggest impression on them and which one was the worst, and whether they ever deliberately messed up a take in order to be able to repeat the kiss. In the second, respondents answered when, where, how, why and with whom they would like to perform a love scene. In both cases, the answers to these questions are oriented towards the character/actor dichotomy, ranging from absolute professionalism (Luchy Soto: "[kissing] is an obligation like if you had to open or close a window") to emotional surrender (Luis Peña: "it's the same [sensation of kissing] that you'd have if the camera wasn't there [...] When you're working you have to give yourself up to the role"), and the disappearance of any hint of desire that goes further than choosing a fatal kiss because it is longer (Alfredo Mayo). The restraint is demonstrated by the lack of specificity about the kind of kisses or the kind of love scenes, and by the absence of graphic details or allusions to physical reactions. Rather bolder, however, is the survey "*¿Qué pecados ha cometido usted en pantalla?*" [What Sins Have You Committed on Screen?] (DE LA TORRE, 1941: 12-13), in which actors and actresses confess to all manner of amorous betrayals and adulterous acts they have committed as characters. The content of the stories is not exactly a reflection of pure love, but

their virulence is mitigated by the distance that the actors assume, tinged in most cases with innocent humour. Their reality as good people thus eclipses their acts on the screen. As Consuelo Nieva puts it, “just look at me: so bad, so bad, and yet I can’t even break a dish.”

At the same time, while this good, wholesome love was proclaimed in the opinion pieces and exemplified in the innocent stories on Spanish actors, the narratives of desire could find a place very occasionally in the social news or gossip columns, whether real or invented. And whenever this happened, Hollywood was there as a possible setting: on the very few occasions when the magazine spoke of sexuality in a fun, playful, carefree way, the actors and situations chosen were from the American film industry. Mae West, who, as noted above, could be viewed as embodying a depraved love, was the protagonist of a few of these: in a photo report in which the stars are shown alongside their favourite animals, in West’s case all we see is a man being beckoned by a pair of hands in the corner of the frame, while the caption reads: “Mae West, who has hidden behind the curtain because she is too embarrassed to make certain confessions, declares blushing that of all the animals her favourite is man” (1940: 6) (Figure 6). In another case, in a brief news item titled “*Dos explosivos en una película*” [Two Explosives in One Film], we are told that “the alarm has been set off in Hollywood, with the news spreading like a bombshell that Mae West and John Barrymore—the two hottest heads in Tinseltown—are going to work together on a film titled ‘Not Tonight, Josephine’. It is reported that the studio that will be shooting the film has taken the necessary precautions, bullet-proofing its interior walls” (DEL REAL, 1941: 14). In reality, I have not found any reference to this film, or to any collaboration between these two actors; no doubt it was merely a rumour or a piece of invented news intended to reinforce the image of Hollywood as a place where forbidden desires can be imagined.

Along the same lines are the commentaries on the tribute that Hollywood’s fire fighters, described as “highly flammable”, wanted to give Joan Blondell, making her honorary president of their institution, although when they asked her to allow them to rescue her in a fire drill she instead gave them a wax dummy with her features (SANZ RUBIO, 1943: 14). And also worth noting are two news items about supposed scientific experiments related to the stars: one story was about a device that records the physical reactions of university students to pictures of Marlene Dietrich, Lana Turner and Hedy Lamarr, to determine which one has the most sex appeal (DEL REAL, 1941e: 16); the other was about a lie detector that measures the intensity of the kisses between different stars (Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas, Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper, etc.), revealing that the man always comes out the loser: “the results show that the so-called stronger sex is the one that reveals more signs of weakness in this kind of competition...” (DEL REAL, 1941d: 16). In all of these sporadic and anecdotal pieces published in different issues of *Primer Plano*, playful sexuality infiltrates the magazine using Hollywood as an excuse, while at the same time offering a vision of a sexually strong and dominating woman that is quite absent from the rest of its pages.

These examples, however, are no more than anomalies in a publication that was closely tied to the principles of the regime, in which amorous and sexual desire is condemned as a foreign danger that threatens the economy, spirituality and gender roles of the Spain of the time. Firmly establishing itself as an authoritative source of moral guidance, and therefore essentially of censorship, *Primer Plano* was able to give, through its opinion pieces and reports on the stars, a popular dimension to the secrecy and ambiguity characteristic of official censorship, while at the same time combining it with the glamour of American cinema, of which it was not a great admirer. In a way, the magazine walked a fine line between what society was expected to learn and what society wanted to see, between moral ped-

agogy and popular gossip, condemning while virtually succumbing. While CIRCE, like the sorceress in Homer's *Odyssey*, was the name of the Falangist film club, the editors of *Primer Plano* operated in a manner similar to the Homeric story of the sirens: not so much plugging their ears, but certainly tying themselves down tightly, listening to the sirens' song but ensuring that desire would not push the new Francoist society off its chosen course. ■

## NOTES

- \* This article forms part of the research project of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness *El cuerpo erótico de la actriz bajo los fascismos: España, Italia y Alemania (1939-1945)* (CSO2013-43631-P).
- 1 I am not aware of any publication that offers an in-depth analysis of the magazine as a whole, although there is research into its ideological approach in the period 1940-1945 through its editorials (MONTERDE, 2001), its high-brow orientation in the earlier issues (MINGUET BATLLORI, 1998), its views on Italian neorealism (ORTEGO MARTÍNEZ, 2013) and its reaction to Mexican cinema (GARCÍA PASTOR, 2016).
- 2 The closest thing to such regulations is a talk given by the screenplay censor Francisco Ortiz Muñoz in the assembly hall of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, in Madrid, on 21 June 1946, and subsequently published (ORTIZ, 1946). Although in this talk the censor stresses that the views offered are his own, he sets out a series of criteria that seem in keeping with the unwritten rules of Spanish censorship. His model is the U.S. Hays Code, which he adapts with certain modifications (TUÑÓN, 2011: 19-20). According to Rosa Añover Díaz, there were also internal instructions, like the ones approved by the Censorship Board of Salamanca in 1937 (AÑOVER DÍAZ, 1992: 22). But none of these were documents with official recognition.
- 3 It is worth noting, however, that *Primer Plano* also contains references to censorship in the United States; in this respect, I have identified an allusion to "Yankee puritanism" (DEL REAL, 1941b: 15) and the news story "El nuevo film de Greta Garbo irrita a la Censura" (DEL REAL, 1941f: 14) about

the banning of the film *Two-Faced Woman* (George Cukor, 1941) in three U.S. states.

- 4 Two short pieces on Japanese cinema, "El Japón prohíbe los abrazos" [Japan Bans Embraces] (1941: 16) and "En el cine japonés no existe el beso" [In Japanese Cinema There Are no Kisses] (1943: 19), underscore, with irony and amazement, the emotional restraint of Japanese culture.
- 5 It is worth mentioning here the article on the film *The Bandolero* (Tom Terriss, 1924), made in Hollywood and set in Spain, which presents (and to some extent challenges) foreign clichés about Spanish kissing (GÓMEZ MESA, 1941: 19).
- 6 The film was released in Spanish theatres with the title *Arizona*.
- 7 Zúñiga doesn't specify whether he is referring to the silent version from 1924, with Norma Talmadge, or the sound version from 1933, which was Mary Pickford's last film.
- 8 Zúñiga expressly states that he is referring to this version, starring Ann Harding, and not George Cukor's film with Katharine Hepburn (1938), which in Spain was titled *Vivir para gozar* [Live to Enjoy], which according to Zúñiga is "incomprehensibly distorted".

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## PRIMER PLANO: THE POPULAR FACE OF CENSORSHIP

### Abstract

During the early years of Franco's dictatorship, the film magazine *Primer Plano*, a publication aligned with the Falange, was an important instrument for the promotion of the regime's ideas about the construction of a national film industry and about the film production of other countries. In the case of depictions of love and sexuality, the double-edged threat (spiritual and economic) represented by foreign films could be seen, according to the magazine, in the invasion of alien gestures which the Spanish people sought to imitate and in the proliferation of films whose thematic focus was sexual desire, which threatened the stability of Francoist society, especially where the role of the woman was concerned. In opposition to these narratives of desire, *Primer Plano* advocated a chaste and morally edifying conception of love.

### Key words

*Primer Plano*; film magazine; fascism; censorship; Eros; desire.

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## PRIMER PLANO: EL ROSTRO POPULAR DE LA CENSURA

### Resumen

Durante los primeros años del franquismo, la revista de cine *Primer Plano*, alineada con la Falange, fue un instrumento fundamental de canalización de las ideas del régimen sobre la construcción de un cine nacional y sobre el cine de otros países. En el caso de las representaciones del amor y la sexualidad, la doble amenaza espiritual y económica que suponían las películas extranjeras se concretaba, según la revista, en la invasión de gestos ajenos que los españoles querían imitar y en la difusión de películas que se articulaban a partir del deseo sexual, amenazando así la estabilidad de la sociedad franquista, especialmente en lo que concierne al rol de la mujer. Ante estas narrativas del deseo, *Primer Plano* defendió un modelo de amor casto y edificante.

### Palabras clave

*Primer Plano*; revista de cine; fascismo; censura; Eros; deseo.

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# PORTRAYING HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPANISH FILM AND TELEVISION DURING THE FRANCO REGIME

BEATRIZ GONZÁLEZ DE GARAY

JUAN CARLOS ALFEO

«je savais que le bien comme le mal est affaire de routine,  
que le temporaire se prolonge, que l'extérieur s'infiltré au-  
dedans, et que le masque, à la longue, devient visage.»

*Mémoires d'Hadrien*

M. Yourcenar

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the long Franco regime, both movie theaters and movies in Spain were areas of longing, places for furtive encounters, impossible desires and stern warnings to everyone whose sexuality, regardless of orientation, ran outside the narrow margins that religious morals assigned to human sexuality in an absolutely Catholic way, that is—pardon the diaphora and the paradox—universal. Sexuality had to be heterosexual, connubial, reproductive and monogamous or, otherwise, damned, although the prevailing machismo tolerated that monogamy could be questioned with relative indulgence in the case of the male.

During the moral crusade of the regime, certain cultural products aroused special concern, film and later television being worthy of particularly attentive zeal on the part of censorship mechanisms, both civilian and religious, as the two coexisted, each with its own legal identity and

institutions<sup>1</sup>, nourishing pages of anecdotes that nowadays could seem naive, but at the time constituted a true nightmare for those who wanted to discuss heterodox realities (ZUBIAUR, 2010). The problem was that control was exerted subjectively, in line with the individual criteria of the censor, in the context of concepts as vague as “respect for good habits.” There was no detailed and explicit code like the American Hays Code that would have allowed writers and producers to anticipate the censor’s judgment; the closest thing was a 1950s code published by the Episcopal Commission on Orthodoxy and Morality (Comisión Episcopal de Ortodoxia y Moralidad) aimed at providing moral guidance to Catholic devotees<sup>2</sup>, but it did not necessarily coincide with the guidelines of civil censorship, even though the Catholic Church was represented in its bodies.

This lack of definition triggered a specific demand by film professionals in what was called the *Salamanca Conversations* (Conversaciones de Sala-

manca), which asked for “clearly determined matters and unapproachable subjects, and to provide enough space to make it possible to create a kind of cinema that could address important subjects”<sup>3</sup> as well as the request that censorship only be practiced by the docent Church and that its judgment could not be modified *a posteriori* by another official institution (GALÁN, 1989: 226-227).

This combination of civil and religious control determined that the “visible” representation of the LGBTIQ issue in any of its facets, variations or details, could only flourish on the screens of both movies and television under very precise and controlled conditions.

The difference between film and television is essential to the content of this paper and explains why there is a substantial difference in the volume of anecdotes concerning each of them regarding the censorship system: while cinema was an industrial activity that, although deserving protection by the regime, was essentially a private initiative, television was exclusively a public media, so its control, at least in theory, was guaranteed.

Through these pages we will review the details of LGTBIQ representation, first in movies and then in television during the Franco dictatorship. Finally, in a metadiscursive analysis, we will address the different ways of looking at that period regarding the LGBTIQ issue from the perspective of the democratic period.

## 2. REPRESENTATIONAL MODES OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPANISH FILMS DURING THE DICTATORSHIP PERIOD: CONCEALING, EROTIC CINEMA, AND “SISSY COMEDY”

Homosexuality learned over decades to live along the edges of others’ stories, to cross-dress its gaze in the vestments of love, indifference, desires and passions which resembled it to the point of attaining an affinity that at times became identity itself, hence the quote that heads this article. The

gay and lesbian experience drew for years on representations that, even being cynically wrong and clearly unflattering, were the only “authorized” discursive source for identity construction.

Here we shall not dwell on explaining the different representational modes —concealing, vindicating, erotic, decentered and integrational— that have appeared so far regarding the LGBTIQ issue in both Spanish films and TV, as there is a lot of written content around the subject<sup>4</sup>, to which we will add a *traditional mode*.

Until the arrival of democracy there were only two ways of addressing the LGBTIQ issue in film: 1) to do it in a way in which the details about the nature of the representational object were not totally explicit or in which one had to appeal to extra-discursive references to relate to them, which falls into what we have been calling the concealing mode, as in movies such as *Diferente* (Luis María Delgado, 1961) or *La Maldición de los Kranstein* (Marcelo Matrocínque, 1964); or 2) in cases where it was recognizable, to make the representation faithful to the traditional stereotypes, that is, a laughable or perverse character, totally recognizable but whose visibility was, on one hand, relatively reassuring and, on the other, divested of any indication of moral and social equity. All of this would constitute a mode that could be called the *traditional mode*, in the sense that representations are in line with the clichés and stereotypes traditionally related to homosexual visibility in society.

In the case of women, the procedure took an unexpected route owing to the lack of a traditionally “laughable” figure as the driving force of comic situations, and since the stereotype of a masculinized woman was far from having the same hilarious impact, the perverse slope was chosen so that the “visible” lesbian became a woman driven by unrestrained appetites, the epitome of which would be a vampire. This narrative displacement banished her to a chimerical, unreal universe, to a non-existence outside of fictional plots, and there-





Visual expression of homosexual desire and guilt in the movie *Diferente* (Luis María Delgado, 1962)

fore was even reassuring in its own way, as long as its perversion was not a threat outside the universe of narrative development. The vampire stereotype remained for years in the filmography of several countries and became a category in itself, providing significant stories far beyond the time-frame addressed.

In *Diferente*, the references to the nature of the main character were encoded as alleged homosexual standards of culture, with nods to the work of Oscar Wilde, Lorca and Freud, the cult of the body, the love of dance or resorting to symbolic-type Freudian references to drilling jackhammers, swelling or standing forearms, fingers pushing “the right” buzzers, etc. Picture 1 shows the moment in which Alfredo, after contemplating a jackhammer worker with fascination and desire, comes back to the house of an employee's spouse who was unsuccessfully suggestive to him several sequences earlier. After the last shot of the worker, the tip of the jackhammer fades with Alfredo's finger on the ring bell, indicating the sexual nature of what comes next: Alfredo goes in and the woman closes the door with a delighted smile. Note that, even when the woman has already opened the door, his finger is still on the buzzer.

*Diferente* manages to overcome censorship wisely by combining its flirting with the limits of what is accepted in terms of representation without exceeding them and a seamless moralizing message in which the main character will end up drowned, humiliated and visibly sorry. In the Board of Classification report, D. Alberto Reig [Gonzalbes], after commending the aesthetic and technical aspects of the film, observed that “[...] as far as the ‘difference’ is concerned, that’s another issue”<sup>5</sup> but “adaptations” were not recommended<sup>6</sup>. To complete the alibi, the closing of the synopsis attached to the file indicated that “Alfredo was evicted from his house by his older brother. In his loneliness, he begs God’s forgiveness”<sup>7</sup>. As Baltasar Gracián said: enter conceding and come out winning. In this way the movie anticipates the spirit of the new Ministerial Order of February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1963 in which considerably more explicit film censorship rules were handed down: “9. It is forbidden: 1) to represent sexual perversions as the axis of the plot and even as secondary, unless the latter is essential to the development of the action and has a clear and prevailing moral consequence.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1978, once democracy was established, the movie was re-released without changing the original duration but adding to the promotional material the very explicit slogan: “Why being homosexual is being Different!”.

In *La maldición de los Karnstein*, the movie that probably merited an honor similar to *Diferente* but related to lesbianism, homosexual references are literally wiped off the map and there is nothing left in the film narrative of the story that served as inspiration, *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu (1872). It wasn’t until 1972 that *Carmilla* “returned” to Spanish cinema and this time much more explicitly, embodied under the anagram of Mircala in *La novia ensangrentada* by Vicente Aranda.

In *La novia ensangrentada*, lesbianism is presented as a perverse and malignant condition; in the words of Irene Pelayo (2011: 285) “the bite

has an explicitly sexual power over the sufferer. The immortal power inherent to the vampires is transmitted through the bite, an action similar to kiss, through which vampire attributes are transmitted. After this bite, the victim will fall into the biter's web and into vampirism in general. In the film, this bite takes on the meaning of the female vampire initiating her victim into the world of sex."<sup>9</sup> Traditionally "the essence of homosexuality as a predatory weakness imbues the representation of homosexuals in horror movies"<sup>10</sup>(Russo, 1987: 49, translated by MELERO, 2010: 53).

As in the case of *Diferente*, the strategies operating on vampire representations are more or less subtle, depending on who is looking at it: on one hand, the vampire synthesis reduces the lesbian issue to a matter of bites which are simply the narrative sublimation of the sexual encounters of the main characters (PELAYO, 2011: 286) and, on the other hand, the lesbian construction did not establish in that period any commitment towards the construction of the identity of the social group but rather locates women in the direction of satisfying a heterosexual male point of view where feminine encounters are part of the erotic social imaginary. However, lesbian vampirism challenges the limits of what is acceptable to the extent that it questions the male presence as a source of sexual satisfaction by narratively introducing strong women, empowered and sexually self-sufficient, which is why the only possible ending is the death of the main characters.

These movies use terror as pretext not devoid of a certain eroticism, and even if it was not considered totally correct, it could be accepted by the censors as long as it remained within the limits of decency. The footage of *Las Vampiras* (Jesús Franco, 1973), for example, was cut by 15 minutes because of the censorship requirements to cut out any excessively generous or violent shots (PELAYO, 2011: 54). These boundaries were to finally blow up after dictatorship was over, leading to the erotic mode that will be characteristic in the bulk of



*Diferente* (Luis María Delgado: 1962) movie posters: from premiere in 1962 and re-release after Francoism in 1978

lesbian cinema during the period of the Transition; vampires would persist, but directors such as Jesús Franco were to take their erotic aspect to the extreme.

The political implications of these strategies could not be more obvious, but Beatriz Gimeno clarifies them and, even though her text refers to the lesbian in advertising messages, it is perfectly suitable for our discussion: "In her [the lesbian in advertising messages], the lesbian identity has disappeared and has been transformed into a reflection, into a still picture that allows capitalist patriarchy to exploit male anxiety by transforming a threatening political identity into a sexual fantasy [...]"<sup>11</sup>(GIMENO, 2005: 297).

Another of the pretexts that allowed homosexual characters to appear in movies during Francoism was to provoke laughter. To trigger hilarity has traditionally been the function reserved for homosexual male characters in any kind of popular discourse: jokes, novels, plays, and so on. It is therefore not surprising that film and television took advantage—and continue to do so—of the narrative gold mine that male/female misunderstanding provides. *No desearás al vecino del 5º* (Ramón Fernández, 1970)

is an impossible hybrid between “sex-celtiberian comedy” and “sissy comedy,” and that was probably the secret of its success; in the words of Román Gubern (1981: 267): “a hypocritical agreement was established between salaciousness as a commercial attraction and its moral repression”<sup>12</sup>.

Extending that affirmation slightly, the move of *No desearás al vecino del 5º* consists in denying anything shown: the issue of divorce is raised, but denied; adultery is praised at the same time that its ravages are exposed; the issue of premarital sex is raised—for a good cause, of course—but finally the bride’s honor is respected and, in the end, a homosexual character who is represented as the axis of the plot eventually ends up being an undercover Casanova who, in fact, does what is needed to survive.

Not without problems, it was squeezed through the filter of the dictatorship, among other things because the representation of *the poofster* is funny and reassuring to the extent that it is foreseeable, notorious and his expression is the antithesis of the heterosexual male, so there is no possible room for confusion, something Albert Mira (2008: 78-79) defines as an “investment paradigm”: “In the sissy, desire and love are ridiculous or pathetic, rarely are they taken seriously. By emphasizing the external aspect, any emotional depth disappears, the dangerous specter of homoeroticism vanishes”<sup>13</sup>.

During the dictatorship, despite the conflicts, the several schools of thought within the government itself or even the disagreements between civil and religious authorities about what censorship should or should not accept, the only access channels to a homosexual point of view in cinema were, thus, to accept a caricature—neither benevolent nor naïve—or to enter into the game of hiding and taking the blame and the punishment as uncomfortable and unavoidable baggage. However, there was a third possibility: to appropriate storylines and plots. Moralizing melodramas that fed Spanish billboards for years had sufficiently broad

plot scenarios to have a genuine process of projection and affinity between spectator and characters, nearly always female, a plot appropriation strategy that would explain the existence of genuine gay legends, such as Sara Montiel. She embodied social and morally questionable heroines, such as María Luján in *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957), and because of the way they lived their romantic relationships, they were just like their homosexual spectators, who, precisely from that parallelism, could engage with plots that initially did not target them. As García Rodríguez (2008: 96-97) asserts: “the figure of the folkloric dancer dressed in ‘faraloes’ is a distinctive Spanish gay icon and was part of the social imaginary of some homosexuals from that time”<sup>14</sup> María Donapetry (2006: 78-9) addresses the issue of appropriation—what she calls “against-the-grain readings”—<sup>15</sup> regarding the representation of the figure of Queen Joanna the Mad in *Locura de Amor* (Juan de Orduña, 1948): “The combination of the words ‘queen,’ ‘crazy’ and ‘love’ became fuel that was relatively easy to re-inscribe in the popular speech of that moment”<sup>16</sup>.

This dialectic between the discourse of the oppressor and that of the oppressed is clear in Barthes’ observation, captured equally by Donapetry, in regard to myth: “The oppressed person is nothing, there is only one discourse to be found in him, the one of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his word is rich, multifaceted, flowing, has every possible level of dignity: he alone controls the meta-language. The oppressed person builds the world, has only an active language, transitive (political); the oppressor conserves it, his speech is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is myth; the language of one tends to transform, the language of the other tends to perpetuate.”<sup>17</sup> (BARTHES, 1999: 133).

Taking a step further, *queer* readings were made of movies that had been aligned *a priori* with Franco’s ideology, such as *Harka* (Carlos Arévalo, 1941) or *¡A mí la legión!* (Juan de Orduña, 1942) (AMADOR CARRETERO, 2010).

### 3. REPRESENTATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPANISH TV FICTION DURING THE DICTATORSHIP: TABOOS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

If cinema found slots, though meager and narrow, through which to avoid some censorship, it was very complicated for television due to its own mainstream nature and the lack of offer during that period. It was during the transitional period to democracy when this medium began to timidly open up to these subjects and representations through programs such as the report broadcast by the weekly news programme, *Informe Semanal* (TVE 1: 1973-), on “Homosexuales, aquí y ahora” [Homosexuals, here and now] from 1981, or the airing of an episode of the film and discussion program called *La clave* (TVE 2: 1976-85) dedicated to homosexuality in 1983. Furthermore, homosexuality in television during the period of the dictatorship is a topic that has been only scantily researched (GONZÁLEZ DE GARAY, 2012; LLAMAS, 1997; MELERO SALVADOR, 2013), so we will outline the few references to examples of homosexuality found in TV fiction during the Franco dictatorship.

As in film, the first examples were strongly stereotyped and the characters were episodic. On one hand, the examples of episodic characters whose homosexuality was suggested through an exaggerated mannerism of gesture and ambiguous dialogs stand out. This representational mode is analogous to the concealing mode in movies (ALFEO, 1997: 34-35). That is, a way of suggesting the characters' homosexuality through elliptical extra-discursive references.

The first allusions recorded (MELERO SALVADOR, 2013: 505) appeared in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE 1: 1967), a program of paradoxical liberal vocation in a strongly controlled media that “reveals the difficult balancing act of the dictatorship” (GÓMEZ ALONSO & PALACIO, 2006: 33), in a story about the history of censorship in which the

censors did not allow them to use this exact term. First of all, during a sketch about ancient Rome and its supposed debauchery, a group of people are seen drinking and caressing each other. Among them we can see two women who while hugging are sharing a bunch of grapes (13 min. 45 s.). Thus, this first reference to homosexuality is framed within a context of perversion and vice; however, it was narrated with the fine irony that ridiculed the ‘Female League against Frivolity,’ which was the thread running through the story



Up. Allusion to lesbianism in ancient Rome in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE 1: 1967)

Down. Homoeroticism in a sketch set in Middle Ages in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE 1: 1967)



and, which, by the way, merits a study from the gender perspective.

Another glimpse of homoerotism can be found in the Middle Ages sketch which shows a striptease seen by, among others, two men that are clearly hugging affectionately until they notice what they are doing and shy away from each other (19 min. 42 s.). These kinds of misunderstandings with comical intention were to be the pillars of so-called 'sissy comedy' (MELERO SALVADOR, 2010: 127-180).

The sixteenth century is then defined by the Lecturer (played by Irene Gutiérrez Caba) as "the golden age of theater and the golden age of modesty," to the extent that, as the narrator herself indicates, women were not even allowed to go on stage. We then witness the representation of Romeo and Juliet at the climax of which a kiss takes place between the two lovers. With a sought-after hilarious effect, the reverse angle shows that Juliet is being played by José Luis Coll (a very famous Spanish comedy actor), revealing the irony that is the result of the inconsistency between the praise of the censorial Lecturer and the homosexual kiss that can be seen on the screen. Even though it is the result of misogyny and is not being interpreted as a homosexual act *per se*, the moment became a representative milestone that would take many years to be repeated in national fictional television; in fact, there is no record of any homosexual kiss, with characters that clearly define their sexual orientation as such, until *La huella del crimen* (TVE 1: 1985) episode 5 (#1x05, El crimen del cadáver descuartizado, Ricardo Franco, TVE 1: 1985). In the next two theatrical extracts, from *Othello* and *Hamlet*, men perform the two female characters as well.

When the story gets to seventeenth century France we note, on one hand, the artificial mannerism of almost every man at the dance and, on the other hand, a homosexual misunderstanding is shown when one of the "precious" (as they are



Up. Romeo kisses Julieta, played by José Luis Coll, in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE I: 1967)

Middle. Effeminate french characters from 17th century in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE I: 1967)

Down. Comical attempted homosexual misunderstanding in *Historia de la frivolidad* (Jaime de Armiñán & Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, TVE I: 1967)

named in the film credits) winks and the other thinks that it refers to him, gets surprised and the first man denies it when suddenly the camera focuses on a woman who winks again (30 min. 08 s.)

—another misunderstanding that reinforces the traditional use of homosexuality (masculine) as a comic element.

Another example of elided references to homosexuality can be found in the fourth episode of the first season (#1x04, *Aquí durmió Carlos III*, Antonio Drove, TVE 1: 1977) of *Curro Jiménez* (Antonio Larreta, TVE 1: 1976-78) in which the affected gestures of one of the characters indicate a hidden homosexuality.

When this character, named Don Félix, sees a Muslim ambassador's wife who is also staying at the same inn and who is in fact El Estudiante (José Sancho) in costume, he says that she is very hairy, smokes cigars and is a bit weird, but has a "strange charm that I cannot explain". At the end

of the episode the characters end up under the effects of opium. It is at that moment when Don Felix, looking at a carnation, claims out loud that maybe his life has been a mistake to then point out smiling that he is happy to realize it and starts caressing and chasing El Estudiante in costume.

This again provides an example of the concealing mode in homosexual representation founded in misunderstanding and cross-dressing and very present in theatrical tradition, folklore and film.

A further example in which extra-discursive references are needed to understand the possible homosexuality of a character occurs in *Entre visillos* (TVE 1: 1974), in particular in the eleventh episode of the series (#1x11, Miguel Picazo, TVE 1: 1974). This is an adaptation of the 1957 novel by Carmen Martín Gaité and Nadal prize winner about the routine and tedious life of a group of women in a Spanish provincial capital in the 1950s. The book makes it clear that the character Teresa is divorced and a lesbian. The TV series



Up. El Estudiante (José Sancho) and the one-off character Don Félix (Emiliano Redondo) are involved in an homosexual misunderstanding in *Curro Jiménez* (Antonio Larreta, TVE 1: 1976-78) (#1x04, *Aquí durmió Carlos III*, Antonio Drove, TVE 1: 1977)

Down. Carmen Martín Gaité made a cameo in *Entre visillos* (TVE 1: 1974) (#1x11, Miguel Picazo, TVE 1: 1974) playing a character who has an affective attitude towards Teresa (Sonsolés Benedicto), a character portrayed as lesbian in the novel



removes any reference to the character's sexual orientation, performed by Sonsoles Benedicto, but she is shown becoming closer to another character, a cameo played by Carmen Martín Gaité herself, where they drink and talk affectionately.

Within this concealing representational mode, several examples were to show up later, during the democratic period. Such was the case of the series *Anillos de oro* (TVE 1: 1983) in 1983, written by Ana Diosdado and directed by Pedro Masó, which addressed the homosexual issue through the episodic plot in the seventh episode (#1x07, *A pescar y a ver al Duque*, Pedro Masó, TVE 1: 1983).

cultural level [...] and from a broken home —usually the paternal figure is missing— with which he maintains a favorable relationship”<sup>18</sup>.

The prevailing social taboo regarding homosexuality is reflected in the continual use of euphemisms (delicate, sensible) to refer to the sexual condition of the character. In fact, in the aforementioned episode not only do the words vanish, but the images as well. When Rita (Queta Claver), the servant, give us to understand that she surprises Arturo having sex with one of his employees, no image of the two men is shown; however, the spectator only sees the servant's face of astonishment as she runs out



The picture of a homosexual relationship is denied to the spectator showing only the horror face of the servant finding out in *Anillos de oro* (TVE 1: 1983) (#1x07, *A pescar y a ver al Duque*, Pedro Masó, TVE 1: 1983)

The episode relates the story of Arturo (Tony Isbert), a man from the upper class in his thirties whose mother, on her deathbed, makes him promise to get married. He is portrayed as an extremely shy, fragile, and sensitive person who has always been by his mother's side, and the father figure is missing. His profile coincides with the major structural characteristics that defined homosexual characters in films, as studied by Juan Carlos Alfeo Álvarez (1997: 295): “a single individual, between 19 and 30 years old, who pays attention to his personal appearance [...], situated in a high or middle-high social class and with a high

of the room followed seconds later by Arturo himself, who comes out of the bedroom getting dressed up and followed by his lover. Hence, no verbal or visual verification of the character's homosexuality is provided, even though in both plot and allusions it could not be more clear, which suits the characteristics of the concealing representational mode.

In conclusion, homosexuality in Spanish TV fiction during Franco's dictatorship was forbidden by censorship, and only through ambiguous situations and extra-discursive references can some examples lead to a queer reading.

#### 4. THE DIACHRONIC LOOK: HOMOSEXUALITY IN FRANCOISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEMOCRACY

How homosexuality during the dictatorship was represented in the period following it, in other words, during the democratic period that started in 1975 and still prevails, is in fact a very unique and interesting case of analysis. Both in cinema and in television there have been several titles set in the dictatorial period that include the homosexual issue in different ways.

On one hand, some biopics and other productions that introduced prominent historical figures among their characters can be highlighted. Here we would include productions such as *Lorca, muerte de un poeta* (TVE 1: 1987-88), *A un dios desconocido* (Jaime Chávarri, 1977), *Las cosas del querer* (Jaime Chávarri, 1989), *Las cosas del querer 2* (Jaime Chávarri, 1995), *El cónsul de Sodoma* (Sigfrid Monleón, 2009) or *Sin límites* (Little ashes, Paul Morrison, 2008). This focus on great men of letters, singers or painters connects with what Llamas (1997: 72) denominates “the Elton John factor”: “[t]he new authorized gays [...] are often examples of recognized excellence”<sup>19</sup>.

On one hand, television, which at the end of 70s and 80s showed a tendency to produce literary adaptations (*Cañas y barro* [TVE 1: 1978], *Fortunata y Jacinta* [TVE 1: 1980], *Los gozos y las sombras* [TVE 1: 1982], etc.), as well as biopics of distinguished figures [*Cervantes* (Eugenio Martín, TVE 1: 1981), *Ramón y Cajal: Historia de una voluntad* (TVE 2: 1982), *Goya* (TVE 1: 1985), etc.], addressed the figure of Federico García Lorca at the hand of Juan Antonio Bardem in *Lorca, muerte de un poeta*. According to Manuel Palacio (2005: 154), “it was about creating symbolic mythologies based on connecting the past with the social time and space of the present”<sup>20</sup>. These were series characterized by an unvaried tone “somewhere between giving voice to the defeated and settling a score with the victors” (PALACIO, 2005: 161). In this con-

text, addressing Lorca’s homosexuality worked as another symbol of freedom of speech. However, the series, which won the Montecarlo Festival critics’ choice award in 1988, showed sentimental homosexual relationships that were to a large extent suggested rather than explicit. Lorca’s attraction to Dalí is insinuated, although it is clearly shown in the film *Sin límites*, and his relationship with Emilio Aladrén and Rafael Rodríguez Rapún is narrated. In this respect, it is not a particularly radical narration and the dialogue that comes closest to that takes place in fourth episode (#1x04, *El Llanto* 1929-35, Juan Antonio Bardem, TVE 1: 1987) when Lorca, faced with Cipriano Rivas Cherif’s amazement that Lorca “had never been with a woman,” claims: “I have only known men, and you know that sissies make me laugh, I enjoy their womanly obsession with washing,

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IT CAN BE OBSERVED HOW A LARGE  
PART OF THE DIACHRONIC LOOK AT  
HOMOSEXUALITY DURING FRANCOISM  
WAS SUSTAINED BY RECOVERING SOME  
OF THE IMPORTANT FIGURES IN THE ARTS

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ironing and sewing, putting on makeup, dressing in skirts, speaking with feminine gestures and expressions. But I don’t like them. Your idea of just knowing women isn’t normal, nor is mine. Normality is love without limits, but for that we would need a revolution, a new moral, a moral of absolute freedom. And that was what beautiful old Walt Whitman was seeking”. This disdain of what is effeminate will be taken up again by the series *El ministerio del tiempo* (Pablo Olivares & Javier Olivares, TVE 1: 2015) in its eighth episode (#1x08, *La leyenda del tiempo*, Marc Vigil, TVE 1: 2015) when the main characters move to the Residencia de Estudiantes in 1924. There they

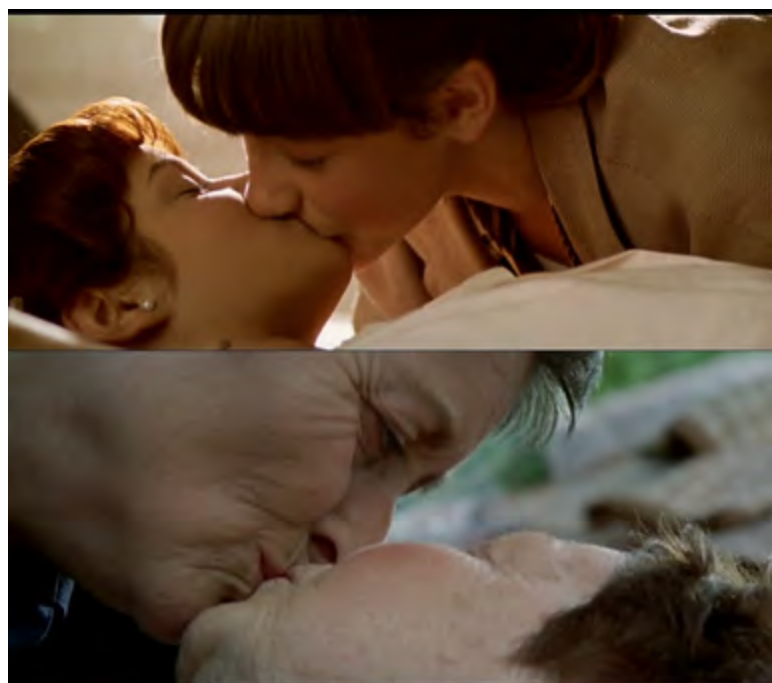


establish a relationship, among others, with Lorca himself (performed by Ángel Ruiz) who claims “I won’t deny that I like men, but I hate swishes, pansies and effeminacy” (28 min. 30 s.). Even Julián’s character (Rodolfo Sancho) is considered homosexual because he hugs Lorca. The same episode tells of a love affair between one of the main characters, Irene (Cayetana Guillén Cuervo), and actress Rosita Díaz Gimeno (Mar del Hoyo), Juan Negrín’s daughter-in-law.

Lorca is probably the most important historical homosexual figure in Spain, and was included as well in the plot of *A un dios desconocido* (Jaime Chávarri, 1977). In this film, the main character, José García (performed by Héctor Alterio who won that year the best actor award at San Sebastián International Film Festival) has a frequent relationship with Pedro (Jose Joaquin Boza), the friend in turn of an adolescent poet that will be soon identified as Federico García Lorca. In fact, in that movie “Oda a Walt Whitman” from *Poeta en Nueva York* (Poet in New York) is recited, as it will also be later in *Lorca, muerte de un poeta*, thus shaping an element of national cultural gay tradition. Outstanding aspects of this representation of homosexuality are, on one hand, that José’s sexual orientation “seems to be a state which blocks any door to hope” and, on the other, that it “shows the first representation of an act of a sexual nature between two men: a kiss between José and Miguel”<sup>21</sup> (ALFEO, 1997: 57).

Along this road towards a more explicit representation of Lorca’s homosexuality, the movie *Sin límites* can be highlighted, a Spanish-British production which addresses the tumultuous relationship between Lorca (Javier Beltrán) and Dalí (Robert Pattinson). The film shows how despite the painter’s reservations and in an anguished way, their relationship is manifested in kisses and even an attempt at sexual contact.

National film production became interested as well in the figure of the important Spanish man of letters, Jaime Gil de Biedma (performed by Jor-



The rekindling of young love in *80 Egunean* (José María Goe-naga y Jon Garaño, 2010)

di Mollá), through the movie *El consul de Sodoma*. Not without controversy (INTXAUSTI, 2010; RUIZ MANTILLA, 2010) the film relates in a very explicit way the poet’s intricate sexual evolution as well as homosexual exclusion by both sanctimonious Francoist society and the resistance (illustrated by his exclusion from the Communist Party).

To finalize this review of audiovisual productions that approached important homosexual historical figures during Franco’s regime we focus on the case of Miguel Molina, as portrayed by director Jaime Chávarri in both parts of *Las cosas del querer*. Both can be included in the de-centered representational mode as “homosexuality does not constitute the main focus in the development of the plot”<sup>22</sup> (ALFEO, 1997: 42). However, in the second part (six years later than the first one, 1989 to 1995) “the homosexuality issue is much more defined”<sup>23</sup> (ALFEO, 1997: 101) and three types of homosexual characters are represented: the uninhibited funny man, the naïve man in love and the passionate one who does not accept his condition.

In short, it can be observed how a large part of the diachronic look at homosexuality during Francoism was sustained by recovering some of the important figures in the Arts. In this regard we should note the absence of women and of representatives of other fields such as science, economics or politics.

In another vein, Agustí de Villaronga is a director whose filmography has repeatedly tackled the homosexuality issue: from *Tras el cristal* (Agustí de Villaronga, 1987) to *99.9* (Agustí de Villaronga, 1997) or *Aro Tolbukhin* (Agustí de Villaronga, 2002) and the ones set in Franco's dictatorship, such as *El mar* (Agustí de Villaronga, 2000) or *Pa Negre* (Agustí de Villaronga, 2010). Auteur filmmaker of "cruel movies" through which "evil circulates" (PEDRAZA, 2007: 6) and in which "we usually find characters generally complex in the role of child corrupter" (GORDI, 2011: 54). This topic, child abuse during Franco's regime, was also addressed in *La mala educación* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2004) through its recreation of a case of pederasty at a Catholic school in the 1960s.

The dramatic treatment is also chosen for *Electroshock* (Juan Carlos Claver, 2006), a tv-movie based on real events which narrates a love story between two teachers in the last years of Franco's dictatorship, one of which is sent to a psychiatric facility and forced to get electro-shock treatment. The tendency in movies with homosexual characters to show parents who hold empathetic or rejectionist attitudes according to their child's gender continues in this film. Thus, gays usually have unrelenting fathers and more understanding mothers while it is the other way round with lesbian characters, as the movie depicts.

The prize-winning film *80 Egunean* (José María Goenaga & Jon Garaño, 2010) also narrates a love story between two women with the repressive context of the dictatorship as background. Two old friends meet again in their maturity and

their youthful feelings start to rekindle. The film shows, subtly and undramatically, a repressive environment (both former and current), although in the second case it is endogenous rather than exogenous, as it arises from one of the main characters "exploring the persistence of homophobically produced historical inhibitions and prohibitions" (PERRIAM, 2013: 39).

The memory of a youthful love in the late stage of life is also the starting point in *En la ciudad sin límites* (Antonio Hernández, 2002). It contains a mixture of Franco's political repression (clandestine communism) and social repression of sexuality as exemplified by Marie's character (Geraldine Chaplin), who reported her husband's male lover, and Max himself (Fernando Fernán Gómez), who regrets not having lived the love of his youth.

Tragicomic is the tone chosen by *Madre amadísima* (Pilar Tavora, 2009) to tell the story of Alfredo (Ramón Rivero), a man who recalls his life marked by an abusive father, a very close relationship with his mother and his manifest effeminacy, which causes him several problems in the repressive environment of a small village in the last years of Francoism.

More recently, the issue of homosexuality during Franco's dictatorship has been addressed on television through *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Antonio Onetti & Rodolf Sirera, TVE 1: 2005-12), *Cuéntame* (Miguel Ángel Bernardeau, TVE 1: 2001-) and *El ministerio del tiempo*. Throughout the long time setting of the first two, several homosexual characters have appeared: Sito Robles (Jaime Menéndez), Felipe (Xosé Manuel Esperante), Ubaldo Ramos (Roberto San Martín), Richi (Víctor Massán), César (Miguel Cubero), Beatriz de la Palma (Sandra Collantes), Matilde (Bárbara de Lema), Teresa (Carlota Olcina) and Ana (Marina San José) in *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, as well as Julián (Roger Coma) in its sequel, *Amar es para siempre* (Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Antonio Onetti & Rodolf Sirera, Antena 3: 2013-) and in *Cuéntame*, Mateo (Asier Etxeandía),

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**CINEMA AND TELEVISION (TO A LESSER EXTENT) FOUND SOME FISSURES THROUGH WHICH TO STRAIN A NON-HETEROSEXUAL IMAGINARY MOSTLY BASED ON THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES: CONCEALMENT, APPEALING TO IMPLICIT OR ELIDED REFERENCES, CARICATURIZATION, RESPECTING THE POPULAR CULTURE STEREOTYPES REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY, AND THE APPROPRIATION OF HETEROSEXUAL PLOTS AND CHARACTERS**

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Arturo (Alberto Vázquez) and Marcelo (Nao Albet), although this last one joins the series after dictator's demise. In general, characters in both series are framed in the integrational representational mode of homosexuality, despite the historical period in which they are set. Thus, for example, Felipe, César, Ubaldo, Richi, Beatriz, Matilde and Ana (AETR) and Arturo (C) do not have guilty feelings, their desire is fulfilled and shared with other characters (for example, Ubaldo with his wife), there are even some assertive aspects in an absolutely repressive context: "People are not better or worse just because of their sexual preferences" (#1x173, Asier Aizpuru, TVE 1: 2006). This is not the case with Sito and Teresa (AENTR) or Mateo (C), who have more problems in integrating their sexual orientation and assume conceptions of that period such as "I know this is a sickness" (Mateo en #5x84, La habitación de arriba, Agustín Crespi, TVE 1: 2004). For his part, Julián (AEPS) takes on a villainous but complex role due to his past of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

In *El ministerio del tiempo*, the homosexual issue is addressed mostly through a main character, Irene (Cayetana Guillén Cuervo), a lesbian, born in 1930 and, as she states herself, "adventurous", a euphemism used to refer to her numerous love affairs.

The seventh episode of the first season (#1x07, Jorge Dorado, *Tiempo de venganza*, TVE 1: 2015) explains the moment at which Irene's character is recruited to be part of the *Ministerio del tiempo* (Ministry of Time) and, thus, to travel through Spanish history to guarantee that it stays the same. This was in 1960, therefore in the middle of Franco's regime, when the main character was close to committing suicide because of her unhappiness in both work and family life under that kind of regime: "I spent half of my life obeying the rules imposed by others. I spent my youth married to a man that I hated. My parents forced me to get married at 17 [...] It could have been worse. They almost forced me to be a nun because they found me in the bathroom with a friend"<sup>24</sup>.

The main characters also travel to the Franco period in the third episode of the first season (#1x03, Marc Vigil, *Cómo se reescribe el tiempo*, TVE 1: 2015).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

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The representation of homosexuality during Francoism was forbidden, notwithstanding the discrepancies between civil and religious censorship or, even, the fluctuations of the regime itself. However, film and television (to a lesser extent) found some fissures through which to strain a non-heterosexual imaginary mostly based on the following strategies: concealment, appealing to implicit or elided references, caricaturization, respecting the popular culture stereotypes regarding homosexuality, and the appropriation of heterosexual plots and characters. All of them were tragic strategies that implicitly assumed ignominy, derision, invisibility, death or punishment. Meanwhile, there are three main trends in the way that the homosexual issue has been addressed during the Franco regime in recent and democratic periods: the recovery of great historical figures, such as Federico García Lorca, the focus on the repressive and / or marginal as-

pects, appealing to the complicity of an audience equally oppressed in various aspects during the dictatorship, and the integrated representation in which characters are relieved of blame and their situation de-dramatised, despite the possible anachronism, in order to connect with the sensitivity of the broadcast period instead of the sensibility of the setting period. ■

## NOTES

- 1 Meriting special mention is the work by Juan Antonio Martínez Bretón (1988). *Influencia de la iglesia Católica en la cinematografía española (1951-1962)*. Madrid: Harofarma, in which the institutions in charge of moral control are provided in detail, as well as the codes that were established and a review of the not always easy relationship between civil and religious power in relation to moral criteria that should inspire the control of content.
- 2 The code classified movies according to their moral content: 1. Everybody 2. Young (14 to 21), 3. Adults (over 21), 3R. Adults, with objections (for adults with a solid moral education) and 4. Seriously dangerous. (Colmenero Martínez, 2014, p. 145).
- 3 “determinen claramente los asuntos y temas inabordables, y que tenga la suficiente amplitud para dar posibilidades a un cine que afronte temas importantes”.
- 4 In regard to the different representational modes, see Alfeo (1997) (2000), Pelayo (2011), on cinema, and Gonzalez de Garay (2012) on TV fiction.
- 5 “[...] en cuanto a lo de “diferente”, eso es otro asunto”.
- 6 “Adaptations” was the report section where the commission indicated the cuts and changes which conditioned the authorization for shooting.
- 7 “Alfredo es echado de su casa por su hermano mayor. En su soledad, invoca el perdón de Dios”. File nº 23,805 from the Junta de Clasificación y Censura. The censorship branch met on December 23, 1961, while the classification was done on February 23, 1962.
- 8 “Novena.- Se prohibirá: 1º La presentación de las perversiones sexuales como eje de la trama y aun con

carácter secundario, a menos que en este último caso sea exigida por el desarrollo de la acción y ésta tenga una clara y predominante consecuencia moral”.

Order of 9 February 1963 approving the “Rules of cinematographic censorship” published in the B.O.E. nº 58 of 8 March 1963 (p. 3930).

- 9 “El mordisco tiene poder explícitamente sexual sobre quien lo padece. El poder inmortal propio de los vampiros se transmite a través de un mordisco, una acción similar a un beso, a través del cual se contagian las cualidades vampíricas. Tras este mordisco, la víctima caerá en las redes de quien la mordió y del vampirismo en general. En el cine, por su parte, esta mordedura adquiere el significado de una introducción al mundo del sexo por parte de la vampira hacia su víctima”.
- 10 “la esencia de la homosexualidad como una debilidad depredadora impregna la representación de los homosexuales en las películas de terror”.
- 11 “En ella [la lesbiana de los anuncios publicitarios], la identidad lésbica ha desaparecido y se ha transformado en un reflejo, en una foto fija que permite que el patriarcado capitalista explote la ansiedad masculina transformando una identidad política amenazante en una fantasía sexual”.
- 12 “se llegaba a un pacto hipócrita entre la escabrosidad como atractivo comercial y su represión moral”.
- 13 “En el mariquita, el deseo y el amor son ridículos o patéticos, rara vez se toman en serio. Al acentuar lo externo, cualquier hondura emocional desaparece, el peligroso fantasma del homoerotismo se esfuma”.
- 14 “la figura de la folclórica vestida con “faralaes” es de todas un icono gay particular de España y pasa a formar parte de ese imaginario colectivo de algunos homosexuales de la época”.
- 15 “lecturas a contrapelo”.
- 16 “La combinación de palabras ‘reina’, ‘loca’ y ‘amor’ se convirtieron en pasto relativamente fácil de reinscribir en el discurso popular del momento”.
- 17 “El oprimido no es nada, en él sólo se encuentra un habla, la de su emancipación; el opresor es todo, su palabra es rica, multiforme, suelta, dispone de todos los grados posibles de dignidad: tiene la exclusividad del metalenguaje. El oprimido hace el mundo, sólo

tiene un lenguaje activo, transitivo (político); el opresor lo conserva, su habla es plenaria, intransitiva, gestual, teatral: es el mito; el lenguaje de uno tiende a transformar, el lenguaje del otro tiende a eternizar”.

- 18 “un sujeto soltero, de entre 19 y 30 años, atento al cuidado de su aspecto [...], perteneciente a un nivel socialmente situado entre el alto o el medio/alto y también con un elevado nivel cultural» [...] y «perteneciente a núcleos familiares desintegrados —de los que suele faltar casi siempre la figura paterna— con los que mantiene un estatus de relación favorable”.
- 19 “[l]os nuevos gays autorizados [...] son con frecuencia ejemplos de reconocidas excelencias”.
- 20 “se trataba de crear mitologías simbólicas a base de conectar el pasado con el tiempo y el espacio social del presente”.
- 21 “parece constituir un estado que bloquea toda puerta a la esperanza” / «aparece la primera representación en campo de una acción de carácter sexual entre dos hombres: un beso entre José y Miguel”.
- 22 “la homosexualidad ya no constituye el objeto central en el desarrollo de la trama”.
- 23 “la cuestión de la homosexualidad queda mucho más definida”.
- 24 “me he pasado media vida viviendo con las reglas que me imponían los demás. Pasé mi juventud casada con un hombre que detestaba. Mis padres me obligaron a casarme con él con 17 años. [...] Podía haber sido peor. Casi me meten a monja porque me encontraron con una amiga en el cuarto de baño”.

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## PORTRAYING HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPANISH CINEMA AND TELEVISION DURING THE FRANCO REGIME

### Abstract

This paper analyzes how homosexuality was portrayed in Spanish cinema and television during the Franco dictatorship. Our findings show that three main strategies were used in order to elude the censor: concealing (using implicit references), caricature (exaggerating stereotypes) and appropriation (*a priori* re-reading of non-homosexual discourses). We also study how contemporary cinema and television portrays homosexuality as it was during Francoism, with trends such as the recovery of historical homosexual characters, a harsh reflection of the prevailing repression, and a defusing of the issue with the generation of discourses closer to contemporary rather than historical sensibility.

### Key words

Homosexuality; Film; Television; Francoism; Spain; Dictatorship; LGBTIQ.

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## FORMAS DE REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA HOMOSEXUALIDAD EN EL CINE Y LA TELEVISIÓN ESPAÑOLES DURANTE EL FRANQUISMO

### Resumen

El presente artículo analiza la representación que de la homosexualidad se hizo en el cine y la televisión españolas durante la dictadura franquista. Se concluye que se utilizaron principalmente tres formas de representación para sortear la censura imperante: la ocultación (mediante referencias implícitas), la caricaturización (exagerando los estereotipos) y la apropiación (de discursos sin *a priori* una intencionada lectura homosexual). Asimismo se estudia cómo el tiempo presente ha observado diacrónicamente el periodo franquista en relación a la homosexualidad desde la ficción cinematográfica y televisiva. Se observan en este sentido algunas tendencias como la recuperación de grandes personajes históricos homosexuales, el reflejo crudo de la represión imperante en el periodo o la desdramatización de la cuestión acercándose los discursos más a la sensibilidad contemporánea que a la histórica.

### Palabras clave

Homosexualidad; Cine; Televisión; Franquismo; España; Dictadura; LGBTIQ.

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# SUBVERSIVE EFFECTS OF PERVERSION: SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION IN *THE CANNIBAL MAN*\*

CARLOS GÓMEZ

While the opening credits run, a series of static shots and pans show the space where much of the action of *The Cannibal Man* (La semana del asesino, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972) will unfold; a place on the urban fringe, where a line of tall, newly constructed buildings—all of which look the same—ends with a vacant lot. In the middle of the lot, separate and isolated, is a house that is home to the story's protagonist, Marcos (Vicente Parra). Initially, inequality is defined by proportions in the framing of the scene: to the left, the imposing mass of the new building; to the right, the little house in the vacant lot, cut off from all of the roads that run like arteries over the surrounding area. After this, inequality is articulated as an opposition: a single pan from left to right moves from the building and runs over the empty space of the lot until it reaches Marcos' house. The editing thus sets out the context, before a tracking shot takes us into the house to meet Marcos and begin the story. It is a context that juxtapositions the im-

age of Francoist developmentalism with what lies outside it: the underdevelopment of those left out of the progress promoted by the Franco regime.

This opening is not accidental, as it marks a decisive departure from the first films directed by Eloy de la Iglesia, characterised by a certain isolation from the social reality of their time. Although the Basque filmmaker holds a prominent place in film studies covering the period of Spain's transition to democracy, the films he made at the beginning of his career, which cover the last seven years of Franco's dictatorship, have received very little attention. This might be due to the difficulty associated with contextualising the director's work in the cinema of the period: although his films can clearly be classified within commercial genres, he was already displaying a political dimension articulated through the intersection of the sexuality, relationships of domination and social construction of his subjects. Because of this, and due to the commercial focus of his work, it is



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

difficult to place it either in the category of dissident or protest cinema, or among the mainstream genre films of the late Francoist period.

Academic studies of the director's work to date have focused mainly on the representation of homosexuality in films like *Hidden Pleasures* (*Los placeres ocultos*, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977) or *El diputado* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1978). Such studies have explored the subversion represented in his films by the representation of male bodies as objects of desire (BERZOSA, 2014) or of the reconfiguration that homosexuality represents for patriarchal institutions like the family (TROPIANO, 1997). The analysis proposed in this article will show how these ideas were already a central concern in *The Cannibal Man*, a film that reflects Michel Foucault's idea (2009: 132) that there are class-based sexualities and a bourgeois discourse of sex which, qua technology, "has the objective of producing historical subjects functionalised to a socio-economic and political order that is also historical" (COLAIZZI, 2007: 105). Added to these elements is the presence in the film of Néstor (Eusebio Poncela), the first gay character to appear in Eloy de la Iglesia's filmography. But far from the didactic approach to homosexuality of De la Iglesia's films at the time of the Transition (MELERO, 2010), in *The Cannibal Man* Néstor's homosexuality is not explicitly addressed and needs to be read as part of the network of relationships created by

the discursive texture of the film. In this way, the film, like others by the same director, problematises the increased openness that was beginning to appear in Spanish society to erotic issues, insofar as this openness continued to reinforce a patriarchal and capitalist society.

## THE CANNIBAL MAN AND FRANCOIST CENSORSHIP

Eloy de la Iglesia has suggested that *The Cannibal Man* was the first of his films in which ideological questions make an explicit appearance. The aim of the story to explore the functioning of the social order in the final years of Francoism is made explicit in the film's original Spanish title (*La semana del asesino*, or "The Week of the Killer"), with its allusion to the organization of time around the working week, which will then be perverted by the murders committed by the protagonist. The film's plot is simple and direct: while out one Sunday with his girlfriend Paula (Emma Cohen), Marcos gets into a fight with a taxi driver who kicks them out of his vehicle for kissing in the back seat. Marcos hits the taxi driver with a rock and flees the scene with Paula. The next day, they discover that the taxi driver died from the blow. Paula insists on going to the police; to stop her, Marcos kills her too. From this moment, Marcos will go on killing to avoid being handed over to the authorities. While the list of his victims grows, Marcos strikes up a friendship with Néstor, who has witnessed Marcos' murders through his binoculars.

The explicitly ideological intention of *The Cannibal Man* makes it the most problematic film made by Eloy de la Iglesia during the Francoist period. In an interview, De la Iglesia remarked that the film underwent sixty-four cuts (CASTRO, 1974: 228). The censors' record on the film<sup>1</sup> does not clearly establish the number of cuts it underwent, as it only makes reference to modifications (one of which may involve any number of cuts to a scene). But we do have a means of analysing the

cuts imposed on *The Cannibal Man* by the censors: the existence of an international version of the film, still being distributed today in home movie formats in other countries.<sup>2</sup> In the censors' record, the modifications made to the film can be traced through the letters attached by the producer José Truchado every time a new edit of the film was submitted for approval. The letters list the modifications and deletions made to the final edit, and as all of them match up with shots in the international version that are missing from the Spanish version, I have chosen for my analysis to use that version to comment on any changes of relevance to the meaning posited in my reading of the film. As a side note, this research has found that rather than the sixty-four cuts mentioned by De la Iglesia, the international version contains more than a hundred shots that are missing from the edit of the film released in Spain. In any case, the international version can be used in the analysis in the knowledge that the two versions effectively represent two different textual spaces, as the differences between them reflect changes at the structural level.

*The Cannibal Man* is hard to pigeonhole in the film production of its day, in spite of being the Eloy de la Iglesia film that most clearly reflects the "edgy look" characteristic of a certain grotesque tradition in Spanish cinema of the 1950s<sup>3</sup> (CASTRO DE PAZ and Cerdán, 2011). From that tradition it takes its black humour, which goes beyond the codes of horror that only superficially underpin its images. The political dimension of *The Cannibal Man*, as well as the naturalism with which its images are imbued, also distinguish this work from most Spanish horror films of the period, which were often based on models mimetic of foreign visual styles (Pulido, 2012). However, the rise of the Spanish horror film could be one of the reasons why a film like this one saw the light. When asked whether horror was a pretext for introducing an ideological critique, De la Iglesia replied: "Yes, but in this case the pretext didn't work, ei-

ther for the censors or for audiences. They were mystified by it, they didn't get the humour, or the changes in tone; they found it all disagreeable" (AGUILAR and LLINÁS, 1996: 114). This answer, however, does not seem an accurate reflection of the views contained in the censors' record. When the Censorship Committee approved the second version of the film on 29 September 1971 with a series of instructions, one of the committee members, José María Cano, explained: "[...] I do not believe that it has been differentiated in a discriminatory way from many other films that we have approved on this Committee,"<sup>4</sup> in a clear reference to the horror genre.<sup>5</sup>

The problems with the censors can be attributed primarily to a superficial question of imagery: naturalistic, grotesque images in their depiction of the violence, and highly expressive. But beyond such aesthetic questions, *The Cannibal Man* formulates a discourse that perverts the dominant ideology of Catholic nationalism and, ultimately, of the relations of production of the capitalist and patriarchal society.

## PERVERSION AS SUBVERSION

Various authors have made reference to perversion in the work of Eloy de la Iglesia, but none specify exactly what the term means or what function it fulfils in his films. The filmmaker himself, discussing his work in the Francoist era, speaks of a "language of perversion" that slowly came to dominate and that would find its greatest exponents in *The Cannibal Man* and *Murder in a Blue World* (Una gota de sangre para morir amando, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1973). The director also identifies the function that sexual perversion can fulfil in a context like Francoism: "I think that in the society we live in, sexual perversion is perhaps the only form of rebellion within our reach against the oppressive established order" (CASTRO, 1974: 229). The political effectiveness of perversion, and its effects of social intervention, howev-

er, require a number of clarifications. In his book *Subversion/Perversion*, Mikel Dufrenne (1980) points out the problems associated with the use of the term “perversion”. To pervert means to introduce a change in a particular object or to a subject; therefore, the word “perversion” denotes not so much the efficacy as the nature of an act. This nature has traditionally been associated with a pejorative value judgement, which identifies perversion as wrong and the perverse individual as evil. For this reason, and with respect to political action, Dufrenne prefers the use of the binomial subversion/subvert, which in evaluative terms is neutral and excludes the subject to include the whole system. However, Dufrenne also shows us that perversion can become subversive; because if perversion is an anomaly in relation to the normal, “[p]erversion becomes subversive when it denies all reality insofar as it is norm-referenced, and the norm itself insofar as it is an expression of the system. Thus, when the deviation is, on the one hand, conscious—when the transgression is not merely a craving, but a challenge—and, on the other hand, provocative—when it invites others to become conscious of the system and of what is at once intolerable and vulnerable” (DUFRENNE, 1980: 140). Perversion is therefore posited as a way of challenging the idea of normalcy, as it exposes the arbitrary and oppressive nature of the norms advocated by the dominant ideology. Understood in this way, perversion becomes disengaged from its negative connotations, as it only represents a change from good to evil for the culture or ideology that set the norm.

In *The Cannibal Man* perversion appears on two different levels: firstly, on the narrative level through the actions of its protagonist;<sup>6</sup> and secondly, through the *mise-en-scène*, which in iconographic terms offers a series of inversions of particular motifs on which the dominant ideology is sustained. It is on this second level, through enunciation, where perversion has subversive effects on the spectator, as it exposes the existence

of the normalised reality and compels the spectator to adopt a position on it.

## A READING OF THE CANNIBAL MAN

The structure of the plot is organised around two key elements: the days of the week that constitute the “week of the killer” referred to in the original Spanish title (each day of the week is identified by the appearance of an intertitle; the film begins on a Sunday and ends the following Sunday night); and the series of murders committed by the protagonist. In terms of the causal relations that tie the narrative events together, this structure makes it clear why Marcos commits the murders he does. An explanation guided exclusively by the denotative level of the narration would be: in an effort to conceal the first murder (which was accidental), all of the murders are merely a strategy to mask the first one and prevent other characters from handing Marcos over to the police. The protagonist makes this refusal to give himself up explicit in various dialogues. However, an exploration of the political dimension of the film necessarily involves the proposition of a connotative meaning behind these killings. The most widely accepted explanation, given by the filmmaker himself, is that the characters that Marcos kills embody different forms of repression rejected by the protagonist (CASTRO, 1974: 229). But this assertion is only accurate if we assume that all the individuals killed by Marcos over the course of the story share a common feature: their internalisation of the dominant ideology and their recognition of themselves as subjects interpellated by that ideology, thereby accepting a place and certain functions within the social order. In this sense, Marcos’ victims, immersed in the mechanism of interpellation, contribute both to the perpetuation of the ideology and to the reproduction of the relations of production, using the definition of the functioning of ideology and interpellation developed by Louis Althusser (1988).

In contrast, Marcos is presented from the outset with problems as a functional subject. In the film's very first dialogue, which takes place while he is eating at the local bar, the bar's owner, Rosa (Vicky Lagos), asks him about his plans for Sunday; when he tells her he is going out with Paula, she replies: "It's high time you found yourself a woman to marry." Later, the relationship between Marcos and Paula is presented as abnormal. She is concealing the relationship from her family because they believe that she is going out with boys her age, and she remarks to Marcos: "You have no idea how they'd react if they knew I'm going out with a man like you." When they are about to go back home, Paula looks sullen. Marcos asks her what is wrong, to which she replies: "Sometimes I think we'll never get married. Men your age go out with younger girls to get married right away. But you never talk about it. You only talk about the factory, about your work, not that you're getting a raise and we're going to get married." Right after this comes the murder that serves as the plot trigger. Marcos and Paula hail a taxi; the driver (Goyo Lebrero), seeing the couple kissing in the back seat, stops the taxi and kicks them out. The taxi driver rebukes them for their behaviour, and again there is a reference to the age difference between the two: "If you were my daughter I would let you have it. Even if you were with a boy your age." Marcos and Paula get out of the taxi without paying and the driver demands payment for the ride; Marcos gets into a fight with him. When Paula intervenes, the taxi driver slaps her and says: "Now you'll see, I'm going to give you all the wallops your father should have given you." In one of the devices used repeatedly by the filmmaker throughout his career, while the taxi driver speaks these words and raises his hand, the camera is positioned along the axis of the characters' gazes, in this case with a shot from Paula's point of view, which means that the taxi driver is looking directly at the camera. There is no distancing effect here, but rather an emotional



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

impact on the spectator, who is the target of the same aggression aimed at the character in the story, and thus is also positioned as a victim of the reactionary mentality expressed by the taxi driver through the dialogue and his physical violence. Marcos intervenes by hitting the taxi driver with a rock, and then flees the scene with Paula. They don't know what state the taxi driver is in and won't discover his death until the next day. This first killing already constitutes a reaction by Marcos against a reactionary morality. However, this killing is different from all the others: the taxi driver has no relationship with Marcos and the situation has none of the parallels that will later be established between Marcos' regular job, his status as a factory worker and the method he uses to kill his victims.

After an ellipsis, an intertitle announces that it is Monday and Marcos is back at work as usual in the Flory Soup factory. The *mise-en-scène* is constructed around the disciplinary nature of the factory and its capacity for organising the lives of the workers. With their straight linear movements, the different tracking shots used to show Marcos working in the slaughterhouse evoke the linear nature of assembly line production; and this assembly line production is in turn transferred to the production of the subjects, a point that becomes clear when Marcos goes to see the boss. In the scene that takes place inside his of-



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

fice, the boss (Ismael Merlo), with his secretary as a witness, tells Marcos that he is getting a promotion. The boss gives a vehement speech in which he explains that for the promotion he took into account not only Marcos' years of experience, but also the memory of his mother, who had worked at the factory as well and had died in a workplace accident. This allusion to Marcos' mother underscores the reproduction of the relations of production: a factory worker whose son is also a factory worker, carrying on his mother's work in the same factory. The boss' enthusiastic speech

ends when he turns to the secretary and, with a change of expression, barks out: "Next!" The presentation of the scene steers clear of the use of an establishing shot that would show all three characters together in the frame, instead employing a fragmenting technique with medium and close shots of each one. A triangle is thus created in the scene in which Marcos' notably indifferent gaze swings between the boss, sitting in front of him, and his secretary, who is positioned to his left. The edit splices together various shots from Marcos' point of view showing him staring at the secretary's legs, protruding from a tiny miniskirt. Marcos' gaze thus creates an axis which, in the triangle of the scene, unites a representative of economic production with an image of sexuality.

It will be after leaving work with his new promotion that Marcos discovers the taxi driver's death and discusses it with Paula. The two of them, in Marcos' house, decide what to do. Marcos asks Paula to trust him and reassures her that everything will be alright. They kiss. The camera then begins a tracking shot that moves away from the two characters kissing on the couch and over to the empty bed in the bedroom. In the Spanish version of the film, the sex scene between Marcos and Paula that appears in the international version is eliminated completely. From the empty bed that ends the tracking shot, we cut to a shot of the two characters lying in bed after having made love. Paula cries over what they have done—from the dialogue it is clear that she has lost her virginity—and Marcos starts kissing her again to console her. The shot frames the characters from a position at the bottom of the bed, through the bars of the bed-frame, thereby connecting the idea of a prison to what they have done and negating any reading of sexual relations as liberating. The sexual act results in a change in Paula's thinking about her relationship with Marcos. Thus, she suggests that they should make the decision together about whether or not to tell the police about the killing. Sex induces in Paula the idea of a new power over





*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

Marcos' life: "After that, we should do everything together," she says, gesturing to the bedroom. Marcos answers that her family doesn't even know that she's going out with him, but Paula replies: "But we have to tell them. Because you want to marry me, right?" This response leaves no room for doubt: sex is tied to a series of implications related to the production of the subjects in capitalist society. For Paula, the act is essentially associated with a change in their relationship, founded on the idea of establishing a family unit. Thus, the sexual liberation that was beginning to take hold in Spanish society is not a mere liberation of desire, but instead a reinforcement of the patriarchal society and discourse. And furthermore, through this new power conferred by the sexual act, Paula is now also in a position to demand from Marcos an "ought to be" as a man. When Marcos again refuses to go to the police, Paula holds nothing back in expressing her view of him: "I trusted you. Sure, the mature man, strong, dependable. Do you know what you are? A loser who is full of fear. I don't know why you're so afraid of jail. I mean, just to live in this shack and go on being a factory worker all your life." The argument ends when, after kissing, Marcos kills Paula by strangling her.<sup>7</sup> This is not the only time in the story when the sexual act is followed by a murder, as the same thing will happen to Rosa, the last victim of Marcos' murders. And both of these two cases

presents not a transcendent view of the sex/death binomial, but a rejection of a social mechanism. Rosa, who we know has had her eyes on Marcos for some time, shows up at his home to bring him breakfast. The two have sexual relations; after the sex, Rosa starts trying to cleaning up the house, already assigning herself a role in the domestic space associated with marriage. Marcos kills her when she tries to go clean up the bedroom, where the corpses of his previous victims are all piled up.

All of the killings committed to cover up the death of the taxi driver involve a series of characters associated with the institution of the family: after killing his girlfriend, Paula, Marcos kills his brother, Esteban (Charly Bravo); then his brother's fiancée, Carmen (Lola Herrera); and then Carmen's father (Fernando Sánchez Pollock). And all of these victims have something that distinguish them from the first two: the perversion of different objects associated with work in the slaughterhouse—an adjustable spanner, a knife, a butcher's axe—that cease to fulfil their *natural* function associated with the worker's labour to become instruments of death. Moreover, all of the killings occur in Marcos' home. In the structure of the story, the series of deaths in the domestic space might seem implausible, but this is a matter of little importance from the perspective of its meaning, as Marcos' house is turned into a *slaughterhouse* that perverts his work in the factory.

The perversion affects not only the actions and objects involved, but also the symbolic nature of certain images. As noted above, Marcos starts piling up the corpses in the bedroom of his house. After killing Carmen, he carries her to the bedroom and drops her on the bed next to Esteban. The composition of the frame is similar to that of the scene when Marcos kisses Paula on the bed: the position of the camera at the foot of the bed uses the structure as a kind of internal frame. Later, when Ambrosio discovers the bodies of his daughter and her fiancée, they appear on the bed covered by a white sheet, as if they were a peace-

fully sleeping married couple. The mise-en-scène is a macabre perversion of the couple's fate, a marriage whose consummation was stopped short by murder.

As mentioned previously, all of the points raised up to now interact in the film's discourse on sexuality, and it is here where Néstor also fits in. The relationship between Marcos and Néstor is posited as an alternative to all the repressive situations experienced by Marcos, and particularly those expressly related to sexuality. However, to explain the meaning of this relationship

us inside his home. There we find Marcos, who walks into the living room and lights up a cigarette while staring at the posters of women in swimsuits that cover one of the walls. He then flops down onto the couch, and we cut to a vertical pan that runs up the façade of the newly constructed building located opposite his house. Following the pan, there is another cut to a shot of Néstor, his torso exposed, looking through his binoculars from one of the balconies of the building. The editing then follows the usual shot-reverse shot structure to present the point of view



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

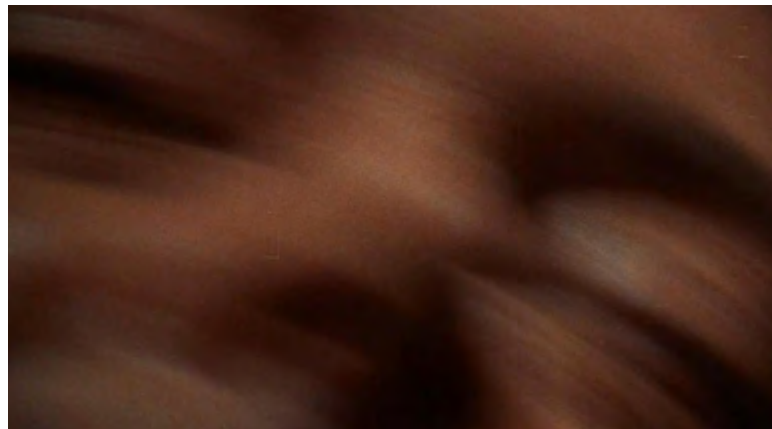
we need to refer to the international version of the film, as it is the element of the story that was mutilated most by the censors. After the opening shots mentioned above that present the landscape around Marcos' home, a tracking shot takes



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

of Néstor, who, after watching some boys playing with a ball in the vacant lot, spies on Marcos through the skylight in the roof of his house. Here is where the differences between the Spanish version and the international version begin to appear. A comparison of the two versions reveals, first of all, that several shots of Néstor looking through the binoculars have been eliminated from the Spanish version.<sup>8</sup> But the most serious cuts, to the point that they completely distort the meaning of the sequence, are related to the posters hanging on the wall in Marcos' house. In the Spanish version Néstor spies on Marcos, and from his point of view we see a series of shots showing the character lying back on the sofa inside the house. From this point the censor required sever-





al shots to be cut—a total of eight shots included in the international version—that alternate between detail shots of the posters and close-ups of Marcos shaking his head one edge of the frame to the other. This series of shots presents Marcos as experiencing more perturbation than enjoyment with the pictures on the posters, which represent a type of masculine imagery typical of the era. Marcos' conflictive relationship with this imagery is expressed in two shots which, through internal framing, show the character trapped in the frame. The first shot is from the point of view of Néstor, spying on Marcos with his binoculars, framed in the grill of the skylight. The other shot serves to end the sequence in both versions: the agitation we saw Marcos suffering—at least in the international version—is now over, and we see a close-up of the character through the wicker mesh of a rocking chair; on this frame, three zooms open up the scale to show the character trapped between the posters (situated above Marcos' reclining figure), the furniture of the house and the mesh of the chair. In opposition to this heterosexual imagery in which Marcos appears to be trapped, the editing places the gaze of Néstor, who eroticises Marcos' body through the close-ups of his sweaty torso.

The friendship between Marcos and Néstor develops over the course of several sequences in which the two characters are depicted as dysfunctional in relation to their social class. Néstor



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

expresses this in a conversation with Marcos: "I'm thinking that we are a pair of weirdos. I should be, like you say, with people of my age, dancing in



*The Cannibal Man* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972)

a discotheque, spending the summer in Torremolinos and speeding down the highway at 90 miles an hour; and you should be married, with a woman who's starting to get a little chubby, a couple of kids, with a bill due on the washing machine, and with the dream that one day you'll have the money to buy a big sedan." Néstor later adds: "I have a friend with a long beard and very thick glasses, who would say that you and I are a couple of '*desclasados*'." The Spanish term '*desclasados*', referring to people who fail to respect class boundaries, is unfamiliar to Marcos and he reacts with a puzzled look, thus reaffirming the lack of awareness of the working class, an idea that would reappear in other films by Eloy de la Iglesia. The character of Néstor is thus established as a refuge and a source of freedom for Marcos, an idea that is made clear in the night-time visit the two make to a swimming pool, the sequence with the most cuts imposed by the censors in the Spanish version. In this sequence, the two characters jump off the diving board into the pool; after a few brief shots of the two in the water, a cut introduces a

short ellipsis and we see the two characters sitting back in a pair of hammocks. This brief scene contrasts with the sequence as it was actually filmed and as it appears in the international version. In particular, once they have jumped into the pool, the edit lingers over the games the two play in the water. Marcos smiles openly for the first time in the whole film; then the two characters continue the game under the water, in a sequence shown with various underwater shots. The homoeroticism of all the action, which concludes with the two characters showering together after leaving the pool, is explicit. The whole sequence also uses extradiegetic music with a markedly dream-like tone, which underscores the liberating effect of the relationship for Marcos, who, significantly, falls asleep in the car while Néstor drives him home.

Although the censors ordered the shots that articulate the desire between the two male characters to be cut from the Spanish version (with the exception of Néstor's initial gaze at Marcos' body), the relationship between the two constructs a space far removed from the norms and obligations imposed by the dominant ideology; a space in which a different form of masculinity can also be constructed. At the end of the film, Néstor will imply in a dialogue with Marcos that he knows everything that has happened, and will offer to help him. Marcos, however, rejects his help and calls the police to give himself up. This is an ending that was imposed by the censors<sup>9</sup> which, nevertheless, fails to tarnish one of the most subversive works of Spanish cinema in the final years of the Franco regime. ■

## NOTES

\* This research has been undertaken in the context of the R+D+i Research Project "El cine y la televisión en España de la post-Transición (1979-1992)" directed by Manuel Palacio [Ref. CSO2012-31895], Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Government of Spain.

- 1 The documents referred to here are from the box of the General Archives of the Administration with code 36/04220, File No. 65,940, for the Censorship Committee of the Film Censorship and Evaluation Board.
- 2 For this analysis I have compared two different international editions: the DVD distributed in the United Kingdom by Blue Underground and the German Blu-ray distributed by Subkulture Entertainment. Both editions, with the title *Cannibal Man*, are licensed by Atlas International, and therefore have the same running time.
- 3 In the interview *Conocer a Eloy de la Iglesia*, Carlos Aguilar and Francisco Llinás ask Eloy de la Iglesia about the relationship between the film and the grotesque tradition, represented by Marco Ferreri and Fernando Fernán-Gómez. In his answer De la Iglesia highlights the presence of poor characters in the Spanish cinema of the 1950s, even in films with reactionary positions like *Furrows* (*Surcos*, José Antonio Nieves Conde, 1951). He then points out that this whole critical approach would be lost in the years that followed: "But when developmentalism began to take over, when the technocrats arrived, anything that might have been left over from Christian or radicalised Falangist cinema, like *Surcos* or *El inquilino*, was swept off the screen. Leftist cinema didn't touch the topic, and Bardem's films, for example, were more focused on the middle classes, on the petit bourgeoisie. [...] In *The Cannibal Man* I had the conviction that to give a leading role to a particular social class would be something of a wake-up call" (AGUILAR and LLINÁS, 1996: 111).
- 4 The documentation related to the censors' previous review of the screenplay can be consulted in the General Archives of the Administration (AGA), in the box with code 36/05086. The script on file at the AGA is the second version, dated 29 July 1971, with 219 pages, and can be found in the box with code 36/05584.
- 5 However, once the censors saw the finished film, some in their evaluations were critical of the fact that the script had been approved and that the production of the film had been permitted. For example, at the Censorship Committee meeting on 24 January 1972, Elisa de Lara commented: "If it weren't Spanish I would ban it without hesitation. [...] Therefore, and with the greatest of reluctance, I approve it for viewers over 18, and with the highest possible number of cuts." At the meeting on 15 February 1972, De Lara reiterated her view that the film was "repugnant," but maintained her argument that it could no longer be banned after the investment that the producers had made.
- 6 One of the factors that for Dufrenne distinguish perversion from subversion is the intention of the act. In this sense, Marcos does not kill with the intention of having a subversive effect on the system; his reaction is unconscious, although the spectator may infer from it an expression of what Dufrenne calls the "sense of the intolerable" (DUFRENNE, 1980: 45).
- 7 Again, the international version includes shots of the killing which were cut from the Spanish version. The cuts affect the duration of the killing, eliminating shots that alternate between close-ups of the mouths of the two characters kissing with Marcos' fingers squeezing Paula's throat.
- 8 The censors insisted right up to the last moment that all of the shots of Néstor should be cut, which led José Truchado to explain in a letter that, in accordance with the "cinematographic metric," the shots of Néstor could not be cut because his point of view was used in the arrangement of the sequence. This explanation saved the shots of the character looking through his binoculars that appear in the Spanish version. It is worth noting that already in their reports the censors had understood that the character of Néstor was gay and that they wanted to eliminate his presence wherever possible.
- 9 On this point, Eloy de la Iglesia remarks: "I have to point out that the ending to the film is not mine; it was imposed by the censors, and we even shot it months later, when there was already a standard copy. It's stupid that the character, just to be nice, would call the police to give himself up." (AGUILAR and LLINÁS, 1996: 110).

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## SUBVERSIVE EFFECTS OF PERVERSION: SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION IN THE CANNIBAL MAN

### Abstract

The objective of this article is to offer a reading of *The Cannibal Man* (La semana del asesino, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972). The film, which underwent numerous changes on the orders of Franco's censors, uses perversion to challenge the values of the dominant ideology. *The Cannibal Man* explores the connection between sexuality and the production of functional subjects for the maintenance of the social order. In this context, it is interesting to analyse the presence of the first gay character in Eloy de la Iglesia's filmography because, in spite of the attempts by the censors to minimise his presence in the film, his relationship with the protagonist of the story contributes to the destabilisation of masculine imagery and of the patriarchal discourse.

### Key words

Eloy de la Iglesia; *The Cannibal Man*; perversion; subversion; sexuality; censorship.

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## EFFECTOS SUBVERSIVOS DE LA PERVERSIÓN: SEXUALIDAD Y CONSTRUCCIÓN SOCIAL EN LA SEMANA DEL ASESINO

### Resumen

El objetivo del presente artículo es realizar una lectura de *La semana del asesino* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1972). La película, que sufrió numerosas modificaciones a causa de la censura franquista, emplea la perversión para impugnar los valores de la ideología dominante. En *La semana del asesino* se aborda el vínculo entre la sexualidad y la producción de sujetos funcionales para el mantenimiento del orden social. En ese marco cabe analizar la presencia del primer personaje gay en la filmografía de Eloy de la Iglesia; porque, a pesar de los intentos de la censura por minimizar su presencia en el relato, su relación con el protagonista de la historia contribuye a la desestabilización de los imaginarios masculinos y del discurso patriarcal.

### Palabras clave

Eloy de la Iglesia; *La semana del asesino*; perversión; subversión; sexualidad; censura.

### Autor

Carlos Gómez acaba de obtener el doctorado en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, donde también desempeña su labor docente. Es especialista en el análisis del discurso fílmico y actualmente prepara una monografía sobre el cine de Eloy de la Iglesia. Contacto: cagomez@hum.uc3m.es.

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# FROM THE BANAL TO THE INDISPENSABLE: PORNOCHANCHADA AND CINEMA NOVO DURING THE BRAZILIAN DICTATORSHIP (1964-1985)

EMMA CAMARERO

## EROTICISM VERSUS SOCIAL PROTEST: THE TWO FACES OF BRAZILIAN CINEMA UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP

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*Magnífica 70* (Cláudio Torres, Conspiração Filmes and HBO: 2015-) is the name given to the television series that has become Brazil's latest on-screen phenomenon. The series offers a portrayal of Brazil's film industry in the early 1970s, the so-called "Years of Lead" of the dictatorship that held power from the coup of 1964 until the election of Tancredo Neves as president in 1985. This production, with its meticulously crafted aesthetic, large doses of black humour and a contemporary filming style, is one of the more successful products currently being offered by the HBO Latino network.

Over the course of three episodes, *Magnífica 70* uses the world of 1970s São Paulo's Boca do Lixo neighbourhood, the cradle of Brazil's erotic cinema movement, which was one of the most

commercially popular film genres in the country during the dictatorship. Concealed beneath this supposedly frivolous reality is a script with constant references to repression, freedom and censorship. The program's protagonist is a stereotype of the Brazilian of the era; a man full of contradictions, married to the daughter of a general close to the regime, working at the Federal Censorship Office and obsessed with one of those actresses whose voluptuous physiques made them a perfect candidate for stardom in the sub-genre which in Brazil was graphically referred to as *pornochanchada*. Using the backdrop of a country superficially dedicated to commercial cinema, this production shows a whole social reality marked by state control of all creation, including the film industry.

*Magnífica 70* is an entertaining product that is at the same time a merciless social critique of the regime in power at the time, but with a focus on the recreation of a world of unscrupulous produc-





*Magnífica 70* (C. Torres, 2015)

ers with absolutely artistic (or, in theory, political) pretensions. The technical execution of the series is impeccable, and although the odd stereotype appears in the plot and character development, such defects are barely noticeable because of the fast-paced storyline and the constant succession of conflicts that arise.

Such meticulously crafted productions as this one are confirmation that Brazilian filmmaking is more relevant today than ever before. Reflecting the same fascination with Brazilian film production under the dictatorship, in 2011 the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid presented “*Cuando Brasil devoró el cine (1960-1970)*” [“When Brazil Devoured the Cinema (1960-1970)”], a review of the intense, revolutionary activity that took place in the Brazilian film world during the harshest years of the dictatorship, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that tells us a lot about the interest that Brazilian cinema has aroused beyond its borders. These are films by directors as important as Hélio Oiticica, Neville d’Almeida, Raymundo Amado, Glauber Rocha, Eduardo Coutinho, and Rogerio Sganzerla, to name a few. They are audiovisual documents that are indispensable for understanding the cultural production related to the events in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s, and they portray the other side of the rebellion against censorship in the country that was also represented, in its own way,



by the purely erotic films of the *pornochanchada* and *Boca do Lixo*.

Today Brazil is experiencing a political moment that has little to do with the Years of Lead, when the most creative generation of Brazilian filmmakers of the twentieth century had to wrangle with the State and navigate the censorship restrictions to ensure their projects saw the light of day. However, the underlying social reality of many of the films made under the dictatorship has not changed all that much, including that persistent eroticism that appears to be an inherent feature of Brazilian society. There also continues to exist what could be called a “hunger for social justice”, proof of which is the work of a new generation of Brazilian directors. In 2014, the Spanish newspaper *El País* published an article titled “*El cine brasileño golea Nueva York*” (“Brazilian Cinema Scores a Goal in New York”). In this article, Marcela Goglio, director of *Latinbeat*, the Latin American film festival held at New York City’s Lincoln Center, suggested that Brazilian cinema “is an explosion because of both the production and the variety, ranging from highly experiment films to more conventional offerings, in every type of genre: there are erotic comedies, there are thrillers, there are personal portraits, there are a lot of documentaries; and they come from every corner of the country.” (CRESPO, 2014).



The above seems to suggest that we might be witnessing a new golden age of Brazilian cinema, an heir to *Cinema Novo* and/or to the erotic comedies of Boca do Lixo. There is also reason to speak of a new group or generation of filmmakers who are socially engaged or who approach eroticism and sex in terms similar to the approach of the Brazilian directors of the 1970s. All of this points to the fact that, although the influence of the filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s on current directors like Felipe Barbosa or Fernando Coimbra is undeniable, individualism and personal themes predominate in the films of today.

"I don't see myself as belonging to any group," explains Fernando Coimbra, "but I do have a lot of filmmaker friends who started with short films like me and now we've made our first feature-length films. We aren't an organised movement like *Cinema Novo* was in the 1960s, but we do belong to the same generation and we have things in common, like an interest in flirting with any genre, and not only addressing social issues, like poverty and violence, but also talking about love, relationships, the middle class" (CRESPO, 2014).

All these assertions, made mostly in the context of film festivals, should not deceive us; Brazilian cinema has been, and in a way still is, one of the great forgotten traditions on the international film scene, regardless of the quantity and quality of Brazilian films produced each year. When it comes to Brazilian cinema, productions like *City of God* (Cidade de Deus, Fernando Meirelles, 2002), *Central Station* (Central do Brasil, Walter Salles, 1998) and *Elite Squad* (Tropa de Elite, José Padilha, 2007) are some of the few titles known to the general public. These are films that have achieved wide recognition at festivals and that deal with issues like social protest, male chauvinism and sexual exploitation, issues that link them to the revolutionary and dissident directors who worked under the dictatorship and its system of censorship.

A study of the context and the historical reality in which the *pornochanchada* movement arose,

and an analysis, on the one hand, of the creative process of these films—script, filming, staging, editing—and, on the other, of the documents written about them by the censors with the Public Entertainment Censorship Service (DCDP, for its initials in Portuguese), points to the conclusion that concealed behind the eroticism and the sex there was also a furtive ideological revolution that not even the censors and the tools of repression could restrain. In their way, they succeeded in changing the social model, and began to liberate women from their role of erotic object to turn them into independent individuals capable of making their own decisions about pleasure and sexuality. However, the importance of erotic cinema in the creation of a collective consciousness that rejected the regime has been underestimated in comparison with social protest films.

Brazilian cinema during this period (1964–1985) thus went far beyond *Cinema Novo*, which was its most visible face, and which had the country's decline as its *leitmotif*: the hunger, the dictatorship, the massacres, the corruption. There was also a type of cinema under the dictatorship that was able to outwit the censors into tolerating most of the films produced in Boca do Lixo during the 1970s. Hiding behind the name *pornochanchada* were productions with erotic content and a coy sexual freedom, framed in genres like the police thriller or the horror film, which filled movie theatres and were a constant source of revenue for their producers.

## CENSORSHIP OF PROTEST FILMS AND EROTIC FILMS: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1964, a dictatorship was established in Brazil and until 1985 all cultural activity in the country was marked by its presence. The cinema would be no exception, but when the coup d'état took place, the so-called *Cinema Novo* revolution had already begun and was unstoppable. Internationally, the prestige of Brazilian cinema had reached

unimaginable heights, and the new processes of film creation were as revolutionary and personal as the processes under way, for example, in France during those same years. In this context of repression, but also of intense creativity, the topic of sexuality was coming increasingly to the fore in Brazil, in both commercial and subversive productions. A version of erotic comedy emerged which until 1972 would give a much higher priority to humour than sexuality, which was barely more than suggested. This humour was based on everyday events experienced by actors and actresses known to general audiences through television, who engaged in puerile conversations filled with misunderstandings, and occasional erotic innuendo.

Some of these productions prior to 1972—directed, furthermore, by renowned filmmakers—had titles as suggestive as *Toda donzela tem um pai que é uma fera* [Every Damsel Has a Father Who Is a Beast] (Roberto Farias, 1966), *As cariocas* [The Girls from Rio] (Fernando de Barros, Roberto Santos and Walter Hugo Khouri, 1966) or *Adultério à brasileira* [Adultery Brazilian Style] (Pedro Carlos Rovai, 1969), among others. As Nuno Cesar Abreu (2006: 139) suggests, by bringing together sexuality and comedy, these films were able to maintain an effective dialogue with the audience and with a new generation of young people from all social classes, who listened to rock or pop music and belonged to anti-Establishment movements that rejected the dictatorship. Brazil's *porno-chanchada* movement could be compared to the “*destape*” films from the same period in Spain, which was also under a dictatorship, a genre consumed partly by a new generation for whom the comical approach to female nudity and sex offered an escape from the political repression.

At practically the same time that the *porno-chanchada* genre emerged, and coinciding with the rise of the dictatorship, alongside the mainstream films dealing with banal topics from which any political background or social struggle was ab-

sent, directors like Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Ruy Guerra and Carlos Diegues established the intellectual and cinematic foundations for *Cinema Novo*. When the new regime attempted to restrict the freedom of expression of these filmmakers, it was already too late. Although in Brazil freedom to express political opinions practically turned into an act of heroism and the political repression increased in the years that followed, forcing many of these artists into exile, Brazilian cinema had already triumphed at international festivals and had turned into an unstoppable phenomenon. It was an especially urban phenomenon, although not only centred in Rio and São Paulo, as there were also major creative centres in Minas Gerais, Brasília, Salvador and Recife. But there can be no doubt that the film library at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and the Boca do Lixo neighbourhood in São Paulo were the focal points of activity that brought together the largest groups of filmmakers, intellectuals and screenwriters.

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**THE MOST CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE OF THIS IS THE EXTENSIVE PRODUCTION WITH TACIT STATE APPROVAL OF FILMS WITH EROTIC AND EVEN ALMOST PORNOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS, SOMETIMES WITH HIGH DOSES OF VIOLENCE, BUT LACKING ANY KIND OF POLITICAL OR SOCIAL CONTENT THAT MIGHT HARM THE IMAGE OF THE REGIME**

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This creative movement had two major currents: one marked by the genre of erotic comedy, produced mainly in Boca do Lixo, and the other characterised by originality, creativity and a sense of social struggle. This second current was irrevocably marked by the political situation in the country and by the Institutional Act No. 5 (AI



Up. Advertisement for *Adulterio à la brasileira* (P. C. Rovai, 1969)  
Down. *Adulterio à la brasileira* (P. C. Rovai, 1969)

5) of 1968, known as the “coup within the coup”, which suspended constitutional guarantees: “The violent repressive apparatus was unleashed: disappearances, kidnappings, torture, exile and the activity of paramilitary groups under the authority of the Death Squads expanded the climate of terror, demoralisation and social breakdown that underlies many of the films. In this stifling atmosphere, with its ‘whoever is not with me is against me’ attitude, disseminated to the populace with the slogan *Brasil ame ou deije*, the identification of the artist or the filmmaker with the figure of the marginalised ‘other’, the rogue, outlaw or guerrilla was presented as an ethical imperative” (CARBALAS, 2011).

In many cases, and in spite of the existence of a law in Brazil that required part of the screen quota to be dedicated to Brazilian films, these

productions were kept out of circulation, either through the actions of the Public Entertainment Censorship Service (DCDP) or by an industry disinclined to distribute them. In the midst of this repressive atmosphere one exception occurred. *The Red Light Bandit* (*O Bandido da Luz Vermelha*, Rogério Sganzerla, 1968), an exponent of Brazil’s so-called marginal cinema, became a box office success in spite of its director’s profound political convictions against the dictatorship. If we compare this low-budget film, based on real events and belonging to the police genre, with some of the erotic comedy productions that were filling the theatres at the time, such as the aforementioned *Adulterio à brasileira* by Pedro Carlos Rovai, we will find some common ground between them, associated precisely with sex and eroticism. The presence of women as objects of male desire, subjugated to the man’s will and whose purpose is to satisfy him, either voluntarily or under duress, are constants in both films. In *The Red Light Bandit* this erotic connection is in most cases related to violence (non-consensual sex or the fascination that the criminal inspires in the woman, who allows herself to be seduced), while in *Adulterio à brasileira* sex is also something dangerous, but in this case associated with desire for the forbidden fruit, for other people’s partners; in short, with

*The Red Light Bandit* (R. Sganzerla, 1968)



that traditional context of adultery that has always been so intriguing to spectators.

The main difference between one and the other type of cinema from the perspective of censorship lies not so much in the treatment of eroticism as in the ideas put forward by their directors, which, with varying degrees of subtlety, they attempt to “hide” behind the presence of sex in their films. Almost all the directors and filmmakers of marginal cinema or *Cinema Novo*, regardless of how subversive their creations might have been, were targeted by the repressive apparatus for their political ideas. Proof of this is the declassified document delivered in 2014 by the National Truth Commission in Rio de Janeiro, which investigates human rights crimes and violations during the dictatorship (albeit without any judicial or punitive power), to Paloma Rocha, daughter of the filmmaker Glauber Rocha. The report, dating from 1971, was issued by the Air Force Intelligence Centre, the Brazilian government’s agency of repression, which detailed Glauber’s artistic relationships, the “leftist” characteristics of his aesthetic expressed in Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, as well as interviews that the filmmaker had given to the British press that were considered subversive.<sup>1</sup>

In view of this context of a lack of creative freedom, it might well be wondered how, in spite of the repression and the censorship, this period came to be considered one of the richest, most varied and complex moments in Brazilian cinema, in which eroticism, so persecuted in other countries where it was deemed an enemy of traditional values, had such a prominent place. An analysis of the role of dictatorships in the repression of cinema reveals that Brazil constitutes an exception in the Latin American context, in which Spain and Portugal could also be included. While Brazilian cinema during the dictatorship, in the decade of the 1970s, benefited from certain government grants, particularly through Embrafilme, the selection criteria, bureaucracy and favouritism applied by this agency was in fact a

form of government control over film production. But that control was based more on political than cultural or moral censorship. The most conclusive evidence of this is the extensive production with tacit State approval of films with erotic and even almost pornographic elements, sometimes with high doses of violence, but lacking any kind of political or social content that might have harmed the image of the regime. In a way, the filmmakers working with government grants were steered away from political issues to work on commercial products that would fill the theatres, but that lacked any social message, although the topic of sexual freedom was present to varying degrees. On the other hand, independent filmmakers, often with support from other countries or even working in exile, were kept out of this commercial film distribution circuit, but were also free in a way to make films according to their own criteria. The direct consequence was that many of the best cinematic creations of this time were not released in Brazil until after the collapse of the dictatorship and the end of the censorship.

A space free from control was thus left open which, from exile or in secret, the Brazilian filmmakers who had been revolutionising the way of making films since the early 1960s decided to fill. The repression of the dictatorship could do nothing to them internationally, and the revolutionary narrative methods of many of these films allowed them to achieve worldwide renown and take away numerous awards at film festivals. These were films that spoke of struggles for social reform and nationalist projects like *Black God, White Devil* (Deus e o diabo na terra do sol, Glauber Rocha, 1964), nominated for the Palme D’Or at Cannes; *The Guns* (Os fuzis, Ruy Guerra, 1964), winner of the Silver Bear at the Berlin Festival; *The Dare* (O desafio, Pablo César Saraceni, 1965); and *Macunaima* (Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, 1969), winner at the Mar del Plata Festival. Ultimately, they were still successful products whose directors had to be controlled or at least monitored by the cen-

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## THE EROTIC COMEDY FILMS PRODUCED IN THE MID-1960S CONTAINED AN IMPLICIT PROTEST AGAINST OR REJECTION OF VIRGINITY, CHASTITY AND THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY MODEL

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sors, and, indeed, many were persecuted, jailed or forced into exile. However, as their creations were screened mostly outside Brazil, they did little or nothing to harm the creation of a national social consciousness in keeping with the new political direction led by the dictatorship. In any case, it is important to remember that in nearly all of these films, just as in commercial erotic cinema, sex and nudity were used as tools of freedom and opposition to traditional society.

This analysis on the particular features of the two movements that led film production under the dictatorship in Brazil, the *pornochanchada* movement and protest cinema, requires a consideration of other aspects of life in the country to understand how Brazilian filmmakers outwitted the censors. The way in which politically bleak periods, when freedom is limited and repression is rife, have the effect of inciting filmmakers to develop their creativity and fill it with social content, in Brazil also had an erotic current of false liberalisation. Filmmakers, but also writers, journalists and even historians, seemed to understand that the cinema was the only creative space left to occupy, a place where it was possible to find formulas to conceal and reveal freedom of expression with all its power in the society that it reflected and defended: “That kind of protest cinema addressed the most burning issues of the era. It was a cinematic form outside the system, the conventions and standards, sometimes a cinematic form outside the law. It was a transgressive cinematic form committed to the issues and with an atypical visual language in its narrative styles. There is no

narration at all; sometimes the experience or the event comes to form part of the film, incorporated into it, breaking the spectator’s passive response to the film” (CARBALLAS, 2011).

With reference to filmmaking in Brazil under the dictatorship, Danielle Parfantieff de Noronha suggests that “discussions of memory and dictatorship include diverse tensions brought out by the representations of censorship, erasure and truth, turned into political and polemical categories, even of the way in which society shares the sense of nation both in that period and in the present” (PARFANTIEFF, 2013: 235).

However, while in countries in Latin America and even in Europe, like Spain and Portugal, dictatorships were characterised by their efforts to forge an image of cinema that bordered on propaganda, that also sustained the regime in power, in Brazil film production developed into two movements that were theoretically opposed in their message, but that used the audiovisual form as a vehicle for social and/or sexual liberation, and that had nothing to do with the parameters set by the political authorities. The censors thus tolerated a certain licence in film productions, characterised by the more or less explicit presence of sex, but were inflexible with clearly social or subversive messages. This type of cinema was represented by productions made in Boca do Lixo that chiefly involved films with banal themes, filled with eroticism, humour and misunderstandings. The other movement, outside the Brazilian mainstream, was led by the proponents of *Cinema Novo* and new filmmakers associated with it, who continued to work with low budgets, revolutionising film narration, and also portraying sex and eroticism, but with parameters that were completely different from those applied in the *pornochanchada* films. The impact of these films on Brazilians was limited in the short term because, apart from a few exceptional cases, they were not distributed commercially until the end of the dictatorship.

By controlling the movie theatres, the dictatorship ensured the repression of revolutionary and leftist ideas without the need to be constantly wielding the censor's knife. To do this it used effective methods which nevertheless were not clearly traceable to the regime. One of the most common strategies was to leave it to theoretically independent grassroots organisations to storm theatres where *Cinema Novo* films were being screened. One of the most prominent of such cases took place the same year as the establishment of the dictatorship, in 1964. Carlos Diegues, one of the most important ideologues of Brazilian cinema, had just released *Ganga Zumba*, the story of a slave uprising in colonial Brazil. In spite of the fact that the film's plot referred to events that had occurred three centuries earlier, terrorists from anti-communist movements stormed the theatres in the absence of repressive action by the authorities. The riot led to the government banning the film and removing it from theatres.

The Brazilian film revolution was under way, but in the cinemas most Brazilians could only see the part of it that dealt with sexual liberation and eroticism. Only after the collapse of the dictatorship in 1985 did Brazilians become aware of its full scope and dimensions.

## THE BRAZILIAN EROTIC CINEMA THAT GOT PAST THE CENSORS

Both producers and distributors in Brazil were aware that films, when they passed through the hands of the Public Entertainment Censorship Services, would undergo some form of partial or total censorship. Through the application of the complex system of unwritten rules about what would or would not be likely to be censored, producers sought to mitigate the damage from the beginning, to keep whenever they could to avoid having to shoot part of the film again, and the costs associated with it, due to an excess of zeal on the part of the censors in the editing stage. Par-

tial censorship, referred to as *cortes*, eliminated whole sequences or parts thereof from the footage when the censor determined that there were gestures, postures or conversations that were not in keeping with the moral standards or message of the dictatorship, or as the censors generally put it, "that offend morality and public decorum". The censors also set age restrictions on a film's potential audience, and issued the so-called "Good Quality" and "Free for Export" classifications. However, if a film was censored completely, this was understood to be a de facto ban on its exhibition anywhere in Brazil.

The criteria for censorship could be divided into two main groups. The first, with more serious consequences for the film and its director, referred to incitements against authority, and attacks against public order or individual rights and guarantees. In the other group the criteria were somewhat more ambiguous, such as the presence of elements with the potential to cause distress or that were offensive to a particular religion.

Although they refer to the capacity of the censors under the dictatorship in Portugal, the reasons argued by Piçarra Ramos (2013: 91) are equally applicable to cinema in Brazil in this period: "It is undeniable that a new aesthetic is an interrogative gaze towards new themes. It is important to analyse this gaze because in many of these films the Censors, incapable of understanding the new language, found no reason to amputate."

Many of the filmmakers of this period were targeted by the military, subjected to searches and threatened. Film reels were often confiscated, and some directors were arrested while others were exiled from Brazil, such as Rogério Sganzerla. Some had the good fortune, if it could be called such, of holding onto the footage they had filmed for years, albeit unable to edit it. This was the case of the director Sérgio Muniz, who in 1971 secretly filmed a documentary on the crimes of the Death Squad, *Voce também pode dar um presunto legal* (whose literal translation would be "You Too Can

Be a Cool Corpse”), which had to wait until 2006—no less than thirty-five years—for its release.

Sganzerla himself, who together with Julio Bressane created the legendary Belair production company in Rio de Janeiro in 1970, had a view of the repression suffered by independent creators in Brazil that might almost be described as “romantic”: “In my view, it is no surprise if the modern artist is called an outlaw [...]. In reality, the charm of that has worn off, but not the conditions that lead us to knock down the values of a society that oppresses us [...]. I, for example, marginalise myself by declaring the shame I feel about Brazil today” (SGANZERLA, 2007: 11).

In general, the censors were rather more magnanimous with *pornochanchada* than with *Cinema Novo*, in spite of the fact that certain sectors of the repressive apparatus advocated firmer action against the erotic comedies. These films generally received approval from the censors with a few small cuts to scenes where a naked female body appeared, and with the “adults aged 18 and over” rating. This was due largely to the economic significance of these productions as generators of revenues which, directly or indirectly, reached the coffers of the State, to the point where the dictatorship allowed the producers and distributors of Boca do Lixo to determine the erotic or semi-pornographic nature of the films based on criteria of profits and box-office success. This was a rare strain of freedom within Brazilian cinema, as the dictatorship was thoroughly oppressive with all other film productions.

Films were thus made for which producers and directors tried to reach an agreement with the censors prior to the final cut. To do this they examined aspects such as how female bodies should be framed in the film, or what role police and military officers could play in the story. There was constant negotiation on dialogues, nudity and bed scenes that would be filmed several times until the censor was satisfied with the result. Even before

the film was submitted to the censorship body, it would be screened unofficially for “friendly” censors for the purpose of obtaining their opinions (SIMÕES, 1999:168).

The erotic comedies produced in the mid-1960s contained an implicit protest against or rejection of virginity, chastity and the traditional family model, although many of them concluded with happy endings with a wedding and the triumph of virtue. In this way, the productions became increasingly critical of a model of sexuality imposed by the authorities, a model which the producers and distributors tried to circumvent by achieving commercial success. But ultimately what they sought to do was to please audiences who were increasingly unhappy with the morality imposed by the regime, and who were looking for ways to escape the oppressive atmosphere through film fantasies filled with sex and eroticism. This attempt to find a way of showing certain freedoms that could reach audiences concealed under a surface layer of eroticism did not always go unnoticed by the censors, as can be observed in the notes taken by one censor on the film *Jardim de Guerra* [War Garden] (Neville D’Almeida, 1970): “It is intellectualised, aimed at a pseudo-intellectual audience, and therefore from our point of view it will not please a larger audience due to its distant, intellectual and impractical language [...]. The director mixes politics with sex with the intention of attracting attention to the film. I believe that it should be restricted to adults aged 18 and over and released with the cuts already requested” (PINTO, 2001: 376).

Although the censorship criteria varied depending on the case and the context, there was never any tolerance of visible sex organs or pubic hair, explicit sexual relations or insinuations of homosexuality or other behaviour deemed “deviant” unless addressed in a humorous manner. Sexually active and independent women were also frowned upon. The presence of a lecherous male figure, however, was a constant in these films and,



in a thoroughly male chauvinist environment, was nearly always tolerated. Erotic comedy producers in general tried to avoid any moral issue or idea that might potentially overstep the limits of the censors. Even so, there were constant protests made to the Ministry of Justice by an ultra-conservative segment of society who called for these “pornographic, immoral and violent” productions to be banned completely.

In this climate of persecution and repression of the film industry, the censors themselves worked in a constant state of tension, terrified by the possibility that, amid so many erotic scenes, the director might have slipped in some subversive message that would escape their attention. With this in mind, the censorship agency carried out what might be called “quick refresher courses” to develop the censoring capacities of their personnel, but which in reality left them even more perplexed about how to do their jobs: “If juxtaposed messages are everywhere and arise at any time, they may go unnoticed. In such a situation, what should the censor examining the film who is unable to detect any message do? Speak to a supervisor [...]. He is sufficiently attentive and prepared to identify alleged moments when the ‘red’ ideology has been concealed between the lines in a film.” (SIMÕES, 1999: 153).

The censors in Brazil never allowed films that promoted a questioning of the established order. This is why directors like Joaquim Pedro de Andrade and Nelson Pereira dos Santos would be deemed by the federal agency to be a potential source of danger to the public, which was considered vulnerable and in need of State protection.

To understand exactly how censorship was used in Brazil to control the dozens of erotic films released into the theatres every year, I have analysed the script, mise en scène and editing of the film *Amadas e violentadas* [Love and Raped] (Jean Garret, 1976), as well as the censorship process imposed to which it was subjected. This film is a *pornochanchada* that belongs, according to Abreu

(2006), to the second period of the Boca do Lixo era (1976-1982), a period of mass-production of films in a wide range of genres, but always with sex and eroticism at front and centre, directed and produced by recognised professionals and enjoying considerable box office success. Indeed, this police film, produced and starring David Cardoso, was one of the ten biggest box office hits of that year in Brazil.

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**THE CENSORS THEMSELVES WORKED IN A CONSTANT STATE OF TENSION, TERRIFIED BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT, AMID SO MANY EROTIC SCENES, THE DIRECTOR MIGHT HAVE SLIPPED IN SOME SUBVERSIVE MESSAGE THAT WOULD ESCAPE THEIR ATTENTION**

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The protagonist in *Amadas e violentadas*, Leandro Kopezky, is a rich young man traumatised by the violent deaths of his parents who is unable to relate normally to women. As a result, he kills his partners and writes about the killings in novels that become best-sellers, until a police officer and a journalist begin to suspect him.

The censors, after analysing not only the film as a whole and scene-by-scene in minute detail, but also the entire film crew and the actors in order to determine whether they could be deemed subversives, issued their certificate of approval, valid from February 1976 to February 1981, as well as the Good Quality and Free for Export classifications. The documents prepared by the censors on the film, analysed in detail by Lamas (2013: 162-174), show that three experts approved it, requesting the classification of “not suitable for children under 18, without cuts.” It was normal for every film to have to receive the approval of three censors, but in addition, *Amadas e violentadas* also had to be reviewed by the Director of the Public

Entertainment Censorship Service. One of the censors wrote in his detailed report: “It belongs to the modern police film genre, with sex-related killings, but the film steers clear of presenting obscene content, managing to maintain a good plot, evidently with the objective of offering the public a serious movie, with the mistakes typical of an insane character, but without showing any gruesome scenes or situations” (LAMAS, 2013: 173).

Killings, scenes of violence and sex, at times bordering on sadism, do not appear to have troubled the censor because they are the acts of a *personagem insana*. It appears that the disturbed mind of the protagonist—and the fact that his actions were attributed to madness, although they included Satanic practices mixing equal parts of sex and violence—excused the film in the eyes of the censor, for whom only the scenes of naked women gave grounds for classifying it for viewers over eighteen, as “all of the scenes showing female and male bodies fall within acceptable limits for the DCDP, and the narrative procedures used in these sequences are effective in this respect” (LAMAS, 2013: 1273).

*Amadas e violentadas* is an example of what was quite a common tendency in the *modus operandi* of the censors for the vast majority of the erotic films produced in Boca do Lixo. In this specific case, the film got past the censors practically uncut, only with the requirement of an adults-only film rating. In the absence of a subversive or dissident message, the sole concern for the censors was to place certain limits on the exposure of the body, particularly the female body.

Erotic films, with care taken in how they were shot, could thus break through the barriers set by a censorship procedure that accepted nudity and sex on the basis of the needs of the story. As long the scenes did not contain any social message—women’s liberation, equality between the sexes, injustice, the class struggle—such films were rarely subject to cuts. This allowed the rise of an erotic cinema movement, which from 1964 to 1985 was



*Amadas e violentadas* (J. Garret, 1976)

extremely popular with Brazilian audiences, and which became increasingly daring in its erotic content to the point of bordering on pornography in films like *Mulher Objeto* [Object Woman] (Silvio de Abreu, 1981).

The censors operated on the basis of a model of sexual and erotic norms, separating attitudes deemed normal from those considered deviant, such as homosexuality. And it was the self-censorship carried out by producers and directors to avoid cuts or the banning of the film that acted as a veritable cleansing mechanism based on what the dictatorship deemed acceptable or worthy of censorship.

## CONCLUSIONS ON A PHENOMENON THAT BROKE THROUGH THE CENSORSHIP

Erotic Brazilian cinema, or *porno-chanchada*, in terms of its message, could therefore not be classified as original or revolutionary in its confrontation with censorship, but it could be classified as such in its ability to break through formal barriers and show much more than was theoretically permitted. The Brazilian film revolution broke out in the context of social conflicts and the polarisation of a country that moved from one period of political upheaval to another of dictatorial atrophy that paralysed or expelled filmmaking with any hint of social conscience or protest. It was that era of struggles for social reform that created the context for films that would receive worldwide acclaim, like Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil*, but which, on the other hand, were banned in Brazil for many years.

It is important to remember the international historical and social context of the Brazilian productions belonging to both the *Cinema Novo* and *Boca do Lixo* traditions. On the one hand, there were revolutionary phenomena like the events of May 1968 in Paris, with slogans like "it is forbidden to forbid" or "imagination to power", led by youths and marked by a profound sense of social change that was not lost on the more dissenting Brazilian filmmakers. But at the same time, a freer attitude towards sexuality began to take root: the appearance of the contraceptive pill in the early 1960s allowed the woman gradually to take a more active part in the sexual revolution, questioning her role of subordination to the man and claiming her own right to physical pleasure. In view of this larger historical and social context, it is no surprise that the Brazilian censors would try to be more lenient with films that had erotic content than with films that contained a social message. It was also those films in which the naked body appeared in a symbolic and dream-like context, with a message far removed from a merely

sexual reality, that were the most successful in getting through the censors. The DCDP also used the "adults aged 18 and over" restriction to avoid more drastic cuts to erotic scenes and to allow a form of public entertainment that the authorities viewed as much less dangerous than what films with subversive social content might provoke.

It can therefore be concluded that *porno-chanchada* was tolerated because the producers nearly always acted on the basis of their knowledge of what could and could not be presented on screen. Self-censorship was present in the way that the body was shown, using resources like caricaturing characters or psychological deviations to justify the presence of nudity or of sex scenes. Moreover, the institution of the family was generally respected, as any adultery, except when presented humorously, almost never went unpunished. The characters who committed acts of violence or sexual excesses did so due to the needs of a script that presented them, for one reason or another, as abnormal. And finally, the directors imposed maximum limitations on the exposure of the female body on screen to avoid cuts to their films and thereby save on production costs.

In Brazil the dictatorship favoured erotic cinema not for its narrative qualities, but for its box-office returns and for the false image of ideological openness it conveyed, which allowed the regime to conceal other repressive excesses affecting parts of Brazilian society behind its permissive attitude towards eroticism. But the censors only partly achieved their objective to keep subversive messages out of erotic films, as every naked body that passed the censors' knife, every uncut sex scene that showed female physical pleasure, represented a subtle step forward for Brazilian society in its fight for individual and collective freedoms.

In short, the generation of Brazilian filmmakers working during the Years of Lead managed to make a language out of repression, and gave Brazil a vibrant and active cinematic tradition in anticipation of the end of the military dictatorship. ■

## NOTES

- 1 Retrieved from <<http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/La-dictadura-brasileña-persiguió-al-cineasta-Glauber-Rocha>> [20/12/2015]

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## FROM THE BANAL TO THE INDISPENSABLE: PORNOCHANCHADA AND CINEMA NOVO DURING THE BRAZILIAN DICTATORSHIP (1964-1985)

### Abstract

The period of the dictatorship in Brazil was marked by the convergence of two cinematic movements: on the one hand, the erotic films produced in the Boca do Lixo neighbourhood in São Paulo, which gave rise to the *pornochanchada*; and on the other, *Cinema Novo*, which turned Brazilian cinema into an international intellectual phenomenon. An analysis of Brazilian cinema during the dictatorship from a historical perspective reveals that both these movements brought about a revolution of ideology and of form that neither the censors nor their tools of repression could restrain. However, the importance of erotic cinema in the creation of a collective consciousness that rejected the regime has been underestimated in comparison with *Cinema Novo*. Concealed behind the eroticism of these productions there was also a struggle based on the affirmation of sexuality as a path towards freedom that often succeeded in outwitting the censors, constituting a cinematic process that is indispensable today for the construction of the memory of those years.

### Key words

*Cinema Novo*; *pornochanchada*; Boca do Lixo; protest films; censorship; revolution.

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## DE LO BANAL A LO INDISPENSABLE. PORNOCHANCHADA Y CINEMA NOVO DURANTE LA DICTADURA BRASILEÑA (1964-1985)

### Resumen

Durante la Dictadura en Brasil convergen, por un lado, el cine erótico de las producciones del barrio de Boca do Lixo, en São Paulo, que dio lugar a la *pornochanchada* y, por otro, el *Cinema Novo* que convirtió al cine brasileño en un fenómeno intelectual internacional. Al reflexionar desde una perspectiva histórica sobre el cine brasileño durante la dictadura, la conclusión es que ambos modos de hacer cine conllevaban una revolución ideológica y formal que ni siquiera la censura y sus herramientas de represión pudieron frenar. La importancia de ese cine erótico en la creación de una conciencia colectiva de rechazo al régimen ha sido infravalorada en comparación con el *Cinema Novo*. Bajo el erotismo de estas producciones se escondía también una lucha basada en la afirmación de la sexualidad como camino hacia la libertad que consiguió burlar a menudo a los censores. Un proceso cinematográfico que hoy resulta indispensable para conformar la memoria de aquellos años.

### Palabras clave

*Cinema Novo*; *pornochanchada*; Boca do Lixo; cine social; censura; revolución.

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# EROTICISM AND FORM AS SUBVERSION IN *DAISIES*

ORISEL CASTRO

YORK NEUDEL

LUIS GÓMEZ

Censorship is a tool to set aside the obvious and classifiable, but when a piece of art is ambiguous and allows multiple interpretations, a bureaucrat is exposed to a swamp of exegesis. The crucial moment in which suspicion crosses with certainty becomes the starting point for a game of hide and seek between the artist and the official.

One example of this tension is the Czechoslovak film *Daisies* (Sedmikrásky, Věra Chytilová, 1966) that is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary in 2016. Two young girls<sup>1</sup> constantly seduce elder men in order to be invited to dinner. Neither of them have work or a significant other. They act unscrupulously and outside the rules. Isolated from society, they are at the edge of drowning in their hopeless anarchism that does not know salvation.

This paper analyzes the use of eroticism and ambiguity of cinematographic language as tools for criticizing the conservative and bureaucratic system of the then Pro-Soviet Czech govern-

ment. The approach to the concept of eroticism by George Bataille helps to interpret the representation of the main characters of the film. In addition, this article explores the narrative resources that link the movie to other arts such as performance, hollowing the discourse of the director and her adscription to the avant-garde movement of the Czech New Wave. *Daisies'* historic context will be discussed in order to examine the cinematographic language as a vehicle for understanding the ideology and posture of the filmmaker: the form as a weapon of subversion.

In comparison with other New Wave-Movements there are only a few English- and Spanish-language texts about Czech Cinema. Nevertheless this film has been discussed widely among international film scholars. Besides the reviews of Clouzot (1968) and Miljević (1995), Weidner (2016) discusses the topic of sustainability and the idea of Dadaism in *Daisies* comparing it with *Nova Express* (1964) by William Burroughs. Sorfa (2013)

analyzes the image of women in Chytilová's works and in *Loves of a Blonde* (Lásky jedné plavovlásky, Miloš Forman, 1965). On the other side, the paper *Banquet of Profanities* by Katarina Soukup (1998) searches for links between food and subversion.

Other books pick out as a central theme the phenomenon of the Czech New Wave and its representatives in general (HAMES, 2005; 2009; OWEN, 2013) and provide chronologies, ranging from the era of the Absurd, the avant-garde until Czech and Slovak Animation. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Filip Šára and David Sorfa (2015) dedicate a chapter to Ester Krumbachová, the scriptwriter and art-director of *Daisies* who did not find the attention she deserves among scholars.<sup>2</sup> Šmejkalová (2001) examines censorship in Czech literature and the dissertation of Huebner (2008), which covers eroticism in the work of the surrealist artist Marie Čermínová, alias Toyen, who was a member of *Devětsil*, a surrealist group, of whom many people were suspicious for its bourgeois tendencies, its interest in jazz and the western popular filmculture (HUEBNER, 2008: 85). *Devětsil* was one of the inspirational sources for the Czech New Wave in the sixties. Despite the huge amount of literature about this movement there is little emphasis in eroticism as a tool for eluding censorship.

After focusing on the historic context of Czechoslovak culture in general, this paper analyzes the concept of eroticism of Bataille in order to apply it to the film *Daisies* and link it to the ambiguity of formal experimentation as a tool for subversion.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

At first, *Daisies* passed all controls of the Czechoslovak Council for Publication and Information, which approved the screenplay. Yet, the film was largely improvised, using the script as only one element in the experiment (LÉGER, 2015: 63). Therefore, in the context of its premiere in May 1967, Jaroslav Pružinec, along with twenty-one members of the Czech parliament, accused the films

*A Report on a Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*) by Jan Němec and *Daisies* by Věra Chytilová for their waste of money. These works were produced and funded by the state in Barrandov Studios, but: «[...] don't have anything in common with our Republic, with socialism and the ideals of communism. [...] We have to ask Němec and Chytilová: Where is the learning effect in terms of labor, politics or even the entertainment for our workers in fabrics, the rural areas, construction sites or other places? We demand an explanation by the cultural workers: How long will you continue to bother the honest laborers and step on our socialist achievements? Why do we have soldiers at our borders that protect us from our enemies [...] while we pay huge amounts of money to the opponents inside the country that smash and destroy [...] the fruits of our work? (PRUŽINEC, 1967.)<sup>3</sup>»

The movie was considered inappropriate for Czech audiences, given the hard times local farmers were undergoing in that period (SEAL, 2012). Therefore, *Daisies* together with *A Report on a Party and the Guests* soon disappeared from national movie theaters and their international distribution was prohibited, although, due to its great popularity among workers, *Daisies* still would circulate from time to time in local theaters (SEAL, 2012; LIM, 2001: 37). The director Chytilová was punished with the prohibition of work between 1969 and 1975 by Miroslav Müller, an intransigent politician, responsible for cultural issues in the Czechoslovak Communist Party after the Prague Spring (RUPNIK, 1975).

Despite numerous invitations, Chytilová could not attend international festivals or be physically present when she was honored with the Grand Prix at the Bergamo Festival in Italy in 1966 for her movie. She was prohibited from engaging in her profession as a filmmaker and dedicated her life to her family until she appealed publically against the sanctions with a letter entitled "I want to work" addressed to Gustáv Husák (CHYTILOVÁ,



1976: 17-20). Due to these lines and the international pressure she finally could celebrate an artistic comeback with *The Apple Game* (Hra o jablko) in 1977. In the context in which the cinema industry was administrated by the State, the directors were employees of the state that maintained dependency with governmental authorities (ELSAESSER, 2005: 70). In addition, the producers of the films were identical with the censors and belonged commonly to the establishment of the Communist Party. According to Owen, the cultural censorship in Czechoslovakia, “especially after the onset of Normalization in 1969, frequently had more to do with the artist and his or her political sympathies, real or supposed, than with anything in the work itself” (OWEN, 2013: 10). Chytilová claimed that her work was misunderstood by censors who did not see that she condemned her protagonists (Chytilová cited in LIM, 2001: 38).

Returning to *Daisies*, there have been voices that criticized the waste of food, but, in fact, it was a matter of incomprehension due to the use of a revolutionary, unusual, circular dramaturgy without a clear message (“Where is the learning effect [...] for our workers”) that called the attention of the bureaucrats. The destructive potential of the film caused dislike, but what role did eroticism play in this movie full of nudity and seduction?

## THE ROLE OF EROTICISM IN THE FILM

Eroticism, in this case, is a mechanism for criticizing a system marked by the conservatism in Czechoslovakia of the sixties, where etiquette and good behavior, especially of women, was the guiding star. The main characters within their feminist liberation are shown as an opposing symbol to a static society and eroticism is their means to accomplish this goal. Their costumes, corporality and phonetics contrast radically with the habits of their masculine neighbors in suits.

Bataille argues that eroticism is a “disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question” (BATAILLE, 1986: 31). When the spectator looks at this surrealist world to which this couple guides him, he senses a loss of consciousness of the characters and their surroundings: now the girls are the masters of the senses and of reasoning. Through teasing and making fun of the desire they provoke in those men that never can take possession of them, the girls incorporate a critique to a corrupt society with its double moral standards. The bureaucrats they are relating with—those men in suits who are inviting them to fine restaurants—are the aim of their mockery, but the mechanisms of seduction used by the girls also work for the spectator, such as the censors that might have felt seduced and mocked at the same time. The daisies do not feel desire and everything they do is part of a strategy of seduction and subversive critique.

Their transgressive capacity and their apparent unconsciousness of limits are noteworthy. One of the aspects that Bataille points out is the anxiety that comes with transgressing or committing a sin. But the female characters do not feel this anxiety because it is transferred to their surroundings. Therefore all men close to the girls are mortified beings, except for the workers that ignore them.

In the film, there are three deadly sins of the daisies that challenge religion: Gluttony, Lust and Sloth. The girls are insatiable. Although this does not necessarily represent eroticism at first glance, the sensations are passing to those who surround them. Their way of eating does not become grotesque, but indeed is breaking with prohibition and etiquette. It is not a coincidence that deserts are their favorite feasts: their sweetness defines the double sense of moral and good behavior.

The daisies incarnate Lust. Bataille mentions that “the inner experience of eroticism demands from the subject sensitiveness to the anguish at the heart of the taboo no less great than the de-

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---

sire which leads him to infringe it" (BATAILLE, 1986: 38-39). The girls introduce themselves as the prohibition and as the desire. They are the unbreakable and untouchable limit that no one can reach. Julie, in this case, is, in the words of Bataille "the religious sensibility [that] always links desire closely with terror, intense pleasure and anguish" (BATAILLE, 1986: 39). Her lover complains how she treats him and she shows the limits with the butterflies that inhibit the access. The suitor will not possess her and she, at the end, will be the restriction, the pure eroticism. He can only show his anguish and dread for comprehending love in a different way. This game of seduction is aimed equally at the audience who might expect a sex scene but is left alone with the interruption and the failed act.

At least, Sloth is a sin that counters work as an element that "does make it impossible to respond to these immediate solicitations which could make us indifferent to the promised desirable results" (BATAILLE, 1986: 41).

The sexual desire is contrasted by the labor of the proletarian and this establishes the limit between the desire and the act. If work does not misplace the erotic thinking completely, at least it insulates it. Reasoning makes it possible to create parameters about what is the right thing to do. This is one possible critique on this collective, consumed by work for the nation. Absorbed and without soul, the workers lost their nature and their minds. "There is in nature and there is

in man a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order" (BATAILLE, 1986: 40). They have lost their impulse to overcome limits.

At work, reasoning comes first, which is not the case with the daisies. "Most of the time work is the concern of men acting collectively and during the time reserved for work the collective has to oppose those contagious impulses to excess in which nothing is left but the immediate surrender to excess, to violence, that is" (BATAILLE, 1986: 41). The girls have been neglected, because the workers have not been infected by their impulses. They do not even see them, because they are invisible in the presence of the reasoning of labor. This neglect leads to the girls' wish to go back to their oneiric, self-centered world where they personify the limit and the transgression. They are the party *par excellence* and the call for unlimited and restless celebration. They are the embodiment of wastefulness and, therefore, the contrast to the representation of a communist society, symbolized by its labor. From Bataille's point of view the criticism of the system of production in this case is evident: «Sacred days though are feast days. Then things which usually are forbidden are permitted or even required, though the upheaval is not necessarily as total as that following the death of a King. The values of a workaday world are inverted. (BATAILLE, 1986: 68).»

Through their acts of wasting, the daisies represent the sacredness of the celebration and therefore they are untouchable. Bataille makes reference to a concrete period, but for them, the festivity is endless. On the other side, the responsibility for everyone else to work is perpetual and goes along with rigid prohibitions.

Each of the daisies can be considered as a nymph-<sup>4</sup>, this "little deadly demon among the wholesome children" (NABOKOV, 1975: 11), as Nabokov would call them. Therefore it establishes the rule that men must be at least ten years older than the girls in or-

der to fall for their sexual tricks and to obey. As we can see they seduce everyone only to abandon them afterwards. Through their phony childishness they catch men that get lost in their sacrilegious games of sensuality that spills over between etiquette and good behavior. They incite the transgression of limits established by a society they are not part of, but which they wish to destroy in one way or another.

Finally, when Chytilová with her deified voice (omniscient and omnipotent) wants to drown them in an attempt to punish them for their actions, an ultimate exposition of eroticism can be observed: the sacrifice. Bataille says that “if it is an intentional transgression, sacrifice is a deliberate act whose purpose is a sudden chance in the victim” (BATAILLE, 1986: 90).

The characters do not die literally. They transfigure to another form, but the fact that they do not de cease explains their condition of being without life and without soul. They are dolls and products of Chytilová’s imagination that reveal the hypocrisy of the system. They are chrysalis that broke their bud and emerge from the water to reconstruct what they have destroyed, but it will not be the same as before, yet now everything is deformed and this new representation makes us doubt of what is correct.

Because of this distinction from the socialist ideal, this movie was and continues to be controversial half a century after its release. What did Věra Chytilová do with this film that made it through the stages of censorship although it does not share the socialist precepts? The key points are three ingredients that are combined in *Daisies*: apart from eroticism, the ambiguity and its experimental form.

### THE AMBIGUITY AND FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION AS SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS

Ambiguity appears ever since the aperture sequence with a sort of intellectual montage<sup>5</sup> that suggests a distorted and interrupted martial tone:

parts of the film alter rhythmically and show a gearwheel in even movement with archive material of explosions and bombings from the air. The images of the detonations are shown in silence. After the opening credits we see for the first time the daisies in a two-dimensional and symmetrical shot, both sitting in plaid bikinis and exaggerated makeup. The girls move and talk without looking at each other. It is a theatrical mannerism, far away from the purpose of a realistic portraiture. The sound again establishes a game of synchronicity, replacing the real ambience by sounds of creaking wood in the acoustic foreground that matches with the girl’s movements. This mannerist montage proposes a certain idea of the representation of the protagonists: they are dolls, puppets or simply alienated and bored.

The renegade personality of the female characters is presented from their first action: they pick their noses, which is followed by a dialogue that clarifies the starting point and the aim of the protagonists: play and destroy established patterns. Since they can’t do anything—here the shot of the two girls is juxtaposed to archive material of a wall falling down—they decide to play to be virgins, to be girls and to be bad in a world that is bad and does not comprehend them. They recite this text with theatricality and a deliberate phoniness, acting without the purpose of realism. Each completes the sentences of the other, only to break later with complicity and proximity through apparent dramatic and violent accents that end up with being a part of the game.

It is a play for the audience. Neither the protagonists reveal a psychological depth nor the credibility that normally is needed in order to involve the audience in the story through a process of identification with the main characters.<sup>6</sup> They seem spoiled dolls or puppets of the director as a tool to seduce the audience only to incommode later on for not giving what is expected. In his paper “Alienated Heroes: Marxism and the Czechoslovak New Wave”, Hames (2014) links Věra Chy-

tilová's movie with the topic of alienation through the connection of the story with Marxism: «Chytilová focuses on two teenage girls who seem to live in a kind of vacuum and decide that since the world has been spoiled, they will be spoiled as well. Neither is given any developed psychology and the two are basically interchangeable. The film resembles a fragmented collage of short episodes in which they engage in destructive activities (HAMES, 2014: 162-163).»

Hames understands the acts of the main characters as a sign of their alienation, but does not reflect on how this reflexive, episodic and ludic form of the film uses the protagonists as pawns of the director's game. They are part of the landscape and only a few times they seem to show a will and, practically never, a desire: «While there has been much debate about the role of the heroines (Chytilová says she intended to criticise them), and the film is open to many interpretations, it makes sense to see their behaviour in the wider social framework —the emptiness of a world with false values (HAMES, 2014: 163).»

The discontinued narration structure promotes an effect of *collage* and reflexivity. The experimentations with color, speed, exposure and movements reaffirm this. The story is organized in impressionist fragments of the girl's actions and their live *performance* that consists in seduction, cheating and humiliation of men with the promise of sexual consummation in order to obtain satisfaction, fun, food and subversion.

As there is no super-objective in the dramaturgy, the action does not proceed towards a climax. It is a succession of *actus interruptus* that structure the narration without crescendos, but with accumulation. The fascination operates on the same level of distance between the director and the protagonists. She does not let us get close to become acquainted to the girls and avoids triggering empathy with their vulnerability, but instead insinuates a nearness through the game played in the movie with the spectator. The girls rebel

against a hypocrite society. They “go bad” voluntarily to give answers to a corrupt world and this makes them likeable, even heroic —dramaturgically speaking—, but without the elixir. They do not do anything for others and only kill time. They are irreverent, insolent and lack of transcendent motivation, which obliges us to give up upon the classic formula of narration.

The lack of motivation keeps us away from the socialist ideal and separates the film from this ideal of representation, because no one punishes or redeems the girls. There is no obvious critique of the bourgeoisie, of the bureaucracy or the ochre of the Czech society of the sixties. It is not straightforward and without a message. The symbolism is maintained in a state of suggestion and works on different levels. The girls eat the apple, but do not have desires. Her actions are marked by the intention of rebelling, of misbehaving, but they do not get any satisfaction, they do not change nor have an epiphany. There is no salvation in existential repetition without an ultimate objective and this pessimistic view on society and on the future is completely the opposite of the Socialist realism spirit, the triumphalist discourse of communism.

Besides, the heroines are marginalized individuals that search for separation from the masses, for individualization up to the final consequences. The moral dilemma, they claim to have, is just another cynic masquerade of their point of view on reality and themselves. The director also pretends to punish them in the scene close to the end in which she threatens them to let them drown only to rescue them under the condition of repairing all the damages they had caused and to “be good girls.” In the *dénouement* they appear wrapped in newspapers, moving mechanically on the tables when they repair the broken plates, murmuring their remorse and their promises as a final and ambiguous game, but deliberately ironic and phony. At last, the chandelier falls down in a stylized way—again with a deceiving effect—and seems to

end their lives, but the director uses the Kuleshov Effect<sup>7</sup>. It is a “prohibited montage,” because “the essence of the scene demands the simultaneous presence of the two or more factors in the action,” so that “montage is ruled out” (BAZIN, 2005: 50)<sup>8</sup>. We never see the collision in one single shot and can infer it because of the juxtaposition of the shot of the lamp, the shot of the astonished girls and the abrupt cut. This is a trick that intentionally extends the masquerade and the game even in the *dénouement* with the disguise of a moral posture of the author that hides another oblique critique and an open end. It is not by chance that Chytilová disdains the credibility when she uses “prohibited montage,” because that way she offers hints to the irony of her own story and the representation, where she opens up the possibility of distance.

Another point of contact between critical ambiguity and formal experimentation is the performative character of the acting and the unreality of the character-dolls of the daisies. Weibgen (2009) describes the *performance* scene of the sixties in Czechoslovakia, indicating a before and after of the self-immolation of Jan Palach at the Wenceslas Square in 1969. Weibgen explains that the act of Palach invited “his audience to view him not only as a person, but as a painting among others” (WEIBGEN, 2009: 63) when he relates it to the performance works of following artists:

Presented by each of these artists as an unfixed and alterable entity, the body becomes a tool for reckoning with the world: not a border zone through which information passes between self and society, but a billboard upon which meaning may be inscribed and displayed (WEIBGEN, 2009: 55).

In case of the film of Věra Chytilová the protagonists are bodies and no real persons. They are beautifully colored images that assemble this work of art with a technique of arranging and overlapping like in a collage. At the same time, the daisies are bodies that take pleasure in a sensorial experience, which they ritualize through an ex-

cess of this experience, bringing us closer to the logic of a *performance*. They seduce with a conventional beauty of bodies, but they use the excess of a corporal experience—eating and drinking in a constant and disproportionate manner that culminates in a banquet of waste—as a protest and a subversion of the status quo.

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**THERE IS NO SALVATION IN EXISTENTIAL REPETITION WITHOUT AN ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE AND THIS PESSIMISTIC VIEW ON SOCIETY AND ON THE FUTURE IS COMPLETELY THE OPPOSITE OF THE SOCIALIST REALISM SPIRIT, THE TRIUMPHALIST DISCOURSE OF COMMUNISM**

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Weibgen cites the art-theorist Miško Šuvaković to reflect on the scene of the *happening* and the *performance* in communist Czechoslovakia and its political meaning: “In such an environment, ludism, individual anarchism, and experimental art were viewed exclusively as a political provocation and an attack on social normality” (Šuvaković en WEIBGEN, 2009: 58). The experimental form of the dramaturgical structure, the montage and, in general, of the discontinuous and strident representation is a stake for the rupture with everything conventional. Nevertheless, Weibgen brings up the term “provocation” in order to separate the artistic intention from the straight political act of Jan Palach that indeed had a clear message.

The other quality of the national *performance* that we see in *Daisies* is the merge of “Christian and pagan elements into a spiritually and politically charged scene” (WEIBGEN, 2009: 63). The character of martyrs has an ironic and ludic aspect, a postmodern appearance. It is part of a simulacrum without depth or solemnity. The mood

changes of the main characters—from tears to mechanic laughter and jumping—indicate this sense of a simulacrum that underlines the whole representation. The holiness of the floral wreath that should have transformed the girl into a virgin and the contrast to the religious allegories or the mockery of love in the castration scene accomplish the same goal. The director communicates with her characters through a typewriter and the letters appear on screen as shot with a machine gun. Her handwriting emerges also with the parts of intellectual montage in which the solemn burden relaxes and diminishes its importance. The meaning of denunciation gets lost with the association of simulacrum and fiction, but especially with the ambiguity of the story and the posture of its author.

The eroticism leans on the convention in order to subvert it, just as the filmic form does. The daisies are young and desirable girls because of their conventional beauty that, besides, interpret a infantilized role in which they seduce elder men, only to bid farewell before consuming the sexual act and to mock them—and us—with an excess, simulated emotions and profligacy. Their overacting and the interferences of the author question this status quo and, at the same time, pretend to criticize the main characters. The filmic language parts from the melodramatic convention of telling a story with some protagonists that have an apparent mission, but the narration circles again and again in a ludic manner over the same situations, leaving the act of seduction unconcluded. The characters do not make progress or change, although they seem to radicalize in their excess of destruction. This could be interpreted as an urging to death, but, again, they only simulate this desire and even their mortality. They cannot die, because they are not alive. They are brushstrokes of the author in order to express an opaque critique through ambiguity of the avant-garde and experimental form that could be sensed and intuited, but stays in the level of interpretation.

The film is an experimentation with eroticism and form and therefore it creates an ambiguity that leaves the censor with a dilemma. Chytilová opposes to the classical style of narration and dramaturgy in film and favors a non-linear and cyclic structure unlike the movies of the Socialist Realism. The lack of clearness, the incomprehension, the elements of Dadaism and Surrealism in this piece of art do not leave transparent what message the director wanted to divulge. Therefore, neither the Member of Parliament Pružinec nor the contemporary literature could decipher it in all its complexity. The eroticism in the film leans on the convention in order to subvert it. The desire and admiration end without the consummation of the sexual act with mockery, excesses and profligacy. There is no progress and no change. There is not even death for the protagonists.

At the end, it is not clear if *Daisies* is an attack on capitalism or socialism, if it has feminist tendencies or it criticizes feminism for the abundance of destruction. The film is like a slippery fish that resists classifications and totalizing interpretations. ■

## NOTES

- 1 John Seal explains that despite several papers and reviews of the movie that erroneously call the protagonists Marie I and Marie II (SORFA, 2015; NĚMCOVÁ, ŠARA Y SORFA, 2015; LIM, 2001) the characters are named Jarmila and Jitka (SEAL, 2012). Our analysis discovers that the girls use multiple names: in one scene they are called Jirinka (the dark haired girl) and Jarmila (the blond one). In the scene of the butterflies and in the castration-scene its Julie and when the man knocks persistently on the door she converts to Marie.
- 2 An exception are two papers of Petra Hanáková »Voices from Another World: Feminine Space and Masculine Intrusion in Sedmikrásky and Vražda ing. Čerta« (2005) and »The Feminist Style in Czechoslovak Cinema: the Feminine Imprint in the Films of Věra Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová« (2014).

- 3 Own translation: "Vážené Národní shromáždění, podávám interpelaci jménem 21 poslanců, v níž bychom chtěli ukázat, jak se plýtvá penězi, které by státní rozpočet potřeboval.

Podle zásad práce a usnesení NS se má NS vyjadřovat k zásadním otázkám ekonomického, politického a kulturního života naší republiky.

Jsme přesvědčeni o tom, že 2 filmy, které jsme viděli a které podle Literárních novin mají mít premiéru v tomto měsíci, ukazují "zásadní cestu našeho kulturního života", po které žádný poctivý dělník, rolník a inteligent jít nemůže a nepůjde. Protože dva filmy "Sedmikrásky" a "O slavnosti a hostech" natočené v čs. ateliérech na Barrandově nemají s naší republikou, socialismem a ideály komunismu nic společného.

Žádám proto ministra kultury a informací s. Hoffmana, kulturní výbor NS a Ústřední komisi lidové kontroly a vůbec celé NS, aby se radikálně zabývaly touto situací a vyvodily patřičné závěry proti všem, kteří tyto filmy připravovali a zejména proti těm, kteří byli ochotni tyto zmetky zaplatit. Ptáme se režiséra Němce a Chytilové, jaké pracovní, politické a zábavné poučení přinesou tyto zmetky našemu pracujícímu lidu v továrnách, na polích, na stavbách a na ostatních pracovištích. My se ptáme z tohoto místa všech těchto "také kulturních pracovníků", jak dlouho ještě všem poctivě pracujícím budete otravovat život, jak dlouho budete ještě šlapat po socialistických vymoženostech, jak dlouho si budete hrát s nervy dělníků a rolníků a vůbec, jakou demokracii zavádíte? My se vás ptáme, proč myslíte, že máme pohraniční stráž, která plní těžký bojový úkol, aby se k nám nedostali nepřátelé, zatímco my, soudruhu ministře národní obrany a soudruhu ministře financí, platíme královské peníze vnitřním nepřítelům, necháváme je šlapat a ničit, soudruhu ministře zemědělství a výživy, v našich plosech práce" (PRUŽINEC, 1967).

- 4 The name which the protagonist Humbert of the novel *Lolita* (NABOKOV, 1975) used to make reference to Lolita and, in general, to all young girls that provoked sexual desire in elder men.
- 5 Intellectual montage is one of the methods formulated by the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein. Through a dialectic collision of two images a new idea or sense is

created. One of these images is external to the situation of the narrated scene.

- 6 According to the conventional interpretation of the model of Aristotelian drama, a profound description of the characters is requested in order to make them believable, to create identification with them and to reach the point of catharsis during the climax.
- 7 Allude to a meaning that is not contained in none of the images juxtaposed. The montage creates a meaning through association.
- 8 When the essence of a situation depends on the coexistence of the elements of a shot, one should not cut, nor fragment the action to avoid a negative effect on authenticity.

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## EROTISM AND FORM AS SUBVERSION IN DAISIES

### Abstract

Erotism, ambiguity and experimentation convert the movie *Daisies* in such a subversive work that even after fifty years it is worth to talk about. The existentialism and the disillusionment of this avant-garde-piece are expressed through the performance of its main characters: two dolls, two images or two contemporary artists that mock and destroy everything that is considered as normal and correct. Věra Chytilová's critic on Czechoslovakian society of the sixties is oblique, but latent in every gesture, every composition and every mean of montage. In this article we track down the strategies of this director from the Czech New Wave to create a revolutionary artwork that turns away from the representation of the socialist realism. It is a critical film towards all conventions that makes it impossible for censors, spectators or critics to straitjacket it. Our analysis reveals its mechanism, which creates fascination and rejection through seduction and estrangement in an ambiguous manner.

### Keywords

*Daisies*; Subversion; Censorship; Czechoslovakia; Věra Chytilová; Czech New Wave.

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## EL EROTISMO Y LA FORMA COMO SUBVERSIÓN EN LAS MARGARITAS

### Resumen

El erotismo, la ambigüedad y la experimentación hacen de *Las margaritas* una película tan subversiva que a sus cincuenta años sigue dando que hablar. El existencialismo y el desencanto de esta obra de vanguardia se expresan a través de la *performance* de sus personajes principales: dos muñecas, dos imágenes o dos artistas contemporáneas que se burlan y destruyen todo lo que se considera normal y correcto. La crítica de Věra Chytilová a la sociedad checoslovaca de los sesenta es oblicua, pero está latente en cada gesto, composición y en cada recurso de montaje. En este artículo rastreamos las estrategias de esa directora de la Nueva Ola Checa en su creación de una obra revolucionaria sin adscribirse a la representación del realismo socialista. Es una obra crítica hacia todas las convenciones que no permite a los censores, espectadores y analistas ningún encasillamiento. En nuestro análisis desvelamos los mecanismos que hacen funcionar la fascinación y el rechazo a través de la seducción y el distanciamiento de manera ambigua.

### Palabras clave

*Las margaritas*; subversión; censura; Checoslovaquia; Věra Chytilová; Nueva Ola Checa.

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# DIALOGUE

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**A CONVERSATION WITH  
THE GEORGIAN FILMMAKER ON  
THE ORIGINS OF HIS FILMS,  
HIS FIRST TEACHERS AND  
SOVIET CENSORSHIP**

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**MARLEN KHUTSIEV**

How it all began



A CONVERSATION WITH THE  
GEORGIAN FILMMAKER ON THE  
ORIGINS OF HIS FILMS, HIS FIRST  
TEACHERS AND SOVIET CENSORSHIP

# MARLEN KHUTSIEV

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

CARLOS MUGUIRO

### INTRODUCTION

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Marlen Khutsiev and Luis Buñuel shared the Special Jury Prize at the 1965 Venice International Film Festival for the films *I am Twenty* (Mne dvadtsat let, 1965) and *Simon of the Desert* (Simón del desierto, 1965), respectively. As would occur again towards the end of the 1980s, for a Soviet film to be awarded a prize in a major international competition at that time was somewhat predictable when certain cultural geopolitical variables, in this case support of the *Soviet thaw*<sup>1</sup>, always significant factors in the outcomes of events of this kind, are taken into consideration. *I am Twenty*, however, was far from an exponent of the Soviet regime's newfound open-mindedness with regard cinema. On the contrary<sup>2</sup>, publicly lambasted by none other than Soviet Communist Party First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev himself and subsequently truncated, stripped of its original title (*Ilyich's Gate*) and released, let us say, *anachronistically*, the film was already a cinematographic symbol of the end of Khrushchev's *Ot-tepel*<sup>3</sup> well before it reached Venice.

During that week at the end of August, Khutsiev found himself mingling with the likes of Satyajit Ray, Miloš Forman, Luchino Visconti, Arthur Penn and Jean-Luc Godard, some of the most illustrious names in the film world. The mere presence of Buñuel's name alongside his own on the prize winners list was a form of recognition singularly close to the heart of the 40-year-old filmmaker. As slight in build as Buñuel himself and Georgian by birth, Khutsiev had been a member of the first class to graduate from the VGIK after the war and had already made two films considered true emblems of the Thaw period: *Spring on Zarechnaya Street* (Vesna na Zarechnoy ulitse, 1956) and *The Two Fedors* (Dva Fyodora, 1959). His talent was of a kind not commonly found in the USSR, capable of capturing the intensity of life and transcending it as just a handful of modern Western filmmakers were able. Indeed, despite so much being consigned to the cutting-room floor, the scenes in *I am Twenty* still managed to retain a vital force which no amount of re-editing could eradicate. Be that as it may, the award lent legitimacy to a



Marlen Khutsiev (photo: Sergio Oksman)

mutilated film which, from then on, would always exist as an incomplete reality referring to another, *Ilyich's Gate*, which became, in turn, a *phantom movie*. Much of the history of Soviet cinema should be interpreted on the basis of this dual parameter of analysis, as defined by Naum Kleiman: the films made and the films never seen, the two being inextricable. The films and their phantoms. The history of *I am Twenty/Ilyich's Gate* conforms to this dualism<sup>4</sup>. All the controversy aside, the award failed to consecrate Khutsiev in the eyes of Western critics and, thanks in part also to his age and the emergence of a new generation of Russian filmmakers, he gradually faded into a somewhat remote, spectral figure.

In 2013, on the occasion of its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Venice Film Festival commissioned 70 short commemorative films by different filmmakers identified with the event. Khutsiev's healthy longevity meant not only that he was able to contribute to the celebrations with a short, ironic film about an imaginary encounter between Chekhov and Tolstoy, but also that, rather bewildered, he found himself thrust once again into the international limelight and *re-discovered* by many Western critics. Until then, and following Venice in 1965, Khutsiev's appearances, for example at the Berlinale in 1992 and the La Rochelle Film Festival in 2005, had been sporadic and

somewhat low-key. Not even with the advent of *Perestroika* (which opened the door to the distribution of many Soviet films in Europe, including those of Aleksei Gherman, and also saw a new version of *Ilyich's Gate* being made available) did the figure of Khutsiev kindle the interest of the media or movie buffs. However, in the years following his reappearance in 2013, thanks, in part, to the systematic efforts of certain critics, such as the Russian Boris Nelepo, Khutsiev became the subject of dozens of tributes and retrospectives at festivals (including Locarno, where he also received a Lifetime achievement Leopard, Mar del Plata, Mexico's FICUNAM and GoEast in Wiesbaden), in cinematheques (The Museum of Modern Art —MoMA— in New York, the Filmoteca Española in Madrid, the Cinemateca Portuguesa or the Arsenal in Berlin) and at universities, such as Cambridge and University College London.

The conversation reproduced here was held in May 2014 in Madrid, when Khutsiev was invited to the Imaginaindia festival. The great barrage of retrospectives and tributes, of which the 2015 Locarno festival can be taken as the high point, was yet to come, but even so the filmmaker was already bemused by all the sudden interest in his work. "I've just come from England and am flabbergasted; I'm astounded there is so much interest in my films. I have never been in Spain before... I have practically not travelled at all. They didn't send me to any festivals, you understand. I went to Venice once. A secretary of the Communist Party insisted, so I went. And I went to present *Infinitas* in Berlin. And that's it. I've never been anywhere else. I've not left Russia. But now, on this trip ... I really don't know. Until now I've just got on peacefully with my life, even though I've found it very difficult to work for some time now." The conversation got under way with *I am Twenty/Ilyich's Gate* and led on to other subjects, such as his memories of his teachers or his attachment to painting.



**I would like to start with *I am Twenty/Ilyich's Gate*. Much has been written about the controversy it stirred among the highest political echelons, Nikita Khrushchev's speech and the re-edit of the film, but I would like to hear your side of things. To begin at the beginning, can you explain the origin of the film?**

All my films have come into being to solve or address a question which took shape in the previous one. This was no exception: *Ilyich's Gate* or *I am Twenty* grew out of *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*. When I was shooting that movie, I felt a very deep sense of nostalgia for Moscow. That's where it came from: nostalgia. I like Moscow or, rather, I liked the Moscow of that period. I had always lived in an old neighbourhood and I used to love wandering around aimlessly. But when I went to work at the Odessa film studio, where I made my first two films, I started to miss the city quite intensely. It may seem strange, but the film was born of that emotional state. That is why, apart from the stories of the characters, the film is Moscow itself. You can recognise me in the rambling walks the protagonist goes on, first thing in the morning or at night.

**What you are saying reminds me of Brinton Tench Coxe's words. He wrote that one of the most disconcerting aspects of the film in political terms was none other than your portrayal of the city as a transmuting, cinematic space, reflecting Walter Benjamin's description in his essay *Moscow*, "a kind of animate, protean, transformative presence that can alter its appearance at will" (COXE, 2008: 217). An image of Moscow at odds with the vision of the city as the eternal, sacred centre of the USSR, as Stalinism saw it. On top of this sense of nostalgia, did the film initially have a literary basis?**

No. Someone who noticed a certain similarity in the dialogues said that the film was based on Erich Maria Remarque's *Three comrades* (*Trois camarades*), but that is not so. The plot and the pro-

tagonists were mine. The three characters are different portraits of myself. Sergei gives voice to my reflections from the period in which the Thaw took place in our country. He does nothing but think about what has happened and how it has come about, very pensively, from a generational perspective as well, as I did. The second protagonist, Slava, who has a young son, is also me, because I had a small child at that time as well and I used to go out to get milk for him. And



*I am Twenty* (Mne dvadtsat let, Marlen Khutsiev, 1965)

the third protagonist, Kolia, the most seductive, is ultimately everything I have always lacked. I have always regarded that kind of ease when dealing with women with great envy. I envisaged the film as two long movements, each like a feature film in itself, making sure that there was no ethical conflict in the first one, that is to say, without prejudging anything, showing how people of my age lived, how we fell ill, how spring cheered us up, how delighted we were to meet up and share those years. I needed to immerse the audience in that flow of everyday life and for the internal conflicts to emerge from there. I didn't want to make a sociological or moralis-



*I am Twenty* (Mne dvadtsat let, Marlen Khutsiev, 1965)

tic film as such formulas were understood at the time, with external dilemmas repeated a hundred times.

**All the same, despite not formulating any express ethical or political criticism, the film fell victim of one of the most dramatic cases of censorship of the day. Certainly the case which had the greatest public impact. Khrushchev put the film down at an event held in the Kremlin convened expressly for that purpose and attended by six hundred artists and writers. His words appeared in *Pravda* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1963. Khrushchev wrote: "These are not the sort of people society can rely upon. They are not fighters or remakers of the world. They are morally sick. [...] And the filmmakers think that young people ought to decide how to live for themselves, without asking their elders for counsel or help." The film raised questions or concerns about the present which found voice, above all, when the protagonist meets the ghost of his father, who had died in the Great Patriotic War (Second World War). How did you interpret his words?**

Indeed, the characters have doubts. In order to clarify this matter for you properly, I have to go back to my childhood, a long time ago. I have to tell you how it all began. Do you mind?

### **Of course not, go ahead.**

Not long ago, someone made me a present of somebody's memoirs in which my mother is referred to as "the beautiful Nina Uteneleva"; that's how they put it. In her youth she must have been an extremely beautiful woman, so I have been told, the greatest beauty in Tbilisi. The "beautiful Nina Uteneleva," note the surname. It was actually Utenelishvili, but they changed it to the Russian style, as occurred after the revolution with other surnames belonging to the *intelligentsia* and aristocrats who adapted to the new circumstances. My grandfather was a teacher in the Cadet Corps, where my uncles also studied. Even when he was retired, he held the rank of General to the Tsar. That's my lineage on my mother's side. But my father was a Communist, even before the revolution. When the Soviets came to power, my mother had to work to make ends meet and that is where she met my father. That's how they got together: my father went to see her parents, pulled out a pistol, put it on the table and said: "If you do not give me your daughter's hand, I'll shoot myself right now, right here in front of you." So they said, "Marry her, marry her right away." And that's how they got married and I was born; I was born of the revolution... My name speaks for itself: Marlen, *Mar* from Marx and *Len* from Lenin. The second episode takes us to when I was 12 years old. The death of my father, though my father didn't simply die. One night in 1937, the NKVD police entered our home and arrested him while I was asleep. I slept in the same room as he did. There was my bed and alongside it there was his, the two right next to each other. But it happened in such a way that I didn't realise. In the morning, I looked over and my father wasn't there. "Where's my father?" I asked. My father lived with another woman then. "He has gone away for work," she replied. True enough, he used to travel around for work, but he had never left like that, in the middle of the night, without saying. At first, I was surprised, but I believed her. Very soon, that sto-

ry started to seem a bit unusual to me, a strange trip, and I started to wonder when he would come back. He never did. I had a fantastic father who disappeared from my bed. I remember him as a surprisingly musical person. He taught himself to play the piano, he played the guitar very well...

**That autobiographical dimension is, of course, very important when it comes to understanding the essence of the film.**

Yes, but there is a third element you need to know before you can understand it all properly. I've already told you I didn't fight in the Great Patriotic War (Second World War), but I did live through that period and was fully aware of everything that was going on. I was 20 years old when it finished. I lived in Tbilisi throughout the conflict. I went to school there. Not once did I think "What if we lose the war?;" not a single time. Not even when the Germans were on the verge of crossing the mountain pass, when the air-raid sirens went off, did I have the slightest doubt, you know. In December 1943, my mother was on tour with her company. She was an actress and occasionally travelled around Georgia with a theatre group. That's what she was doing at the end of that year. I celebrated that New Year's Eve at home on my own. I bought half a bottle of wine (you could buy it in one of the basements without a ration book), a handful of beans, some onion and that was all. There was no electric light and a little lamp I had made myself was all the light there was. A loose wick threaded through a wire made of hairpins floating in kerosene which provided some light. I placed a mirror in front of me. I served myself wine in a small tumbler, not in a wineglass, toasted my reflection and drank to victory. That's how I spent the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 1943. The Germans were defeated in Stalingrad in February.

**It's night, an empty bed, the light of an oil lamp, a mirror, your father and you, a time of uncertainty, historically speaking, a farewell that never**

**took place, the most absolute solitude... And the doubts of a 20-year-old about his place in history. You're recounting the central scene in *I am Twenty*.**

Of course, and I'll tell you more. In the *I am Twenty* version, not in *Ilyich's Gate*, when the father leaves, the camera pulls back and pans out to a general scene, and there's a long monologue. He never said those words to me, but could easily have come out with them, just as they sound in the film. He had a good job and his own car. Once, I don't know what happened, but I was running late and my father drove me to school. I asked him to stop at the corner of the street where my school was, so as not to arrive there by car. My father was happy I did that. He was a very unobtrusive, genuine person. Genuine, just how a Communist should be according to the ideals of the time. Do you see what I'm getting at?

**I recall the dialogue between Sergei and his father, one of those unforgettable moments in Soviet cinema, not only because of the emotional dimension of Sergei meeting his dead father, but because it possesses the rare ability to condense the historical and generational dilemma of those who did not make, but rather inherited the revolution: the doubts to which you were referring.**

- "I want to go on the attack with you, I want to die by your side," says Sergei.
- "That's absurd," replies his father. 'That was our job. Your job is to live, not to die.'
- "Give me some advice then. Tell me what I should do."
- "How old are you?"
- "23."
- "I," says his father, "died twenty-one years ago, so I can give you no advice: I'm younger than you. It is up to you to solve your problems."

My film *Infinity* (Beskonechnost, 1992) came entirely from that scene. It started to take shape while I was working on that movie. All of a sud-



*I am Twenty* (Mne dvadtsat let, Marlen Khutsiev, 1965)

den one day, the new film came to me as an apparition, all at the same time: the title, the presence of the double, how they meet, the dancefloor scene and even the music that would accompany the sequence, everything except the end. I couldn't work out how to split the older and younger versions of the same character apart again. And much later I came up with that ending in which they're walking along a small brook. At first just one metre separates them, nothing insurmountable, but then it broadens into a great river and the two banks are far apart.

**I'd like to return to your childhood a moment. What was your first taste of cinema like?**

The first memory I have of cinema is *Chapaev* (Chapaev, 1934), the mythical *Chapaev*, directed by the Vasilyev brothers and with the legendary Borís Babochkin in the leading role. I remember seeing that first film vividly. I must have been nine or ten years old at the most. I have never bothered to pin that memory down exactly, but it was a love for life. *Peter the First* (Pyotr Pervyy, Vladimir Petrov, 1937) also made a great impression on me, although by then I was slightly older and the effect was less marked. But I must say that, though I liked the cinema, becoming a film director never crossed my mind back then. I wanted

to be a painter. I wanted to be a painter with all my heart and I constantly dream of going back to painting, even at my age, and I'm always putting it off... Putting off what I have always most wanted to do. That's not all. I didn't even imagine that you could study filmmaking or that there was a *school for making movies*. But that's where I ended up, at the VGIK, as a result of a number of coincidences.

**What was joining the VGIK like?**

You have to place yourself in 1945, the year the war ended, the year of Victory, which was precisely the year I started in the VGIK. That year the admission process took place later than usual. They normally did the tests at the beginning of summer, but that time they did them in autumn because the VGIK had to come back from Almaty in Central Asia, to which it had been evacuated, and had to set up in Moscow again. During the war, the entire film industry had moved to Almaty, where the so-called Unified Central Studio was. Remember that Eisenstein shot *Ivan the Terrible* (Ivan Groznyy, 1944) there in Kazakhstan, in Almaty, during the war. When I enrolled, I signed up for Igor Savchenko's classes. I had already seen three of his films, *The Song of the Cossack Golota* (Duma pro Kazaka Golotu, 1937), based on the story by Arkady Gaidar, *Riders* (Vsadniki, 1942), and finally his famous *Bogdan Khmelnitsky* (Bogdan Khmelnitskiy, 1941). Of course, I liked his films, but you can't imagine the extent to which that decision proved providential. Savchenko was an incredibly charming person, with a very expressive body, blond with a lot of hair and very thick eyebrows as well. He spoke with a slight stutter which was most endearing. And from day one, his classes were spellbinding. Let me tell you in detail. Savchenko regularly set us word association exercises to get us used to metaphorical thinking. We would give us a word and we had to invent an association, say what we linked that word with. He taught us to get used to metaphorical thinking. From the very outset, Savchenko showed no

interest in our learning the trade or profession. He wanted to teach us to construct associations, to make metaphorical chains, through images, because art without metaphor, without the ability to create associations, is not art.

**Were you taught by Alexander Dovzhenko?**

No. Dovzhenko was around, particularly in the first few years, and I knew him by sight, of course, but he taught the screenwriters, he taught dramaturgy. But, to be honest, he didn't seem very nice. You would see Dovzhenko walk by with all the solemnity of that all-important, high-and-mighty filmmaker, but with Savchenko, you could say 'Here's an artist'. He inspired a completely different kind of admiration in me.

**Savchenko died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1950. Were you still at the institute when he died?**

He died at the age of 44, quite suddenly. Yes, he didn't even get to see my final degree project, let alone my films. A huge loss. If you remember, the main character in my first film, *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*, was called Savchenko, Sasha Savchenko, precisely as a tribute to my mentor. That's not all. I also called my son Igor after him. Savchenko was my guiding light, but because of his passion and example when it came to film-making.

**Did you get the chance to meet Boris Barnet at the institute?**

Yes, I did my work experience with him and then worked on the film he shot in Moldova, *Lynana* (1955). He was a very peculiar man. Sturdy, quite tall, he looked like Feodor Chaliapin. There were even rumours that he was Chaliapin's illegitimate son. He looked a lot like him and was just as exuberant in life. And a big drinker too. He was friends with Savchenko; they were great friends. He suffered a lot, there's no doubt about it.

**His suicide in 1965 also brings to mind the death of Gennady Shpalikov, the screenwriter of *I am Twenty/Ilyich's Gate*, who also took his own life in 1974.**

But Barnet and Shpalikov were not a bit alike, not one little bit. My relationship with Shpalikov was complicated. But for many reasons, I would prefer not to go into that subject. One is the myth which credits him with the authorship of the screenplay for the film *Ilyich's Gate* (*Zastava Iliyicha*), but that was not really so. He simply took part at a certain point, when I fell out with my friend, co-author and classmate because of *Spring on Zarechnaya Street* and, as we had rowed (we had different points of view), he asked us to remove his name from the credits. And so Shpalikov remained in the credits, while Felix Mironer, who should have appeared in the credits of *I am Twenty*, isn't there. Let's move on to another question, please.

**Now that you mention Felix Mironer, I would like to go back to the VGIK to talk about your classmates. Draw me a picture of that first group of post-war filmmakers.**

As you say, my best friend Felix Mironer was part of that group. We shared a room in the hall of residence and did our final degree project together. My first film, *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*, was shot from a screenplay of his as well. I also studied with Alov and Naumov, very famous film directors in our country. And a world-renowned figure, Sergei Parajanov, was also in my year. There were more people, of course, but I'm mentioning the ones who became famous. Grigory Chukhrai and other directors studied in different years. I was great friends with Mikhail Schweitzer, who had already finished studying when I started, because his wife was studying with us. He introduced me to another great director, also from Leningrad, Vladimir Vengerov. That was my circle of acquaintances and friends. I don't know if you are familiar with the work of these filmmakers, but some of their films are extraordinary. They are certainly on my list of favourites: Schweitzer's *Vremya, vperyod!*

[Time, Forward!] (1965), Vengerov's *Rabochiy posyolok* [Workers' settlement] (1966), and so on. Extremely beautiful films. If I widen the circle beyond my friends to other fellow students at the VGIK whose films I still like a lot, I would particularly like to stress Yuli Karasik, an extraordinary director. I strongly recommend two of his films: *Dikaya sobaka Dingo* [Wild Dog Dingo] (1962) and *Shestoe iyulya* [The Sixth of July] (1968), on the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party uprising, with a formidable portrayal of Lenin, completely different and totally unconventional.



*July Rain* (Iyulski dozhd, Marlen Khutsiev, 1967)

**It's very moving to hear you speak of your colleagues. Probably no other director in the world has invited so many directors to take part in his films as actors. Vasiliy Shukshin in *The two Fedors*, Alexander Mitta in *July Rain* (Iyulskiy dozhd, 1967), Tarkovsky and Konchalovsky in *I am Twenty*... They all appear in your filmography. Your films are full of filmmakers.**

To be fair, I should say that most of them were still not directors when I directed them or chose them as actors. *The two Fedors* was Vasiliy Shukshin's first appearance on screen. Nobody knew him before that. He acted remarkably well in the film and then he went on to become a very well-known actor, and a director as well. Andrei Tarkovsky, meanwhile, was seven years my junior. He did his work experience with me in the VGIK and in one interview he even said that, while he had studied under Mikhail Romm, it was alongside Marlen Khutsiev that he truly learned to make movies. He acknowledged that, although, true enough, he never said it again... Sometimes I am asked why I gave him such an irritable, unfriendly character to play in *I am Twenty*. It had nothing to do with his personality, but rather his temperament, which fitted in with the physical mould I was looking for. In the scene with the great argument, when he asks the protagonist what he takes seriously in life, you also have the cameraman Fedorovsky; Konchalovsky, who you see for barely a minute; Olga Gobzeva, who is now a nun and was an actress in a provincial theatre back then; Pavel Fil, a writer; and Natalya Ryazantseva, another writer. In short, I wanted living people to be in it and so I made use of the people I knew, and it ended up becoming a sort of involuntary portrait of a generation. My assistants tried quite hard to convince me that I should use professional actors and I even did rehearsals to show them they were wrong. The actors acted out each response mimetically, but those who weren't actors lived it as part and parcel of, let's call it, their everyday world. Their lives were like that. It was a kind of, not exactly experiment, but a new method, at least in the USSR, to make acting more veracious. And, in fact, there is always someone who is not an actor acting in my films. Provided they fit the physical requirements, I like to shoot scenes with people who have never been in front of the camera. The same thing occurred with Mitta. I believe he has always said he was interested in this way



of directing actors and that he decided to accept the role of Vladic because he was interested in improvisation. Allow me to digress here a moment; I learned all this from Neorealism. As soon as I discovered it, it became a fetish of mine: De Sica's *Bicycle thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948), Germi's *Path of hope* (*Il cammino della speranza*, 1950) and other neorealist films. If we're looking for influences, I must mention, without a doubt, the work of Rossellini and all those filmmakers. Later on I came across the art of Fellini. When he came to Moscow for a festival, at the same time as all the problems with *I am Twenty/Ilyich's Gate*, he heard about it and wanted to meet me. So we met up in person, I would even say made friends, because after that I went to his house several times and met Giulietta Masina. I even danced a waltz with her!

**Tell me, what do you think of *The Return of Vasil Bortnikov* (*Vozvrashsheniye Vasiliya Bortnikova*, 1953), Vsevolod Pudovkin's last film?**

It's an absolutely unremarkable film. No way is it as good as the rest of Pudovkin's work.

**I ask because some critics and historians, such as your friend Naum Kleiman, place symbolic importance on the film, a first sign of the changes that were to come in the USSR as of 1956 with the so-called Thaw. In any case, I mention it here on account of the idea of return as an important component of estrangement, that bewilderment which confuses a character when he returns to his home sometime after his departure (or death). A place to which he no longer belongs, but is his home. It is a situation which is repeated in a number of your films. An estrangement which even has a political angle, already evident in *I am Twenty*, with the father who returns and finds that his son is older than he is.**

*Infinity* is about that, certainly. And *Epilogue* (*Poslesloviye*, 1983), but return wasn't the main

theme in that case. The film which conforms to what you describe is definitely *Infinity*. And that is probably down to two things. When they grow old, everyone eventually begins to think: "What is all this? How long do I have left?," and they start thinking about the end of human life, about death. I also started thinking about it and eventually overcame the fear of death, and this film is dedicated to that. And then, and this



*Epilogue* (*Poslesloviye*, Marlen Khutsiev, 1983)

would be the second reason, man doesn't only return to the places where he has been, but also returns mentally to events in which he did not take any personal part, but have interested him all his life. That's why my protagonist, despite never fighting, suddenly finds himself at the start of the First World War, even though he could never have been there. What can I say? Mentally, I have been here and there as well! As for the Patriotic War, I should have joined up in the last year, but for a number of medical reasons, asthma for starters, they didn't let me. Since then I have felt in debt to my peers, young people like me, who did fight. That's the plain truth! I have always really wanted to make a film about that and didn't do it at the time, but afterwards I shot a documentary called *Lyudi 1941 goda* [*People of 1941*] (2001).



**Bernard Eisenschitz referred to the encounter between the past and the present that comes up in some of your films, particularly in *Epilogue*, and summarises what you are explaining.**

But it isn't anything mystical, please understand, it is simply to do with memory, with the preservation of the memory of others and what to do with the past<sup>5</sup>. It is as though the film suggests that they will always be alive and you can meet them again. I don't like unadulterated spiritualist pomposity at all, just as I don't like making a show of formal effectism. There are directors who are very concerned that the audience should recognise what they know how to do, how well they have brought it off. I never think about that. All my films are born of reflection and feelings, and that is what I keep in mind. It is something that has accompanied me all my life, it's at the root of what I do. What's more, and I came to understand this after some time, nothing ages in art, particularly our art, as much as that which is built on the priority of form, which is subject to changing fashions. The most important thing is the essence, the internal form, the most important thing in art is man. I don't like pure abstraction. It is like a rug, which can decorate a setting, as pure decoration, but offers nothing to the soul or to the spirit...

**In that sense, do you think that, in general, your cinema has been misunderstood or not understood properly?**

In our country, the critics are very attentive to what's going on in the West. But speaking about that internal form I'm referring to, no critic has so far paid any attention to one feature which appears over and over again in all my films: I am referring to how they begin and how they end, because they almost never start with something tied in with the plot or in a functional manner. They always begin with a kind of opening, with a long introduction, with the creation of an emotional state, with scenes in which there is not even any text. And then the endings. I am going to tell you, and



The filmmaker, during the interview in Madrid, May 23rd, 2014  
(Photo: Sergio Oksman)

don't think I'm boasting, but if any of the Western directors or our film experts had seen the end of *In-finitas*, but shot by a Western director, they would have written and spoken wonders of it, because it is—indeed, I see it as such—a very interesting, metaphorical solution, but in our country they pay no attention to such things. No one has realised that each and every one of my movies—except *The two Fedors*, which ends with a gaze and a remark, a final response—has an emotional ending with a metaphorical meaning. There is no storyline between the main characters in any of the last scenes of my films, not even in *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*—the scene in which the wind blows all the papers on the desk into the air—, in *Ilyich's Gate*—the fallen soldiers marching and morning breaking in the city—, or in *July Rain*, with the veterans' reunion, which is also the end of the movie. I have repeated it in all my movies. *Epilogue*, which is based on dialogue, ends with an unexpectedly long pause, with photographs being developed, a storm, the protagonist looking and thinking there is an old man on the balcony opposite. *Infinity* concludes with that story of the river we have spoken about. And the next film I'm going to make, about Chekhov and Tolstoy, won't end with a plot development either. It's going to have a metaphorical ending. I guess it's something I like.



Over Eternal Peace (Nad Vechnim Pakoem, Isaac Levitan, 1894)

**We haven't talked about painting and I think it's important to dwell on the subject, not only because you have always acknowledged that painting was your earliest vocation, but also because of the direct references to pictures and artists that you make in your films. There are quite a few explicit references to the great Russian realist and landscape painting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *I am Twenty*, for instance, the characters go to an exhibition of the Itinerants, *The rejoicing of the Peredvístzhniki*. In *July Rain*, one of the characters compares a landscape to a picture by Isaac Levitan...**

I am very keen on painting, that's right. Russian painting, certainly. Ilya Repin, for example. Repin is a fabulous painter. His portraits are amazing. And Levitan, as you say, as well. There is a place on the Volga, near Kostroma, called Plyos. I was there once and went in search of the place, the exact location, from which Levitan overlooked the landscape and painted his famous painting *Above the Eternal Peace*. I saw it, I stopped right there. And I noted a strange difference: it's just like that, but also a bit different. That was the spot, but in Levitan's picture you get the feeling that the viewer is even higher up. And I understood why. In the picture, in the distance you have the beyond, the clouds, but Levitan crossed those clouds with another small, light cloud, which is lower down.

That small detail generates the feeling of looking over the cloud, as if you were on it. That decision creates the sensation of seeing the landscape from an enormous height. Of the Spanish painters, there are two I like a great deal: Velazquez and, above all, El Greco. And of the Italian masters, Botticelli. Unfortunately, I've never seen the original of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. I went to see it when I was in Milan and everything was closed; a great shame. I'm sure I could look at it for hours. Returning to the subject of landscape, if you notice, in all my films you can see that rotation of the seasons of the year. It even features in the titles: *Spring on Zarechnaya Street*, *It was May* (*Byl mesyats may*, 1970), *July Rain*. I know no other way. We live in the real world, in nature, and the passing of the seasons and changes in nature, the wind and the rain encompass my films too. Well, they are no more than features of my own character. After an interview I gave years ago, the journalist chose the title: "I am a contemplator" (Я созерцатель).

**Like in Ivan Kramskoy's picture, *The contemplator*.**

Exactly, it is something inherent in me. In life in general. We are talking a lot here, but I don't normally talk so much. I am more the silent type. I listen and watch, and yet I don't do it thinking: "Aha, this may come in useful one day." No, it's my natural state in life. Interest in a person, getting to know them. Now for example, I've met you, I've met Dushitsa, the cameraman who is filming us. I look at him and it's interesting to see how absolutely absorbed he is in his camera. That's what I said a moment ago about one of my qualities, about where all this comes from. I said I am a contemplator. Indeed, I am a contemplator. I like dreaming about things, but without focusing too much, thinking, immersing myself in a situation "What if, what would be if such and such happened to me?" And that's how I came up at the time with *July Rain*. It was raining and I took shelter in a phone box and started imagining... What



The filmmaker, during the interview in Madrid, May 23rd, 2014  
(Photo: Sergio Oksman)

if a girl came running up? I would give her my jacket, she would rush off, and then we'd start to phone each other...

**People who have been touchstones in your life, such as your father or Savchenko, have marked the course of this conversation. I would like to draw it to a close with another of your teachers, Mikhail Romm, who entrusted Elem Klimov and yourself with the completion of his posthumous film *And Still I Believe...* (I vsyo-taki ya veryu..., 1974).**

I met Mikhail Ilyich through Daniil Bravitsky, a writer and later a director, who had worked with Mikhail Romm. Through him and through Vasily Shukshin, who had been a student of his. We developed a very good relationship. When Khrushchev criticised *Ilyich's Gate*, particularly the famous scene between Sergei and his father, Mikhail Romm stood up, turned to Khrushchev, who had broken off his speech for an instant, and said: "Nikita Sergeyevich, I understood that scene differently." And he went on talking. So he contradicted



*The Contemplator* (Sozertsatel, Ivan Kramskoy, 1876)

him in public when everyone was afraid to do that. So yes, I had a very good relationship with Mikhail Ilyich. I remember once when I was shooting a documentary in Paris, he came to pay me a visit and we arranged to meet up. But there was one other supremely important moment in our relationship: he was one of the very first people to see the complete version of *Ilyich's Gate*, the original version, which still went under that name. We were alone in the screening room. He saw the film, we went outside and he stood in silence next to the screening-room door, smoking long and hard. I was nervous. I thought: "Why is he saying nothing to me and just standing there smoking?" After a while, he came up to me and uttered just one sentence: "Marlen, you've justified your life." ■

## NOTES

- \* My thanks to: Qazi Abdur Rahim, Sergio Oksman, Olga Korobenko, and the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Madrid.
- 1 In 1958, *The Cranes are Flying* (Letyat zhuravli), directed by Mikhail Kalatozov, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, post-Stalinist Soviet cinema's first major international award. *Ballad of a soldier* (Ballada o soldate) by Grigoriy Chukhrai was awarded a Bafta in 1961 and was nominated for the Oscar for the Best screenplay written directly for the screen. In 1962, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (Ivanovo detstvo) won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. This was the first and most emblematic international endorsement of the new generation of Soviet filmmakers.
  - 2 At first, the Gorky Studio, which specialised in films for children and the youth, welcomed and was even enthusiastic about the *Ilyich's Gate* project. According to the studio's report of the meeting held on 16 December 1960 to discuss the project quoted by Artem Demenok in *Iskusstvo Kino* in 1988, the screenwriter V. Solovyev, member of the First Creative Association, in charge of overseeing the film's production, stated that "this is the only screenplay I know that speaks openly, earnestly about our time, about what's really important, what excites us. [...] This is a wonderfully rare thing, and really needed today." (DEME-NOK, 1988: 97, quoted in COXE, 2008). Those attending the meeting shared Solovyev's opinion. However, there was some concern as to how the Ministry of Culture would see things. "If we have to," V. Ezhov explained, "we'll go to Ekaterina Alekseyevna Furtseva (Minister of Culture), and she'll understand it. We'll tell her it's the first profound, real exploration of the question of contemporary life." (1988: 97). After its publication, the Ministry of Culture warned the director of the Gorky studio, G. I. Britikov, that the main problem with the screenplay was its use of an impassive, contemplative tone, rather than the adoption of a more active, civic attitude. According to Josephine Woll (2000: 142ff.), Ekaterina Furtse-

va staunchly supported Khutsiev and, following the first screening, came to his defence when he was criticised, among other things, for the volume of the footsteps of the Red Guard marching down the street at night: "At night," the Chairman of the Ideological Commission claimed, "people should be asleep. Footsteps are that loud only in prison." (KHOPLIANKINA, 1990: 46). Furtseva herself, however, fell victim of the power struggles taking place within the political machine and the party (Woll, 2001). Nikita Khrushchev ultimately nipped the release of the film in the bud after the March 1963 screening. At a public event held in the Kremlin, to which some six hundred artists and writers were invited, the First Secretary of the Communist Party and President of the Council of Ministers accused Khutsiev of, for instance, presenting "ideas and norms of public and private life that are entirely unacceptable and alien to Soviet people [...]. The idea is to impress upon the children that their fathers cannot be their teachers in life, and that there is no point in turning to them for advice." (WOLL, 2000: 146-147). Khrushchev's words, which were in line with the new style manifested in his attack on the corruption of Soviet principles in art at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Moscow Union of Artists, ultimately marked the fate of the film. *Ilyich's Gate* was never released or distributed. Almost two years later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, 1965, an abridged, reedited version came out under a new title: *I am Twenty*. Soviet society had changed and it received little attention. Suffice it to say that the film was seen by 8.8 million cinemagoers, a very low number compared to the crowds attracted by the major productions of the day, such as *War and Peace* (Voyna i mir, 1965, Andrey Bolkonskiy), which brought 58 million viewers to the box office (ZEMLYANUKHIN and SEGIDA, 1996: 251 and 72).

3. The so-called Thaw that followed Stalin's death took its name from a novel by Ilya Erhenburg published in 1954 entitled **Оттепель** (Ottepel/The Thaw).
4. Strikingly, as though staging the scores that cinema had to settle with the past, the plot of the film includes a meeting between Sergei and the ghost of his father,

who died at the age of 20 in the Second World War and, now younger than his son, is unable to answer his questions.

5. Regarding this Bakhtinian take on space/time as applied to Moscow in Khutsiev's work, Coxe has pointed out that "during the studio meeting to discuss Khutsiev's and Shpalikov's literary script in December 1960, Khutsiev remarked that these stones of Moscow's streets remember the generations that have walked them, and that he intended to portray the conversation between Sergei and his father 'as completely real' without resorting to the 'recollections' of a cinematic flashback. This is the very sort of transformation (ремонт) of the present (сейчас) that defines the Moscow text. The past and present merge and blend fluidly without resorting to overused cinematic devices." (2008: 218).

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## MARLEN KHUTSIEV. HOW IT ALL BEGAN

### Abstract

Born in Tbilisi (Georgia) in 1925 and trained at the State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow, Marlen Khutsiev is a film director, screenwriter, actor and teacher, and was a significant protagonist of the Soviet New Wave of the 1950s and 1960s. His film *Ilyich's Gate* (*Zastava Ilitsa*, 1965) became an unofficial symbol of cinema during the Khrushchev Thaw due to the problems it faced from the Soviet censors, whose reservations meant that it had to be completely re-edited. The new version of the film was released three years later under the new title of *I am Twenty* (*Mne dvadzat let*, 1965). In this previously unpublished interview, which took place in May 2014, Marlen Khutsiev takes us on a journey through his life and work, exploring his childhood, the VGIK years, the origins of his films and his problems with the Soviet censors.

### Key words

Russian and Soviet cinema; Khutsiev; Thaw; Censorship.

### Author

Dr Carlos Muguiro is reader in Film Aesthetics at the Universidad de Navarra and Head of the Department of Documentary Film at the ECAM (Madrid Film School). He was awarded a Ph.D. in Humanities (Extraordinary Doctorate Award) from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and is currently Visiting Scholar in the Department of Slavonic Studies at the University of Cambridge. His research interests lie in Russian and Soviet culture, and the portrayal of nature and landscape in cinema. He curated the first Alexander Sokurov retrospective ever held in Spain and *Ver sin Vertov*, a curatorial project to reconstruct the Russian and Soviet documentary film tradition of the last fifty years, from Dziga Vertov's death to 2005, held in the Casa Encendida cultural centre in Madrid. In the wake of this cycle, Muguiro published *Ver sin Vertov (1955-2005). Cincuenta años de no ficción en Rusia y la URSS*. He has also edited the books *Ermanno Olmi. Seis encuentros y otros instantes*; *El cine de los mil años. Una aproximación histórica y estética al cine documental japonés*; *The Man Without the Movie Camera/ The Cinema of Alan Berliner*; and more recently *Las formas de la estalga. Construcción y manifestaciones de 'la nostalgia de lo ruso-soviético' en la cultura cubana contemporánea*. As a filmmaker, he has worked alongside Sergio Oksman in the making of *O futbol* (2015), *A Story for the Modlins* (2012) and *Notes on the Other* (2008). Contacto: cmuguiro@unav.es

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## MARLÉN JUTSIEV. ASÍ EMPEZÓ TODO

### Resumen

Nacido en Tbilisi (Georgia) en 1925 y diplomado en el VGIK de Moscú, Marlén Jutsiev es director de cine, guionista, actor, profesor y protagonista destacado de la Nueva Ola Soviética de los años cincuenta y sesenta. Su película *La puerta de Ílich* (*Zastava Ilitsa*, 1965) se convirtió en un símbolo no oficial de la era Jrushev debido a los problemas con los censores soviéticos, que obligaron a un nuevo remontaje del film. La nueva versión se estrenó tres años después bajo el título *Tengo veinte años* (*Mne dvadzat let*, 1965). En esta entrevista inédita, celebrada en mayo de 2014, Marlén Jutsiev repasa su vida y su obra, explorando su infancia, los años en el VGIK, el origen de sus películas y los problemas con la censura soviética.

### Palabras clave

Cine ruso y soviético; Jutsiev; Deshielo; censura.

### Autor

Carlos Muguiro es profesor de Estética del Cine en la Universidad de Navarra y director del Departamento de Cine Documental de la ECAM (Escuela de Cine de Madrid). Doctor en Humanidades (Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado) por la Universitat Pompeu Fabra, en la actualidad es profesor invitado en el Departamento de Estudios Eslovacos de la University of Cambridge. Sus áreas de investigación se centran particularmente en la cultura rusa y soviética y en la representación del paisaje y la naturaleza en el cine. Fue responsable de la primera retrospectiva dedicada a Alexander Sokurov en España y del proyecto *Ver sin Vertov* en la Casa Encendida de Madrid, un proyecto curatorial que reconstruía la tradición del cine documental ruso y soviético durante los últimos cincuenta años, desde la muerte de Dziga Vertov a 2005. En el contexto de este ciclo, Muguiro publicó *Ver sin Vertov (1955-2005). Cincuenta años de no ficción en Rusia y la URSS*. Entre otros, ha editado también los libros *Ermanno Olmi. Seis encuentros y otros instantes*; *El cine de los mil años. Una aproximación histórica y estética al cine documental japonés*; *The Man Without the Movie Camera / The Cinema of Alan Berliner*; y más recientemente el monográfico *Las formas de la estalga. Construcción y manifestaciones de 'la nostalgia de lo ruso-soviético' en la cultura cubana contemporánea*. Como cineasta, ha hecho junto con Sergio Oksman *O futbol* (2015), *Una historia para los Modlins* (2012) y *Notas sobre el otro* (2008). Contact: cmuguiro@unav.es.

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(DIS)AGREEMENTS

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**GERMANY, ITALY, AND SPAIN:  
EROTICISM AND DESIRE UN-  
DER EUROPEAN FASCISM**

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introduction

**CINEMA AS DESIRING-MACHINE**

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**THE SHADOW OF THE BODY**



## introduction

# CINEMA AS DESIRING-MACHINE

ENDIKA REY

The jury of the 66th edition of the Cannes Film Festival surprised both insiders and outsiders with their decision to award the Palme d'Or to both the director and the two leading actresses of the film *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (*La Vie d'Adèle* – Chapitres 1 & 2, Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013). By placing Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux on the same level with Kechiche, the jury seemed to be sending the message that film authorship did not belong exclusively to the one behind the camera, but that the bodies and gestures portrayed were also responsible for the creation and discourse of the image. Moreover, this decision of the jury, headed that year by Steven Spielberg, came at the exact moment of an uproar in France with hundreds of demonstrators protesting in the streets of Paris against the legalisation of homosexual marriage. This context gave both the prize and the picture a political dimension, despite the fact that the jury insisted that its appraisal of the film was based exclusively on cinematic rather than moral considerations.

Months later, controversy would surround the film's public release when Exarchopoulos and Seydoux both claimed that the director had taken an authoritarian and violent approach during shooting, demanding an extreme commitment from them, especially in the most erotically charged scenes. The naturalness of the film's images was not really natural, and with the declarations of the two stars the deceit was revealed: it was im-

possible to deny that the lesbian romance depicted on screen and all the women's movements were, in reality, meticulously orchestrated by a man. At the same time, *Blue is the Warmest Colour* would face distribution problems: both in Tunisia (the director's place of birth) and in the United States the film was subject to censorship, especially of the long sex scene between the two actresses. Even in France, two years after its première, the Catholic group Promouvoir would succeed in having the film's distribution licence legally revoked based on the argument that the realistic sex scenes could offend the sensibilities of a young audience.

According to Christian Metz, censorship proper mutilates distribution; economic censorship mutilates production and ideological censorship mutilates invention (METZ, 1970: 18). In this sense, it is worth highlighting that film history "is the history of censorship, written also in its banned images, and we should not forget, as Gérard Lenne rightly notes, that 'censorship (its history) becomes an integral part of creation'" (BASSA AND FREIXAS, 2000: 52). The case of *Blue is the Warmest Colour* is perhaps the clearest example of a recent film that presents an intersection of simultaneous debates over the censorship of eroticism, political resistance linked to desire, the limits of the *mise-en-scène*, and film authorship. Both the award at Cannes and the controversies surrounding the film effectively contributed to its success, but did this new type of condemnation—of both the work

and its message or methodology—actually enhance the desire for what had been condemned? In a way, factors external to the film contributed to the repression of a work whose greatest merit was, ironically, an apparent freedom of movement.

In *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Wilhelm Reich discusses how sexual repression begins with the patriarchy and extends to women with the idea that the sexual act is something dishonourable for them: “This patriarchal sexual order [...] became the basis of authoritarian ideology by depriving women, children and adolescents of sexual freedom, by making a commodity out of sexuality, and by putting sexuality in the service of economic suppression” (REICH, 1946: 30). The banning of *Blue is the Warmest Colour* operated more as an *a posteriori* symbol than an *a priori* obstacle: the days of fascism and its methods are far behind us, yet the sexual act between two women has similarly been read as one of those “dishonourable” acts. In the words of Félix Guattari, “the cinema is a desiring-machine that has won its place over the course of a long historical evolution. The history of desire is inseparable from the history of repression. Might a historian one day take up the task of writing a history of the cinema of desire?” (GUATTARI, 1983: 81). Jacques Aumont posited a similar idea when he suggested that a face today is the history of all the others that preceded it: “the history of the face in the modern era may be all at once the history of its expressiveness, of the free inscription of passions on its surface, and of its civility, of the retention, refinement and codification of that inscription [...]. The face [...] follows two paths: the externalisation of the depths of intimacy and the manifestation of belonging to a civilised community” (AUMONT, 1998: 25).

One of the objectives of fascism was to dehumanise and desexualise those faces through the body. On this basis, topics or motifs like adultery or sexual desire were elided, internalised or ex-

pressed metaphorically in the same way as other expressions related to eroticism. The face and physical presence of actresses under fascism is in part a question mark, and the different methods of turning the camera’s gaze on desire (linked more to the imaginary) and on eroticism (linked more to the body) would thus have a substantially different but normally muzzled iconographic approach. It would seem essential to turn back now to the Germany, Italy and Spain of fascism and censorship, an historical turning point for both social and cinematic conventions, to understand Europe and European cinema today; to know how to read the history of the body and face of the female figure in the modern era through the taboos, through the actresses and the femininities constructed by means of the masks of dictatorship. It is also necessary in order to make sense of the history of cinema as a desiring-machine. ■

## NOTES

- \* This section forms part of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness research project: *El cuerpo erótico de la actriz bajo los fascismos: España, Italia y Alemania (1939-1945)* (CSO2013-43631-P).

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## discussion

### I. Were there similar elements in the cinematic depiction of women in the different European fascist regimes or, conversely, were different motifs established based on their respective cultures?

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#### Alejandro Montiel

Although they were under governments that were diametrically opposed politically, Spanish cinema from 1939 to 1945 still drew aesthetic inspiration from the “poetic realism” of the French films of the previous decade, and had no qualms in drawing from other controversial influences (including Soviet cinema). In analysing this we need to tread carefully and examine each film case by case. For example, I suspect that the Victorian spirit was still present in the British films of this period, regardless of the fact that they were withstanding the blitzes of the Luftwaffe. It is also obvious that in the former colonies (the United States) there was a certain conservative resurgence as well, with the promotion of a model (the soon-to-be hegemonic Hollywood model) of the loyal, self-sacrificing wife of the heroic soldier who was the antithesis of the flirtatiousness and levity of the gay divorcees dancing to jazz music in the subversive years of the 1920s and early 1930s. The Spanish case (after the victory of the rebel faction) is notable for the disturbed, disturbing and unabashedly antiquated alliance it made between sex and religion; an utterly Catholic morbid fascination that the Germans, for example, took no part in, whether pro-Nazi or anti-Nazi. Paragons of female characters trapped in sordid situations when they are driven by desire abound in Spanish cinema, where there was also a powerful resurgence of the traditional code of Calderonian honour and the defence of modesty.

#### Vinzenz Hediger

My theory is that all of the fascist iconographies were built on pre-existing cultural foundations. In this process, the foundations were modified and,

sometimes, permanently altered. Successful political regimes don't appear out of nowhere; their political legitimacy always depends on, or is inter-related with, their cultural legitimacy, and in this sense I would say that culturally specific foundations exist and need to be taken into account in the three countries.

#### Marta Muñoz Aunión

In the cases of German and Spanish cinema I think that similar female archetypes can be found, because they are icons of Western culture established over centuries in literary and theatre tradition. I refer here to the two traditional poles in the patriarchal structure of bourgeois society: the good woman and the bad woman. Nevertheless, in the specific depictions of these stereotypes we can find differences associated with the social complexities that separated the two countries in the 1930s. Thus, under the banner of the *good woman*, the Germany of the Third Reich included and exploited new models that Spain in that period never contemplated: the hard-working independent city woman, the patriotic fighting woman, the war widow at the head of the family, and others. These are figures that reflect the models that were imposed in the country thanks to modernisation, urbanisation, and the consequences of the First World War (1914-1918), among other factors. Under the heading of the *bad woman*, which in both countries included the same kind of female conduct associated with promiscuity and deceit or betrayal, the Germans created and developed their own female archetype, the *red woman*, the leftist political activist, which was expanded during the Second World War to include the woman who tarnishes the Aryan bloodline by

having relations with men considered to belong to “lower races.” These archetypes don’t appear in Spanish cinema, because neither the levels of political emancipation achieved by Spanish women under the Second Republic nor their depiction in the cultural production of the period are comparable to those of the Weimar Republic. While it is true that National Socialism strove to control the emancipation of women, it cannot be ignored that a significant proportion of the working population before and during the war was female and demanded a symbolic recognition of their work. This accounts for the differences in the cinematic models of femininity between the two countries.

### **Raffaele Pinto**

Cinema represents women based on the literary and national cultures of each country (I think that the cinematic depiction of men, on the other hand, depends much less on national cultures and therefore crosses a lot more conventional boundaries). There is a very obvious, radical difference, for example, between the misogynist (Shakespearean) view of the woman in Hollywood (Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich) and the philogynous (Dantean) view of the woman promulgated by the Cinecittà studio (Anna Magnani).

### **Gino Frezza**

I would argue that there is very little similarity between the cinematic images of women produced under the three fascist regimes: perhaps a few could be found between Spain and Italy when the female characters belong to traditional or reactionary contexts in terms of economic development (peasants or women far removed from modern urban centres, for example). Nevertheless, if we take the Italian case overall, I think it offers a gallery of female figures who seem to me to preclude comparisons with other film traditions except for the American tradition, with which Italian cinema set itself in fierce competition based precisely on its ability to offer more diverse and sophisticated products (including female archetypes and images). This is the result of both internal work on the imaginary of the period and the need to meet audience demand for realistic product. The female spectator at whom Italian cinema is aimed is less inclined to carry out her role according to the norms and customs enshrined by Italian law or traditions than to pursue opportunities (for gratification, success, etc.) that instead seem to be a reflection of the—still emerging—consumer society.

## **2. Nudity in cinema, for example, was not handled in the same way in Italy or Germany as it was in Spain. Did the different countries share the same taboos under the three dictatorships?**

### **Alejandro Montiel**

My answer is a categorical no. This has probably been the case, at least, since the sixteenth century and the Wars of Religion, and, on the other hand, I wouldn’t go as far as to describe the tradition of false modesty (for example) as a taboo, but merely as a social custom, which has waxed and waned, risen and declined at different times in history. We also shouldn’t forget that the German and Italian dictatorships both collapsed in 1945, while the Spanish went on interminably, with Spanish

National Catholicism taking on greater force after the defeat of the Axis powers, even at the expense of other no less repulsive albeit more modern sectors of the National Movement, like Falangism. *Rome, Open City* (Roma città aperta, Roberto Rossellini, 1945) offers a fascinating character besieged by burning desire and moral uncertainty, Pina (Anna Magnani), in a film that is pro-Catholic but which takes a first step on the path towards a new, democratic and liberal Europe. A heroine who is desperately in love with a good-hearted

communist partisan would be unthinkable in the repressive and autocratic Spain of Franco, but not in Italy after Mussolini or in the liberated Berlin. I cannot imagine an erotic myth like Silvana (Silvana Mangano) in *Bitter Rice* (Riso amaro, Giuseppe de Santis, 1949) being offered to the world by Spanish cinema in the 1940s, or even in the 1950s or 1960s.

### **Vinzenz Hediger**

I would say that other types of cultural influences are more decisive. In Italy and Spain, for example, the Catholic Church was a much more predominant political factor than it was in Germany. In this sense, as Pierre Sorlin suggests, the Church was one of the unifying features that made the Italian nation-state possible. The scope of Mussolini's political power was only fully realised after he reached an agreement with the Catholic Church with respect to the division of power in the Lateran Pacts of 1929. In Germany, on the other hand, the country was unified against the Catholic Church: Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* or *culture struggle*, in the 1870s, was explicitly designed to restrain the political influence of the Catholic clergy and to inculcate in German citizens of the Catholic faith a loyalty to the Reich that prevailed over their loyalty to the transnational institution of the Catholic Church. If we agree that the fascist cultural regime was built on pre-existing foundations, we can see differences in each country in terms of the degree to which the moral teachings of the Church affected sexuality (and, by extension, the representation of nudity in cinema). At the same time, there was an inherent conflict between fascism, the fascist political and cultural regime, and the traditional morality of monogamous heterosexual sexuality (and its constraints). Totalitarian regimes tend to establish patterns of social connection and emotional and ideological loyalty that transcend (and sometimes directly interfere with) the family unit on which—at least from the perspective of political theory since Jean

Bodin—the modern European nation-states have been built. Both because Catholic traditions were not as strong in Germany and because Germany was the most totalitarian of the three fascist states, we find a kind of depiction of sexuality that works against the bourgeois family model and the traditional understanding of female sexuality. But even in the case of Germany, these tendencies are, in the best of cases, quite moderate.

### **Marta Muñoz Aunión**

The taboos were different. Nudity might be one of them, but there were also profound differences in relation to pregnancy outside marriage, separation and divorce, widows remarrying, the activity of women in the workplace and the public sphere, religious sentiment, and others. For example, the woman in German National Socialist cinema is more active and enterprising, holding positions from which she had until then been forbidden, and more visible in the public sphere. This is due to three main factors which I can only mention briefly here: her real presence in the German economy of the period, which was too obvious and necessary to be denied, the need to confirm this modernising dimension to which National Socialism had appealed from the beginning, and the fact that German women were a huge support to the social and political projects established by Nazism to reinforce the ideology of a “people united behind an upright leader.” The film production of the Third Reich addressed the need to control female desire for emancipation, which at the same time was being given a limited degree of freedom. This contradiction was accentuated with the outbreak of the Second World War and the obligation to secure the full support of what came to be called “the internal front” made up of the mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters of the soldiers sent to the front. They were the ones who kept the country running, filling traditionally male occupations, and becoming the heads of their families and, as a result, the task of State



cultural production (including cinema) was to control female *desire*, to channel it in directions in keeping with National Socialist interests, redirecting the energy unleashed by the *laxity* resulting from the absence of men and delimiting it within a discourse based on the needs of war and the promise of a final victory. The case of abortion is interesting: although it was highly stigmatised in cases of normal pregnancies, it was accepted and even imposed in the interests of *public health* and the maintenance of the race.

### Raffaele Pinto

As far as I'm able to judge (my experience as a spectator is very uneven in the filmographies of the three regimes), I would say that the female question is almost absent in German cinema, where Nazi propaganda imposed a military idea of society (with the consequent cult of violence), which also encompassed the woman, negating her female aspect (Riefenstahl's semi-naked female bodies are *healthy* and *athletic* bodies). In Spain I think the regime opted for a more conservative vision, where the woman was relegated to the expressiveness of the folk tradition (the female body is revealed, up to a certain point, *singing*). Italian cinema, which was quite independent from the propaganda of the regime, turned to an analysis of the feminine in order to create models of *Italianness* (it was a first-class cinema without which the emergence of Neorealism could not be explained); the hints of nudity normally have a *tragic* quality.

### Gino Frezza

Analysing the relationship between nudity (particularly and almost universally female) and the film image is very important to explore the expressions of freedom existing in the dialogue between cinema, censorship, politics and society. In Italian cinema, there are examples of how female nudity has appeared on the screen, albeit for very brief moments, thus denoting a level of awareness of this innovation—which would provoke an explicit outrage in cases like Alessandro Blasetti's *La cena delle beffe* [The Jester's Supper] in 1942, where Clara Calamai's breasts were shown in a very brief but very shocking scene. However, nudity in Italian cinema was generally relegated to the shadows, out of the frame, as tended to occur in other countries. Censorship oversaw this aspect of representation, perhaps to a greater degree than it oversaw the political adherence of films to the ideals of the regime, but, at the same time, these conditioning factors related to nudity invited filmmakers to value the imagination of the spectator and to keep it vividly projected on the desired images. Nevertheless, what was explicitly prohibited, more than nudity, was full sexual intercourse, as well as erotic kisses. With these aspects, religious censorship was more restrictive than political censorship. In Italy, the Catholic Centre, expressly established for this mission, was very active (not only during the fascist regime but also after the war and into the 1950s and early 1960s). I would say that any analysis of nudity needs to take a temporal rather than a geographical perspective. The real differences in filmic expression of nudity and sexual relations actually appear with modern cinema.

### 3. Do actresses contribute any idea to the discourse of the film through the subjectivity of their own bodies and erotic gestures? To what extent does the star system overstep the camera's gaze or conform to historical codes?

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#### Alejandro Montiel

George Cukor, who directed all the great actresses of Hollywood's classical era, once claimed that he had never directed Greta Garbo. Greta Garbo, he said, could not be directed. She worked the little miracle of her performance, charged with suggestive meanings, as she saw fit. To a certain extent, every actress does this. Subjected to castrating codes, after the cruel amputation of the clitoris, at some time in the eyes of every inspired actress, desire shines in a way that cannot be repeated. Actresses embody (a most appropriate way of putting it) the fictional desire with their own desire, the flirtatious woman with their own flirtatiousness, the lewd woman with her own lewdness, the truth of the character with her own inimitable smiles and tears. It is impossible to erase the splendour of the bodies (*splendor veritas*), of the gestures, of the gazes of Consolación (Rosita Díaz Gimeno) in *El genio alegre* [The Happy Genius] (Fernando Delgado, 1939), of Florentina (María Mercader) in *Marianela* (Benito Perojo, 1940), of Eloísa or "Malvaloca" (both played by Amparito Rivelles) in *Alma de Dios* [God's Soul] (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1941) and *Malvaloca* (Luis Marquina, 1942); of Luisa (Conchita Montenegro) in *Rojo y negro* [Red and Black] (Carlos Arévalo, 1942), of Inés (Isabel de Pomés) in *La torre de los siete jorobados* [The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks] (Edgar Neville, 1944), or of Nieves (Conchita Montes) in *Domingo de Carnaval* [Carnival Sunday] (Edgar Neville, 1945).

#### Vinzenz Hediger

The actresses were quite aware of the cultural codes and knew how to play with them. An exhaustive analysis would also have to study *conventionalisation*, that is, the patterns of lighting, framing, wardrobe, etc., in that transition occurring from the rise to the fall of political fascism. I sus-

pect that we would find a number of strategies and patterns with a certain technical continuity with non-fascist films, before coming to the elements of representation of the female body and the organisation of male and female gazes that could actually be characterised as examples of a fascist aesthetic of the kind that Susan Sontag identified, for example, in the films of Leni Riefenstahl. The question would be how these tropes are related to the specific representation of the film actresses in Germany, Italy and Spain in the 1930s and 1940s.

#### Marta Muñoz Aunió

The German star system was the result of a plan orchestrated by the Ministry of Propaganda that produced a range of roles, filled by different actresses, aimed at satisfying the fantasies of different groups and social classes (rural, urban, low, middle, religious, nationalist, etc.). However, although the star system was designed according to the social needs identified by the Nazi regime's intelligence services to satisfy and at the same time control the desire(s) of the masses, it is important to take into account that often the controllers were unable to foresee the effect and consequences that some of these representations would have on the population. Some constructed roles, such as the case of Zarah Leander, ended up being re-interpreted by oppressed sectors of society, and the lyrics to her songs even operated in a limited way as subversive.

#### Raffaele Pinto

I think that the star system was a system, and that the actresses contributed little of their own voluntarily. They were chosen by the system based on the values that the cultural industry wanted to convey. Magnani was chosen because she perfectly embodied the sexually active woman in keeping with, and not contrary to, the role of motherhood.

### **Gino Frezza**

The star system in Italy in the 1930s and early 1940s was not a closed and imposed system as it was in America. Auteur-filmmakers like Camerini, Blasetti, Poggioli, Soldati, Palermi, Gallone, Alessandrini, Matarazzo, Mastrocinque, Bragaglia, Mattoli, Gentilomo, etc., offered images of women who, on one hand, perpetuated certain stereotypes (the shy girl, the extroverted secretary, the young rebel, the lovestruck ingénue, the vengeful woman scorned, the likeable mischief-maker, etc.), while, on the other, could be *themselves*, contradicting and challenging audience expectations. They might even glimpse the shadowy realms of female subjectivity. For exam-

ple, a film like *Apparizione*, directed by Jean de Limur in 1944, presents the radical ambiguity of a seduction between a film star (Amedeo Nazzari, who plays himself) and one of his most ardent fans (Alida Valli): the film's story traces the development of the unpleasant consequences that could result from an excessively close encounter between star and fan, ultimately leading to the brink of infidelity... But the illusion is broken, and reality takes over from the image on the screen. In this way of presenting the female outside the usual patterns, Italian cinema in the 1930s, even within the classical parameters of film narrative, was already clearly modern, capturing the new mood of the era and projecting it onto the screen.

## **4. On the other hand, does any actress fully embody the ideals of her nation's dictatorship? Is there any case of femininity constructed (so to speak) by the regime?**

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### **Alejandro Montiel**

It is true that the meaning of "femininity" is constructed in each time and place with powerful and insidious ideological intentions (of domination), but I don't think Spain's originality in this respect went beyond the sophistication revealed in the celebrated assertion of our former prime minister José María Aznar, a worthy heir to Franco's crown: "Man is man, and woman is woman." Of course, one thing I am sure of is that neither an actress as bold as Conchita Montes nor the characters she portrayed on the screen were role models in any sense; I'm thinking of Isabel, the drunk, in *The Last Horse* (El último caballo, Edgar Neville, 1950), but also, earlier, the troubled Andrea in *Nada* (Edgar Neville, 1947) and even earlier, the misfit Mercedes in *Life on a Thread* (La vida en un hilo, Edgar Neville, 1945). *Constructing* a fascist femininity was beyond the capacity of Spanish cinema, but *destroying* any feminist flame the moment it was fanned by anarchist

organisations like Mujeres Libres was not. Although some thirty years later there was no longer any way to hold it down.

### **Vinzenz Hediger**

Kristina Söderbaum would be the clearest case among German actresses. Goebbels was involved in the casting of most of her films, and her husband Veit Harlan was practically the official director of the regime. Söderbaum always played the slightly chubby angelical blonde, profoundly moral and always prepared to sacrifice herself, usually drowning towards the end of the film, a habit that earned her the nickname of "reichswasserleiche," the "Reich's water corpse." The mere fact that such a term existed and film lovers made fun of her suggests that the ideological purity in the construction of female roles was not entirely effective and that the successful modes of representation were inserted in patterns that operated under the level of ideological messaging.

### Marta Muñoz Aunión

Without doubt, the physical appearance of Söderbaum (blonde, blue-eyed, tall with an athletic figure) and her character on screen (sweet smile and motherly quality, innocent and full of feeling) made her the ideal image of the Aryan woman. Curiously, in three of the great dramas she filmed together with her husband, her character always died from drowning, which led the German people to refer to her as the “imperial drowned corpse.” In the last years of the war, Söderbaum became an indispensable figure in Nazi drama films, playing in two of the most significant films of the era: first, as the disgraced German woman whose honour demands the death of the Jewish banker in the dreadful film *Jud Süß* [Jew Süß] (Veit Harlan, 1940); second, in the apocalyptic epic *Kolberg* (Veit Harlan and Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1945), as the daughter of the mayor of a Prussian town besieged by Napoleon’s army, whose boyfriend is among the Prussian troops defending the town. Once again, her image of sacrifice and surrender for the nation represents a hymn, apologetic in this case, to the visual racial fantasy imposed by Nazi cinema from 1933 to 1945.

### Raffaele Pinto

I think that every cinematic femininity is constructed by the cultural system within which it operates (whether under a regime or not). As evidence of this, consider the casting of the girls in *Bellissima* (Luchino Visconti, 1951).

### Gino Frezza

The Italian film system didn’t produce an individual case of an actress who completely and unambiguously reflected the ideals and cultural vision of national fascism. This doesn’t mean that the Mussolini regime would not have gladly accepted a figure fully in keeping with its own ideals, but Italian cinema didn’t look to politics for inspiration; instead, it looked in the opposite direction, to what was happening in society on the level of customs and consumerism, which by this stage were being transformed by an international process of modernisation. Ultimately, the regime chose mostly to develop a *laissez-faire* relationship without explicit coercion in the form of censorship and repression.

**5. Pasolini argued that an aesthetic choice is always a social choice and that in this sense the bourgeoisie of the 1960s and 1970s operated in a similar way to the fascists of the 1940s, as they also attempted to derealise the body through the mask (PASOLINI, 1983: 96, 99). In which specific aspects can we glimpse the change that occurred in the treatment of eroticism in film after the end of the dictatorial period? Could it be said that the progressive establishment of a certain ideology of hedonism contributed to the disappearance of desire or to an inability to satisfy it? Did the subsequent appearance of coitus or full-body nudity on screen represent the conversion of eroticism into more a source and object of consumption than of desire? If we assume that eroticism relates to a function of the brain linked to the “imaginative” while pornography refers to a more “demonstrative” function of the body,<sup>1</sup> where is the boundary between these two concepts today?**

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### Alejandro Montiel

If I’ve understood Pasolini correctly, what he suggested towards the end of his life, in Bologna in December 1973 and in his famous essay “Tetis”, is that the people were still opposing mass lam-

ination of bodies in favour of rather deplorable masquerades characterised by a certain spirit of consumerist affectation. He warned that truth “embodied” (again, a most appropriate term for it) in the common people was in danger of extinc-

tion. Pasolini wrote that by the end of the 1970s Italy had entered the era of consumerism and subculture, thereby losing any sense of reality, which had survived almost exclusively in the bodies of the working classes. Perhaps this was how it was. Today, these words exude a certain old musky quality, remote and nostalgic, which is rather more sensual and sybaritic, however, than what internet eroticism manages to produce. But while it is reasonable to identify eroticism in the image (what is no longer there), it is still impossible to find truth outside the body (where we are and cannot cease to be, what we are and cannot cease to be). Bodies—whether or not they have been pillaged by a process of *deculturisation*—don't know the difference between eroticism and pornography. Only the fascists of today would be interested in such hair-splitting. The fascists of the 1940s—and their Ideological State Apparatuses, including Cinema—were less persuasive and efficient.

### **Vinzenz Hediger**

Foucault suggests that sexual liberation was not the opposite of repression, but its continuation in other terms. As he argues in his *History of Sexuality*, confession, for example, is not a means of repressing sexuality, but of cultivating and controlling it through a system of continuous transgression, guilt and repentance. If confession were successful in repressing sexuality, it would render itself obsolete. Instead, it is incorporated into sexual desire as an authority that fosters transgression through its regulation. Along these same lines, Judith Butler argues that censorship should be viewed not as a privative form but as a productive form of power. In this sense, the transition to any kind of hard-core pornography should again be seen as a gradual development, as a reconfiguration of a system of sexuality and its representation, and as a modification of a continuous circulation of sexuality and sexual representations in the culture. The boundary between imaginative

and demonstrative sexuality certainly changed, especially in the 1960s, when in the United States the MPAA (the Motion Picture Association of America, the association of Hollywood producers that generally oversaw the control of content and is now responsible for film ratings) introduced an X-rating for pornographic content.

But even before then, there was already a clear change to the code which, drawing on Pasolini, we could call the consumerist conception of sexuality. Sophia Loren is an excellent example of this consumerist abundance of the post-war period. In her films and glamorous photographs, Loren is repeatedly associated with Italian cooking, either eating spaghetti or making pizza and pasta in provocative dresses that accentuate her voluptuous figure. The type of *italianità* embodied by Loren reflects naturalness and traditional values, but in reality it is a commodified notion of the culture that creates an association of the oral pleasures of eating with the oral and genital pleasures of sexuality. In his brilliant study of Marilyn Monroe, Richard Dyer demonstrated that the key element of Monroe's star image was the notion of an innocent and natural sexuality; i.e., clean and free of guilt, very much in line with the representation of the female body and the conception of sexuality promoted by *Playboy* magazine in the post-war years. Loren certainly could be seen and studied together with Monroe in this respect.

### **Marta Muñoz Aunión**

After the war ended and it recovered its national cinema, Germany film production in the 1950s was characterised by a clear shift towards a conservatism anchored in Christian religious morality, whether Protestant or Catholic. The female role models were reduced, the divas disappeared, and the licentiousness of the previous years was suppressed. An example of this puritanism of the calm after the National Socialist storm is the outrage generated by the film *Die Sünderin* [The Sinner] (Willi Forst, 1951), whose plot, very much

against the general trend in the films of the period (although fitting within an earlier trend begun in the days of the Weimar Republic), presents the figure of a marginalised woman who faces her fate independently and makes her own decisions about her life and death. Such female autonomy was not tolerated in the early 1950s. However, this film and its moral weight would be easily placed within the dramatic genre and seem inoffensive compared to a Third Reich film like *Ich klage an* [I Accuse] (Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1941), in which a woman with multiple sclerosis asks her husband to help her die, and the husband makes a plea in court in defence of euthanasia. Considering that the Nazis at that time were exterminating thousands of people suffering from chronic mental and physical illnesses and that Wolfgang Liebeneiner's film was described as "especially valuable from an artistic point of view" and "educational for the nation," it seems at least worthy of mention that just ten years later the suicide pact of a pair of lovers confronted with the incurable illness of one of them should be demonised. In post-Nazi Germany, hedonism was clearly identified with the consumption of material goods. Desire was once again re-directed, constrained, this time without the need of an ideological political discourse, but thanks to the country's abundance of material goods, economic growth and needs for reconstruction. However, all of this would begin to crumble, attacked by the filmmakers of the New German Cinema, who sought to recover the body, a desire that was not channelled, but free and libertarian, and an eroticism that had nothing to do with bourgeois conventions. Finally, eroticism is being relegated to a place outside the image due to the definitive presence of the body, the high profile of sexual ambiguity and the right to choose one's gender in the public sphere. It is found today more in the word, which due to its nature as a written sign offers greater possibilities for the individual imagination and fantasy.

### **Raffaele Pinto**

The display of the body and sexuality (in both pornography and commercial cinema) has progressed in parallel with the reduction of its symbolic meaning, and as a result has absolutely no emancipating value. The sex sold in cinema is a *silent* sex, i.e., useless or counterproductive in terms of reducing the renunciation of drives. A sex that is not verbalised and problematised, and is reduced to mere display, has masturbation as its aesthetic horizon; in other words, the infantile regression of society as a whole. The most destructive consequence of this regression is the weakening of the mechanisms of subjective control of violence.

### **Gino Frezza**

Pasolini led his own battle against the bourgeois hypocrisy which, in the 1960s and 1970s, still refused to accept the open expression of sex and eroticism in film and on television. He saw in this obstinacy the entrenchment of a fascist attitude. His was a battle in defence of modern cinema, which sought to explore freely the profound relationship between the image and desire, between love, sex, innocence, and individual and collective maturation. But the situation of the 1960s was quite different from that of the 1940s. The fascist regime had a binding and even more direct power than that which, in the era of democracy and under the predominantly Christian Democrat governments (imbued with Catholic culture), was presented as political power. Pasolini denounced this paradox: in the 1960s, the force of censorship was more penetrating and more dangerous than before, because it was less visible and more indirect. It is also true that thanks to the social and cultural battles of the 1970s, notwithstanding its diverse victims (some of which were excellent; consider, for example, Bertolucci and the court decision against *The Last Tango in Paris* [Ultimo tango a Parigi, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972]), the relationship between culture and censorship, and therefore be-

tween cinema and censorship, was considerably liberalised. Today, at least in appearance and in legal terms, censorship does not exist; and yet it could always return. The evolution of the media (from the film age to the television age, from the new television age to the digital communication age, and now in the age of digital cultures online) has radically changed the situation between the right to free expression and the forms of control and repression by those in power. The opportunities for free expression are much greater today, but, on the other hand, the danger of political control is intangible, often invisible... I think that it's important to take into account these major mutations before condemning the huge quantity of images and the propagation of the so-called "ideology of hedonism"; such definitions usually simplify the cultural context, set up arbitrary conflicts and obstacles and, above all, feed on underlying moral prejudices. For example, I don't support the idea that desire is obscured when the forms of representation of eroticism are many, or even that pornography and consumption are objects of disdain and condemnation. Moreover, there has always been a very close and fruitful relationship between eroticism and pornography, at least since the end of the 18th century, and I don't think that these two forms of manifestation of images of the body (naked, shown in all its parts and in every action possible) have to be treated as opposite poles (whereby eroticism would be valid because it is "imaginative", while pornography is reprehensible because it is "demonstrative"). I think that eroticism and pornography have a lot to do with the relationships that exist between the imaginary and the real, and in turn in relation to desire. This is exactly what digital networks are rewriting and redirecting in highly innovative ways. And this is where we should look to resume a study of the relationship between censorships (in plural) and imaginations of the sexualised body (female and male). ■

## NOTES

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- 1 "Eroticism is that which is developed 'in the head'; it is a function of the brain. Pornography is what bodies do and the spectacle they produce: it is a function of the body. Eroticism is imaginative; pornography is demonstrative" (LENNE, 1978: 19-20).

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## conclusion

# THE SHADOW OF THE BODY

ENDIKA REY

For Pasolini, the body was the last place inhabited by reality, but as they were granted (rather than winning) their sexual freedom after the fascist regimes collapsed, the people lost their own body precisely because eroticism was already in an area of permissiveness: "The conformist anxiety of being sexually free transforms the young into miserably neurotic erotomaniacs, eternally dissatisfied [...]. Thus, the last place inhabited by reality, that is, the body, or the body of the people, has also disappeared" (PASOLINI, 1983: 101).

In cinema, the appearance of pornography in a certain way represented the reappearance of a primitive cinema, of raw presence: "The porno possesses mechanisms of identification, but it only requires a minimal identification. Like the film-events of the Lumière Society, or like the chase films of early cinema, the porno film offers the spectator the imaginary experience of being somewhere else rather than of being someone else, of seeing an action rather than of doing it. It is always the formula of being transported: exotic journeys to the countries of the bodies" (AMENGUAL, 1976: 47). What is curious is that beyond representing a fresh start in relation to previous constructions of eroticism and desire, pornography, in principle distanced from all fascism and sup-

posedly liberating, ended up perpetuating some of those same repressive and distorting elements.

The taboos disappeared, but not every trace of them. "A whole social order is perpetuated: the virile man appropriates the submissive woman. Thus, pornography is commercial not only in its aim: it is commercial ontologically, as it reduces love to relations of domination, and therefore of ownership, once again evacuating any sentimental dimension" (HENNEBELLE, 1976: 69). The patriarchy continued to define this new type of film and, even today, generally and with few exceptions, the genre (both in its professional and its amateur configurations) approaches the female in an authoritarian manner and without any emphasis on her role as a subject: she is merely an object of satisfaction. Fascism, as Hediger asserted, drawing on the theories of Pasolini, not only refers to a political movement based on violence, but to a whole ideology founded on our cultural regimes that emerges and continues far beyond the period of the dictatorships themselves.

If the representation of eroticism has undergone a significant change in the last few years, this is undoubtedly related to the rise of social networks. This phenomenon distances us from cinema, but not from the image itself: the mo-

bile phone permits the construction of identity of the one behind the camera. The selfie is the definitive mechanism of self-control, underscoring how portrayer and portrayed are the same person. Originally conceived for the purposes of flirtation (in other words, to feed desire), the selfie allows individuals to control the construction of their own identity or, at least, the dreamed reflection of that identity. The pressure is no longer in the hands of a totalitarian system that directs the gaze; instead it is controlled by a global society where censorship goes hand in hand with democracy. The block (Twitter), the ban (Facebook) or the report (Instagram) are the new anonymous mechanisms of repression to which all users have access. Nudity, for example, continues to be censored and the social networks have established themselves as the new high priests of morality, or at least as their pupils.

Thus, audiovisual strategies of seduction must once again include omission, internalisation or metaphorical expression because, although invention and production are permitted, public distribution continues to be censored. As Pasolini foresaw, now it is the freedom of the consumer society that has established a hedonistic, secular ideology, and the theory of eroticism is thus reflected in an anthropology founded on a certain type of deranged natural corporeality. The idea of sin has disappeared, and “without the threat of stoning, love is weakened, relaxed, transformed into something easy and risk-free that is no longer capable of re-directing a life, of giving meaning to anything. [...] With the splendid vindication of desire, eroticism and love are separated as they are brought together, the effect miraculously made independent of its cause. Might sex be the revenge of love?” (RINS, 2001: 114).

In his posthumous work *Cuerpo a cuerpo*, Domènec Font suggests that “while the discourse on the body is established as a revelation of the mentalities, artistic practices and bioculture of an era, its application as a study in cinema is complex

and seems only to disguise a return to idolatry and fetishism. The grammar of the body in cinema is problematic and functions in relation to a metaphysics that establishes it not as a biological object but as a ghost, a mere apparition without volume or substance, a trace of light and chemical essence. What is it that defines this imaginary construction, material and sign, simulacrum and reproduction? The image as medium” (FONT, 2012: 15). Félix Guattari, on the other hand, suggests that eroticism “is always an inversion of the boundary between authorized pleasure and coded prohibition. It proliferates outside the law; it is the accomplice of the prohibition; it channels the libido over the forbidden object, which it only brushes against and barely uncovers. [...] On one side we have the ghost, desire made ghost, an impotent act; on the other, the reality of desexualised production” (GUATTARI, 1983: 91). The cinematic image contains desire and eroticism, the body, as a ghost. The history of the cinema of desire is yet to be written, but, today, perhaps the last place inhabited by the reality of the images is in that shadow. ■

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## **GERMANY, ITALY, AND SPAIN: EROTICISM AND DESIRE UNDER EUROPEAN FASCISM**

### **Abstract**

This text offers some reflections on the treatment of eroticism and desire in cinema under German, Italian and Spanish fascism. Censorship and repression under the dictatorships were integrated into a pre-existing cultural and moral framework where female sexuality was ultimately conditioned by a derealisation of the face through the mask. This body turned ghost is both privative and productive because the star system controlled but also satisfied the desires of the masses. Different types of femininity were constructed based on the particularities of each country and regime, but several similar codes were also used to create an ideal image of the woman. With the end of fascism, this constrained eroticism would be redirected to include forms such as pornography, although the boundary between the two concepts has been blurred and identity structures are still under the influence of patriarchy and commercialism. The history of the cinema of desire can help us to read the body and face of female figures in the modern era.

### **Key words**

Eroticism; Desire; Fascism; Actress; Body; Gesture; Censorship; Star-system.

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## **ALEMANIA, ITALIA, ESPAÑA: EL EROS Y EL DESEO BAJO LOS FASCISMOS EUROPEOS**

### **Resumen**

El presente texto reflexiona sobre el tratamiento en cine del eros y el deseo bajo el fascismo alemán, italiano y español. La censura y represión de las dictaduras se integran en un marco cultural y moral preexistente donde la sexualidad femenina acaba siendo condicionada por una desrealización del rostro a través de la máscara. Ese cuerpo hecho fantasma no solo es privativo sino también productivo ya que el *star-system* controla pero también satisface los deseos colectivos. Se construyen distintos tipos de feminidad según las particularidades de cada país y régimen, pero también hay una serie de códigos parejos a la hora de crear un ideal de la mujer. Ese erotismo constreñido se reconducirá con el fin de los fascismos adquiriendo formas como la pornografía, si bien la frontera entre ambos conceptos es difusa y las estructuras identitarias siguen estando bajo el influjo del patriarcado y el mercantilismo. La historia del cine del deseo nos ayuda a leer el cuerpo y rostro de las figuras femeninas en la era moderna.

### **Palabras clave**

Eros; deseo; fascismo; actriz; cuerpo; gestualidad; censura; *star-system*.

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bajos suyos en libros de edición y autoría colectiva como *La herida de las sombras. El cine español de los años cuarenta* (Actas del VIII congreso de la AEHC) o *Imagen, memoria y fascinación. Notas sobre el documental español* (J. M. Catalá, J. Cerdán y C. Torreiro, eds.). Contacto: jmontiel@har.upv.es.

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# VANISHING POINTS

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**FABULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF  
THE KILLER IN JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S  
DOCUMENTARIES**

Bruno Hachero

**CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD  
BETWEEN DISASTER AND SACRIFICE:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE**

Asunción Bernárdez Rodal,  
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**MEMORY AND MASS GRAVES: POLITICAL  
STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENT  
DOCUMENTARIES**

Jose txo Cerdán, Miguel Fernández Labayen



# FABULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE KILLER IN JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S DOCUMENTARIES

BRUNO HACHERO HERNÁNDEZ

## I. INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATION AND ANNIHILATION: THE CASE OF THE INDONESIAN GENOCIDE

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The physical destruction wrought by genocide is preceded, or accompanied, by a symbolic destruction of the *other* who is the target of the extermination. This is why representation is of crucial importance to the process. According to Frigolé (2003: 12), the symbolic destruction of the humanity of the *other* “is a prerequisite for the other’s annihilation. Genocide is the most dramatic and extreme manifestation of the denial of resemblance. Neither resemblance, nor ties, nor proximity.” Taking the Nazi genocide as the paradigm of horror in modern Europe, Jean-Luc Nancy (2005: 34) suggests that “what the camps will have brought about is, above all, a complete devastation of representation or even of the possibility of representing.” On the dilemma of whether it is appropriate to represent certain aspects of horror, Nancy asks

directly: “What became of representation itself at Auschwitz?”

This question is crucial, on the one hand, to understand the problems posed for art by the representation of horror; and on the other, to identify the representative logic that is brought into play to perpetrate the massacre. In short, what representative processes come into action to dehumanise the other to such an extent that extermination becomes possible, overcoming any hint of empathy?

With the diptych that comprises the films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), Joshua Oppenheimer and his collaborators create a full portrait of present-day Indonesia, where the ghosts of the genocide that took the lives of more than half a million people (with some estimates placing the figure above one million) still linger. The filmmaker asserts (in HACHERO, 2015) that neither of his films attempt to represent the genocide. Instead, they explore the vestiges that Indonesia’s



*The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

traumatic past has left in an ailing present, or how the present is founded on a recent past that still quakes in its memory. And they do this through the traces left behind: in the director's statement<sup>1</sup> for *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer recounts how he filmed two leaders of the death squads in North Sumatra for the first time in 2004—a decade later, these recordings constituted the starting point for *The Look of Silence*. On camera, the two men appeared keen to explain in full detail how they had killed more than 10,000 people in the very place where they were standing. After filming, to Oppenheimer's surprise, one of the killers took out a small camera and asked to have the moment immortalised in a snapshot with the help of a film crew member acting as photographer. Oppenheimer filmed them posing: the owner of the camera first gave a thumb's up, and then proudly made the victory sign. In the same statement, the filmmaker connects this anecdote to the heinous images of prisoners humiliated and tortured by

US soldiers at Abu Ghraib<sup>2</sup> military prison, which came out two months later. On all this, he reflects:

The most unsettling thing about these images is not the violence they document, but rather what they suggest to us about how these people wanted, in that moment, to be seen. And how they thought, in that moment, they would want to remember themselves. Moreover, performing, acting, posing appear to be part of the procedures of humiliation.

These images seem to suggest that the depiction of the violence is intimately related to its most extreme manifestations, and its assimilation by society. This idea was the seed for the two-film project in which Oppenheimer and his collaborators sought to delve beneath the surface of Indonesia's present: on the one hand, *The Act of Killing* puts into play a strategy that turns around on itself to reflect how the perpetrators of the killings see themselves and want to be seen, of how they weave a whole web of moulded stories, fantasies and memories that enable them to live with their

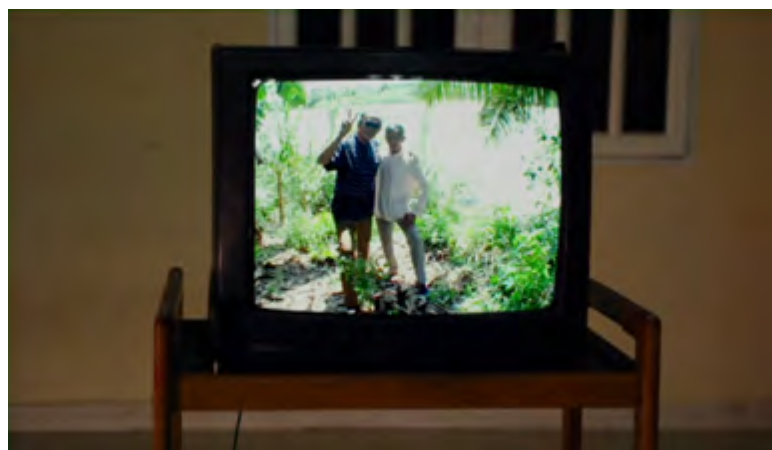


past; on the other, *The Look of Silence* adds to this strategy a view that is censored in Indonesian society: the view of the victim, which it juxtaposes against those of the perpetrators in encounters that are only possible thanks to cinema and the presence of the director himself. Both films, their differences notwithstanding, are based on the *fabulated* (or imaginatively reconstructed) testimony of the perpetrator, out of which a particular construction of reality is structured.

## 2. THE FABULATION OF THE PERPETRATOR

The crimes committed in Indonesia in the context of the coup led by General Suharto were perpetrated with US support and celebrated in the US and European media at the time. These crimes remain unpunished, many of those responsible are still in power, and there have been no initiatives for reparations, victim assistance or debate and recovery of the country's historical memory. On a few occasions (see Stevens, 2015) Oppenheimer has compared the situation to an alternate history of Europe in which the Nazis won. In such a situation, what can cinema do to restore the memory of the tragedy?

After numerous interviews<sup>3</sup> with members of the death squads that perpetrated the genocide, the filmmaker met Anwar Congo, who would become the main character in *The Act of Killing*. The film's cinematic strategy operates on two main levels. On one level, Anwar and his companions are given the chance to stage a film in which they themselves recreate their acts, and review it on screen (while the camera films their own opinions of the footage they are watching). Cinema, as a visual imaginary, forms part of their lives and even of their killing techniques, and thus proves to be a natural vehicle for recovering their past through dramatisations, a strategy that evokes the collaborative poetics employed by Jean Rouch with his subjects in films like *I, a Negro* (Moi, un noir, 1958) or *Chronicle of a Summer* (Chronique



*The look of silence* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014)

d'un été, 1961). On the other level, Oppenheimer is concerned with the present, with teasing out how these people see themselves, and how they want to be seen in contemporary Indonesia; in short, how they can live with what they have done, and how they give meaning to their lives based on it. To this end, the director complements these scenes with an interactive filming of their conversations, demonstrations, and different moments of their everyday lives. However, this strategy is based on an intense and intimate relationship with them—in the tradition of Robert Flaherty and his method of living with his subjects for an extended period—to produce a dramatic work that involves months of filming and the filmmaker's manifest involvement in what he is filming.

The first image of *The Act of Killing* is of a huge building in the shape of a fish, out of which emerges a line of women dancing in synchrony. The next shot shows Anwar Congo and Herman Koto, two men directly responsible for the extermination of thousands of people in North Sumatra, under a majestic waterfall, their arms outstretched and their expressions evoking relief and serenity. A voice, amplified by a megaphone, gives orders to the women who are positioned around them to smile and express peace and happiness on their faces. "These are the first shots!" barks the voice. "Don't let the cameras catch you with a long

face! Smile! Real joy, not just pleasure! And natural beauty! This isn't a farce!" The shot then changes, the film shoot is over and some assistants are giving out towels to the actresses, who are visibly distressed by the extreme humidity of the place. The farce is exposed. From this point, a distance is revealed that is partly comical, partly critical, which Francisco Montero (2013) has astutely explained as follows: "the whole film is founded on the contrast between the high level of awareness of its creators and the aberrant lack of awareness of its protagonists."



**The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)**

This level of self-exhibition, of celebration of a heinous past, is what differentiates the Indonesian situation from other genocides whose perpetrators were defeated and neutralised, or whose societies have engaged in reparations processes. The Shoah constitutes the paradigmatic case, and Claude Lanzmann established a canon that has become a moral benchmark for the treatment of such horrors in documentary cinema. In his film *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann resorts to the word as the only legitimate way of recounting the horror without showing what has no possible image. However, he uses a hidden camera to interview the former SS soldier Franz Suchomel while he explains the operation of Auschwitz. The executioner's testimony is not only meticulously or-

chestrated; it is also obtained without his consent, with Lanzmann promising, in front of the camera, that his identity will be protected.

Rithy Panh is a somewhat different case, and also more honest with his interview subjects. In *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), he films the memory of the Cambodian genocide, including prison guards at the S-21 extermination camp, recreating the actions and words of the Khmer horror of which they were the perpetrators. Panh's film was shot at the camp itself, now converted into a memorial to the tragedy, with special attention to gestures as a means of accessing the past. There is a crucial difference here from Lanzmann's approach: for Panh, the question of the executioner's humanity is clear: "He's human at every instant; that's the reason why he can be judged and condemned. No one can rightly authorize himself to humanize or dehumanize anyone" (PANH, 2013: 54). Based on this recognition, the executioner's testimony can constitute a privileged source of information on the routines and practices of the extermination, as the French-Cambodian filmmaker himself explains:

Often, during the filming of *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, I ask the "comrade guards" to "make the gestures" of the period for my camera. I specify that I am not asking them to "act" but to "make the gestures", a way of extending their words. If necessary they start, stop, and start again ten or twenty times. Their reflexes return; I see what really happened. Or what's impossible. *The method and the truth of the extermination appear* (PANH, 2013: 80, italics added).

These perpetrators cannot live in their own past (note Panh's clarification: he did not ask them to "act", but to "make the gestures"), nor are they given the opportunity to do so in either of the two films. There is a distance marked by the filmmaker himself from the staging that conditions the scope of the testimonies to a particular ethics of representation. With Panh or Lanzmann, the executioners cannot be free, although Panh opens up

their expressive possibilities more, offering a new path for exploring the testimony of the tragedy from the point of view of the perpetrator. Even a filmmaker like Avi Mograbi feels the need to complete the killer's testimony in *Z32* (2008) with his own reflections interspersed with Brechtian digressions distanced from and problematising the film itself, conveying to the spectator the moral dilemma posited by the filmmaker. Oppenheimer himself criticizes Lanzmann's position in the following terms:

Lanzmann draws a red line around the question of why the perpetrators did what they did. I don't draw that line. By approaching them as human beings, I try to understand how. Through the question of how they live with what they've done, how they narrate what they've done, how they want to be seen, and how they see themselves, I then try to glimpse why they did what they did at the time. Lanzmann famously said that it's obscene to ask that question "why." I utterly disagree. I think if we want to understand how human beings do this to each other—because every act of evil in our history has been committed by human beings—we have to look at the people who do it as human beings and understand how and why they do this (Oppenheimer, quoted in LUSZTIG, 2013: 52).

The difference in Oppenheimer's treatment of the executioner compared with these earlier filmmakers is basically twofold. First of all, the heroic nature of genocide in contemporary Indonesian society allows for a range of different approaches that prove particularly interesting for exploring human evil in a context where it has been celebrated rather than repressed. Anwar Congo, in this sense, is not merely a mass murderer. From the outset, he declares with a sense of martyrdom that he has nightmares about what he did. His conception of himself, at least at the beginning of the film, is that of a kind of tragic hero who sacrificed himself for his country, and thus he constitutes an opportunity to explore in depth whether a human being can live in peace after committing

such heinous acts. In this way, both films examine a country whose society has been built on genocide, celebrating the massacre as a foundational act and, therefore, introducing into its imaginary an acceptance of the annihilation of many of its compatriots, fellow Indonesians labelled with an intolerable otherness whose representation has been meticulously shaped by the regime itself: in *The Act of Killing*, Anwar Congo is seen sitting in front of a television set showing a film produced by the government on the killings of communists, in which the victims are depicted as horrendously as possible in an effort to justify their extermination. Anwar explains that some children were traumatised by the film—which is compulsory viewing in schools—but despite it all he felt proud to have killed "the communists, who look so cruel in the film." These are stories that shape the conscience.



*The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

The second difference in Oppenheimer's treatment of the executioner lies in the filmmaker's development of a sympathetic relationship with him, giving him his own voice and creative freedom, and the design of a whole dramatic process extended over time in order to explore how the killer assimilates his past and expresses his identity in the film's representation. In short, the ethical approach arising from Oppenheimer's film aesthetic, dramatic work and mise-en-scène, creates a horizontal relationship and an intimacy with the killer resulting from an intense en-

agement with him, based on a genuine desire to understand. In this way, the filmmaker explores the need to tell that sometimes afflicts those who have committed such heinous acts: apart from Anwar's verbosity, perhaps the most paradigmatic case in the two films is Amir Hasan, the art teacher in *The Look of Silence* who illustrated a book about the killings he committed on Snake River. Oppenheimer, however, explores these acts by questioning the official story through the words of the executioner, but also questioning the words of the executioner through the cinematic medium and the performance for the camera, to offer us an image as problematic as the reality he is filming. Into this intimacy with his subject Oppenheimer inserts small digressions that contrast with the discourse of the executioners: the opinions expressed in the control room while Anwar appears on a television program in *The Act of Killing*, or the first shots of shopkeepers clearly being extorted by one of them. It is paradoxical that the counterpoint that most clearly reveals the inconsistencies of Anwar's discourse is also one of the most cynical and transparent killers in the film: Adi Zulkadry, whose extreme cynicism arises precisely from a rejection of all these stories and fantasies that others seem to need in order to live with what they've done.

In his landmark study of documentary filmmaking, Bill Nichols (1991: 34) suggests that "if there is one overriding ethical/political/ideological question to documentary filmmaking, it may be, What to do with people? How can people and issues be represented appropriately?" Taking this question to the representational limit constituted by the horror, and the moral limit constituted by giving a voice to the killer (mass killer, in this case), Oppenheimer's diptych represents a milestone in documentary filmmaking that follows in the tradition of filmmakers like Rithy Panh or Avi Mograbi to take their idea even further: while Panh confronts executioners and survivors at the very heart of the Khmer horror in *S21: The Khmer*

*Rouge Killing Machine*, and Mograbi inserted the on-camera testimonials of a killer in *Z32* (a reflective, essay-style documentary that turns back on itself to assess its own moral burden), Oppenheimer literally brings the killer's mind to the screen in order to reassess it from his own perspective, to explore it and illuminate it through dramatisation in a strategy that turns around on itself, and that has Anwar Congo himself as its active, conscious subject. Throughout this process, Oppenheimer maintains his position as an outside observer who provides a clear point of view in contrast with the delusional dramatisations directed by Congo, and who vests the documentary with meaning through the editing process. In spite of all this, his intimacy with Congo is manifest and evident, and constitutes one of the choices—perhaps one of the riskiest in ethical terms—made by the filmmaker.

On numerous occasions, Oppenheimer has identified Jean Rouch as his biggest filmmaking influence, and it is no accident that we can find

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**OPPENHEIMER LITERALLY BRINGS THE KILLER'S MIND TO THE SCREEN IN ORDER TO REASSESS IT FROM HIS OWN PERSPECTIVE, TO EXPLORE IT AND ILLUMINATE IT THROUGH DRAMATISATION IN A STRATEGY THAT TURNS AROUND ON ITSELF**

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features in Rouch's poetics that serve to better understand the relationship established by Oppenheimer in his films with the Indonesian reality, and more specifically with the people who appear in his film. In *Moi, un noir* Rouch portrays the lives of young Nigerians in the city of Abidjan, in Ivory Coast. In the film's opening words, Rouch explains how he proposed to them "to shoot a film where they would play their own roles, where they would have the right to do and say whatever

they wanted.” Thus, Rouch films Oumarou Ganda and Petit Touré, who in turn create two fictitious characters through which to *fabulate* a particular story: Edward G. Robinson and Eddie Constantine. To bring us closer to the lives of Ganda and Touré, Rouch allows them to invent two identities through which to create a particular story which, in fact, will ultimately speak to us of their reality, of how they both perceive the world around them and inscribe themselves in it:

Fabulation reaffirms the reality of the character precisely because the character is real and does not use fabulation as a model but as a power. In the course of this fabulation the character becomes another, is another, and takes his people with him: fiction drawn from reality modulates the voice of the people (SÁNCHEZ, 2013: 220).

In the section of his book *Cinema II: The Time-Image* dedicated to Jean Rouch, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze outlines the concept of “simulation of a story”, and suggests that this is when “cinema can call itself *cinéma vérité*, all the more because it will have destroyed every model of the true so as to become creator and producer of truth” (2013: 156). This idea of the simulated story alludes to the abandonment of the *true form* in the search for another truth that can only be attained through cinematic investigation, through a different conception of film depiction.

If we return to Montero’s idea of the contrast between the high level of awareness of the filmmakers and the aberrant lack of awareness of the protagonists in *The Act of Killing*, we can see clearly that the involvement that Oppenheimer allows to Anwar and the other killers is different from the freedom that Rouch gave his subjects. While Rouch sought to build bridges towards a shared ethnography in cinema, Oppenheimer maintains a critical view, a final judgement with respect to what is being filmed, that does not leave the film entirely in the hands of his subjects. In the words of Benedict Anderson (in TEN BRINK and OPPEN-

HEIMER, 2012: 284), “he is not part of their film but they are part of his.”

The discursive tools conceived by Rouch are brought into play here through different technical possibilities—and, therefore, a different relationship with the subject based on those possibilities. In the publication that accompanies the critical edition of Rouch’s films produced by Intermedio, Fran Benavente offers an overview of his work that unpacks different elements of his personal poetics. Thus, he proposes the concept of “double movement” (2009: 34), which blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction and allows characters to wander freely across it. It is precisely this double movement that offers such a complex image of Anwar Congo in one of the last staged scenes in *The Act of Killing*, when the *noir* fiction re-enactment causes him to collapse in an unusual moment of empathy. Benavente (2009: 43) expands on the explanation of this concept as a “double movement between the one filming and the one filmed: a kind of feedback loop.” This mechanism finds its maximum expression in digital technology, which allows Anwar to see himself on screen and assess his own performance for the camera. In this way, Oppenheimer’s strategy creates a dual space which, on the one hand, contains the representation conceived by the killer himself, while on the other, turns around to include the killer assessing himself, questioning his own representation and, in this way, questioning the whole representation offered by the film. It will be this same contortion of the strategy that makes it possible to turn the space around again for the creation of *The Look of Silence*, a film in which this time it is the victim who assesses the killer’s “performance”.

### 3. PERFORMANCE AND TRUTH

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To understand how non-fiction film works, and why, as a medium, it is one of the most insightful ways that we humans have for exploring our na-



ture, the key lies in the fact that we are performative beings. We are inhabiting languages and stories. And if we work with the natural performance that comes when anyone is being filmed, that can be even more insightful. Situations can be created where extraordinary things happen that you never would have dreamed of (Oppenheimer in HACHERO, 2015).

In his theorisation on the observational documentary, Nichols (1991: 42) introduces the concept of the *social actor* “to stress the degree to which individuals represent themselves to others.” In this way, the researcher identifies an equivalence between the performative processes of the individuals who appear in a documentary and the processes brought into play in fiction films. “Social actors, people, retain the capacity to act within the historical arena where they perform.” In this sense, what kind of truth does the documentary offer?

In the ending to *Chronicle of a Summer*, Rouch and Morin screen the rough cut of the film for its protagonists, together with a diverse group of other people. After the screening, and with the camera filming them, they ask them what they thought of the movie. Conflicting positions emerge between those who connected intimately with the characters, those who criticise them for an obscene or immodest sincerity, and those who comment precisely on a lack of naturalness. Morin reduces this to two diametrically opposed poles, between the excess or lack of sincerity of the subjects. In any case, this scene raises a substantial doubt about the film. In response to what the filmmakers view as the brutal sincerity of their subjects, Morin suggests that the audience viewed them either as comedians or as exhibitionists, and therefore their film was a failure, because they were neither one of these. Rouch concludes by problematising the matter even further: “we cannot know, and nor can they.”

A little earlier, one of the children in the audience had responded emphatically to the dilemma of what they had seen on the screen: “it’s true; you

can’t lie to the camera.” This categorical assertion by a child may seem naive, but behind it lies an equally categorical truth: there is a trace of reality that is revealed to the camera, related to what Jean-Louis Comolli once insightfully observed:

The filmmaking process proves that there is in each person an unconscious awareness of the gaze of the other, and that this awareness is expressed in the adoption of a posture, because it incites and seeks that posture and because it records it, because it inscribes its mark. Inevitably, the filmed subject identifies the round black eye of the camera as a materialised gaze of the other. With an unconscious but certain knowledge, the subject knows that being filmed means exposing oneself to the other (COMOLLI, 2002: 135).

In front of the camera, we make a particular choice in our own self-portrayal. Beyond the question of whether the performance is consistent with the person who performs it or the topic explored by the documentary, in itself it constitutes a gaze, and therefore a truth. Comolli explores this further, criticising the idea of *mise-en-scène* as a single gaze, the director’s, realised from the camera to the filmed subject. For Comolli (2002: 136), “each one, filmmaker included, is under the gaze of the others and even objects, when they return our gaze, return it to us charged with them, altered by them.” In this sense, the performative documentary conceived by Oppenheimer includes the gazes of his subjects by giving them performative space and creative freedom.

Anyone I film also comes to the filmic encounter with his (her) habitus, that tightly woven fabric, that network of learned gestures, acquired reflexes, assimilated postures, to the point of having become unconscious, which make him (her), depending on the field involved [...], appear compromised and caught off guard in the *mise-en-scène* [...] (COMOLLI, 2002: 138).

This performative space that Oppenheimer constructs thus becomes a strategy that gives the perpetrator the freedom to fabulate or dramatise



*The look of silence* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014)

his past while at the same time critically assessing his gaze. Through the editing process, Oppenheimer places images constructed by the perpetrators into relation with one another, images from the propaganda film produced by the authorities about the massacres, images of the terrorised masses, images of conversations that expose the fallacies being presented, images of victims viewing the statements of the perpetrators... In short, the portrait covers a range of gazes that reflect the real identity of Indonesia, and above all the fictional nature of its manipulated history and the false myths that the killers have constructed about the massacre. The performances and fabrications of the perpetrators of the Indonesian genocide are inscribed in a wider filmic discourse that places them in context.

But it goes further still, as it also assesses the gaze of the spectator. By refusing to include his own moral dilemmas in the film, as Mograbi did, Oppenheimer leaves the spectator to be the one who tackles the dilemma, furthermore confronted by modes of representation that bring into play codes as diverse as performance, interviewing, archive footage or the blunt confrontation filmed (and facilitated) by the camera. In his reflections on Rouch, Sergi Sánchez (2013: 224) considers how digital technology facilitated an evolution of his ethnographic poetics towards a different relationship with the filmed subject:

How does this “I am other” that seemed to govern Rouch’s ethnographic work change with the rise of digital technology? We could say that the formula becomes more specific: the “anyone” is specified as a second person singular that includes the individual and the collective, that retains the influence of the foreign culture and condenses it into the all-encompassing ‘you’, that speaks with the voice of a complex and multifaceted ‘I’. From the “I am other” that Godard and Deleuze associated with Rouch’s project we move to this “I am you” imposed by digital technology.

It is an intimate and specific relationship with the filmed subject that could take shape in those encounters between victim and perpetrator that structure *The Look of Silence*, where Oppenheimer opens up a whole new possibility of dialogue and confrontation unimaginable until then in a society like Indonesia’s. Cinema as intervention in reality, as a form of thought that unravels the false stories to move towards a particular truth which, in turn, makes political action possible.

When, at the end of *The Act of Killing*, Anwar returns to the rooftop and tries to reproduce his testimony at the beginning of the film, shot months earlier, his body doubles over and he seems to want to vomit itself up. There is a psychosomatic reaction to his own testimony, to the place and, in short, to the traumatic past. There is an identity crisis in the subject, who doesn’t know how to perform there where months earlier he had explained and re-enacted his killing method in full detail, ending the demonstration with an obscene final dance in the same place where he had taken the lives of a thousand people. After the experience of filming *The Act of Killing*, Anwar is *the other*. Empathy has blurred his personal fantasies, and his *character* falls apart on camera. The fantasies that permit Anwar to deal with his past are no longer sustained even in his story. Cinema thus reveals its capacity to travel to the place of the other through performance itself. The processes of representation that the perpetrators



*The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

bring into place are exposed as fragile by a cinema that *writes* in that same code, speaks the same language and, for this very reason, can unravel the intricacies of the images, the gestures, the words and the faces, and tease out the truth they offer through a particular critical mise-en-scène. In front of the camera, Anwar's body cannot lie, nor can the sweaty faces of the killer's family in the confrontation with Adi in *The Look of Silence*.

In an interview conducted by Joshua Oppenheimer and Joram ten Brink with Rithy Panh (in TEN BRINK and OPPENHEIMER, 2012: 248), the Cambodian filmmaker refers to the incomparable capacity of cinema to express what happens to a face when it confesses "I have killed." The power of filmmaking to explore the unspeakable. This is a key feature of the films that have explored such horrors, from Lanzmann to Panh, Mograbi and Oppenheimer themselves, and which, through the poetics of performance, assumes a different ontology, penetrating the killer's own mind to pose the question to the spectator of what the truth is. While Rithy Panh discovered the method and the truth of the Cambodian extermination in the expressions of the prison guards in *S-21*, Joshua Oppenheimer orients his film methodology towards the staging of the mythical story that made the Indonesian genocide possible, and that even today sustains its memory upon those who perpetrated it. In their obscene celebration lies the same symbolic destruction of the other that makes all



genocide possible, and which Oppenheimer is able to explore through the cinematic medium. Through the codes of a simulated story, Oppenheimer offers us that truth referred to by Deleuze (2013: 156) as "not a cinema of truth, but *the truth of cinema*." ■

## NOTES

- 1 The director's statement can be consulted on the "Statements" page of the film's website: <http://theactofkilling.com/statements/>
- 2 These images are interrogated and problematised in the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), in which Errol Morris explores the (self-)portrayal of soldiers in the pictures they took and how the violence of torture is also deployed in performative codes.
- 3 These interviews were conducted from 2003 to 2005, when Oppenheimer first met the protagonists of *The Act of Killing*. More information on this process can be found in the press notes for the film (p. 14), which can be downloaded from the film's website.

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## **FABULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE KILLER IN JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S DOCUMENTARIES**

### **Abstract**

With the diptych that comprises the films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), Joshua Oppenheimer and his collaborators create a full portrait of present-day Indonesia, where the ghosts of the genocide that took the lives of more than half a million people still linger. The filmmaker asserts that neither of his films attempt to represent the genocide. Instead, they explore the vestiges that Indonesia's traumatic past has left in an ailing present, through two strategies: first, *The Act of Killing* examines the stories, fantasies and false myths that the perpetrators create to be able to live with their heinous past, and how they see themselves and want to be seen; and then, *The Look of Silence* uses the perpetrators' testimonies to instigate a kind of political intervention in Indonesian society that would allow the victims to finally confront the killers. It is a dual story that poses various dilemmas for the spectator, ranging from the ethics of the filmmaker to the ontology of the documentary making itself.

### **Key words**

Fabulation; Performance; Genocide and Film; Perpetrator; Indonesian Genocide; Documentary Film; Ethnography.

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## **FABULACIÓN Y PERFORMANCE DEL ASESINO EN LOS DOCUMENTALES DE JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER**

### **Resumen**

Con el díptico que componen *The Act of Killing* (2012) y *La mirada del silencio* (The Look of Silence, 2014) Joshua Oppenheimer y sus colaboradores crean un completo retrato del presente de Indonesia, donde aún permanecen los fantasmas del genocidio que acabó con más de medio millón de personas. El realizador mantiene que ninguno de sus filmes pretende representar el genocidio. En lugar de eso, sus películas exploran los residuos que el pasado traumático de Indonesia ha dejado en un presente enfermo a través de dos estrategias: por un lado, *The Act of Killing* profundiza en las historias, fantasías y falsos mitos que los perpetradores elaboran para vivir con su pasado abyecto, y en cómo se ven a sí mismos y quieren ser vistos; por otro, *La mirada del silencio* parte de los testimonios de los perpetradores para generar una intervención política en la sociedad indonesia que permita a las víctimas confrontar, por fin, a los asesinos. Un doble relato que plantea diversos dilemas al espectador, que van desde la ética del cineasta hasta la propia ontología del documental.

### **Palabras clave**

Fabulación; performance; genocidio y cine; perpetrador; genocidio indonesio; documental; etnografía.

### **Autor**

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# CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD BETWEEN DISASTER AND SACRIFICE: AN ANALYSIS OF *THE IMPOSSIBLE*

ASUNCIÓN BERNÁRDEZ RODAL

IGNACIO MORENO SEGARRA

## I. INTRODUCTION

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Drawing on concepts from cultural studies and film historiography, this article analyses the figure of the mother as a key element in the film *The Impossible* (2012) directed by Juan Antonio Bayona. Its huge box office success (42 million euros in ticket sales in Spain) can be explained by the background of the economic and social crisis afflicting us, which has favoured the production of conservative cultural products.

Part of the appeal of the film lies in the spectacle it offers of the fragility of the well-being of developed societies and its relationship with the figure of sacrificial motherhood, which contributes a highly marked gender reading to a humanitarian crisis situation that we associate with the sense of global economic collapse. The crisis was identified on 23 October 2008 by the head of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, in the following terms: "We are in the midst of once-in-a-century credit tsunami" (BOYLE, 2013). In 2012, according to Sheldon Filger (2012), we experien-

ced an "acceleration of the negative economic and fiscal metrics that plagued advanced and major emerging economies in 2011", especially in the Eurozone. In Spain, unemployment rose to 25% (50% among youth), and the situation in Greece, Portugal and Ireland was dramatic, while countries with strong economies were plunged into fear of a "double-dip recession" (ROSENBERG, 2012: 174), an economic recession within another recession. In 2012, the economic language was apocalyptic and cinematic: *Taxmageddon*, referring to a fear of an increase in taxes in the US, in articles like "Coming Soon: 'Taxmageddon'" (LEONHARDT, 2012) and *Eurogeddon* in articles like "Eurogeddon: A Worst-case Scenario Handbook for the European Debt Crisis" (WEISSMANN, 2012) were terms used by the financial press that demonstrate the importance that cinema continues to have in the creation of frameworks of social interpretation.

Our analysis of how cinema contributes to the collective imaginary (RYAN and KELLNER, 1990), and which in this case produces reassuring figures like the "sacrificial" mother, is based on three different

strategies. First of all, we will look at the relationship of *The Impossible* with the “disaster film” genre, examining its mechanisms to create a metaphor for the social anxieties associated with historical events (BOYLE, 2013, JAMESON, 1979). Secondly, we will conduct an analysis of the *Mater dolorosa* stereotype, beginning with its historical evolution, so that we can analyse the visual and structural strategies used in Bayona’s film. Finally, we will consider how the film has been affected by the way in which the general press treated the tsunami.

In tension with the allusion to the *veracity* of the story by the film’s director and protagonists, we have based this analysis on a series of assumptions. First: that *The Impossible* is an artistic recreation of real events. Second: that as such a representation, it forms part of a visual tradition (in this case cinematic and pictorial) against which it can be analysed. Third: that as an artistic recreation, it works with a high visual density that condenses aspects of the narration that can be highlighted and analysed.

Our analysis of the film’s symbolic universe is focused on its treatment of the figure of the mother, because we are concerned here with the silent revolution, as Badinter (2011: 11) describes it, that has reinstated motherhood as the “centre of female destiny” in a debate that is of interest beyond the broad limits of the feminist theoretical universe. On the other hand, we are conscious of

*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)



*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

the general phenomenon in mainstream cinema which, according to various authors (GALLAGHER, 2009: 210), involves the use of the image of wounded or hospitalised women as a leitmotiv in genres as diverse as comedy, action and science fiction. In other words, this kind of scene can appear in films like *Spiderman* (Sam Raimi, 2002), *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) or *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer, 2006). The images of hospitalised or suffering women are an “exceptional strategy” that transforms the “most vibrant” narrative development, because “women’s deathbed and hospital-bed scenes in contemporary cinema validate anew the maternal role and the figure of the mother transporting the woman-centered discursive space of melodrama into narrative terrain often hostile to women’s presence”, but may have a negative impact on the representation of femininity, which is depicted as inherently weak. It is obvious that the media visually exploit suffering and violence (BUTLER, 2004) and in this general process, the wounded bodies of women are exhibited without restrictions for the spectators’ gaze.

Since the 1970s, feminist criticism has been engaged in an in-depth review and historical observation of the models of mothers, resulting in an interesting bibliography (THORNTON, 2014; FEASEY, 2012), especially in relation to melodrama (DOANE, 1987; FISHER, 1996; KAPLAN, 1992; ARNOLD, 2013; WHITNEY, 2007) and other film genres (MACCORMICK, 2010; DOUGLAS and MICHAELS, 2004; HORMIGOS,

2010). From a feminist perspective, the history of representations of motherhood can be arranged on a binary scale: self-sacrificing mothers who give up everything to physically or emotionally support their children, or “viperous spiders” (WALTERS and HARRISON, 2014: 39) who weave webs of evil around their children. This dichotomy is highly negative for the social imaginary because it constrains women in claustrophobic models that provoke anxiety and insecurity. Some critics argue that in recent years, especially in television series, a new model has emerged (WALTERS and HARRISON: 2014) of “aberrant mothers” who break with the traditional sacrificial models, but who nevertheless are not narratively punished, as would have happened in the past. This type of model may be less oppressive for women, but at present it is more common on television than in cinema.

## 2. APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION: FEMINISM, DISASTER FILMS AND METAPHORS FOR THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

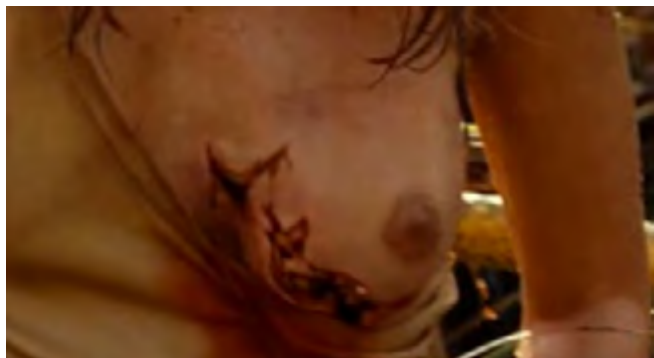
The marketing strategy for *The Impossible* focused on the idea that it was the true story of the Álvarez-Belón family. María Belón played a very active role in the writing of the script, the filming process, and the promotion, for which she granted a multitude of interviews in different media. As Tunzelmann (2012) in *The Guardian* noted: “The real family on whose experiences the film is based is Spanish. Maria Bennett’s real-life counterpart, María Belón, has a story credit on this production.” The combination of the press stories and those provided by María Belón ultimately limited the cultural and cinematic criticism of the film, which barely went further than comparing the family’s actual experiences with what was presented on screen. For example, an important issue was not addressed: this film’s relationship with the disaster film genre, despite the fact that the genre in which a cultural product is inscribed acts as a frame of reference that we should always

take into account when interpreting the text. In the case of *The Impossible*, this frame of reference needs to be explained.

The history of the disaster film began in the 1970s with titles like *Airport* (George Seaton, Henry Hathaway, 1970), *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, Irwin Allen, 1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin, 1974). The action in these films revolved around a large-scale disaster provoked by some form of technology. Helen Hanson (2006: 128-129) highlights the presence of a white male hero who articulates most of the collective responses to the disaster. This opens the genre up to a political reading because it reinforces individualist and traditional family values. Hoberman (2003: 17) also noted that these films had a comforting element because they celebrated “the inherent virtue of decent, everyday Middle Americans, linking their survival skills to traditional gender roles and conventional moral values.”

Cynthia Belmont (2013) adds a gender perspective to the analysis of disaster films of the 1990s with her suggestion that in these films we can see heroines who lose their power as the story progresses (*Armageddon*, 1998), and who are even often given the blame for the disaster. Narratively, this loss of female power balances and connects with the efforts of the male protagonist to dominate a wild natural force that attempts to destroy “the American way of life.”

The idea of survival linked to the reinstatement of gender roles leads us to the problematic and ambivalent idea of motherhood: “disaster films often envision nature as female, as a mother—in this case, not a loving one who deserves our love in return, but rather an alienated adversary in a battle of good and evil” (BELMONT, 2013: 358). The equation in a patriarchal society that links the woman with nature and nature with motherhood is complex, because it is related both to the system of care and to random punishments. This restructuring and reinforcement of the nuclear family after the natural disaster has a reading that Bel-



*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

mont associates with apocalyptic religious literature and the concept of Christian guilt, or “cosmic displeasure with humanity” (BELMONT, 2013: 353).

On the question of the connection between the disaster film and financial crises, especially the crisis that began in 2008, an extremely interesting analysis can be found in an article by Kirk Boyle (2013), “The Imagination of Economic Disaster: Eco-Catastrophe Films of the Great Recession”, where, using the theory of framing (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1980), he argues that the natural disaster metaphor was one of the first used by political leaders to talk about the crisis as a “perfect storm, whirlpool, hurricane, earthquake, tornado and wildfire.” He analyses a series of films with reference to the ideas set forth by Fredric Jameson in essays like “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”, to see how these kinds of works participate in the social and psychological mechanisms of repression/displacement to talk about ecological but also economic issues, based on Jameson’s suggestion that the “drawing power of the works of mass culture has implied that such works can-

not manage anxieties about the social order unless they have first revived them and given them some rudimentary expression” (JAMESON, 1979: 144). In this respect, we need to ask what kinds of effects could the crisis have on Spanish women of child-bearing age. While establishing a direct correlation would be impossible, we can note that the birth rate in Spain fell from 2008 to 2012, when the film was released, by a significant 12.8 % (Huffington Post, 2013).

### **3. THE ORIGIN OF THE MATER DOLOROSA**

One of the theories of our study is that *The Impossible* constructs a conservative image of the mother on both narrative and expository levels. The film’s narration reinforces actions that point to the model of the sacrificial mother, while in the visual construction of Maria there is an exaggeration of the gruesome make-up and the gestures that make her appear as a *Mater dolorosa*: bloodied, wounded, and yet still firm in her motherly values and instincts.

In the Christian tradition, there are two stereotypes of the mother: the Virgin with Child, who conveys a sense of tranquillity and happiness, and the Virgin shattered by the pain of her son’s death, which possesses a redemptive element. Jesus died to redeem the world, and Mary’s pain at the foot of cross has the same meaning: she is pained by her son, but also by humanity. As Badinter (1991: 225) suggests, pain and motherhood are thus associated through the evocation of the mother in mystical terms, as the maternal sacrifice is rooted in female nature. Implicitly, every good mother is a “saint”. One variant of this figure is Our Lady of Sorrows (in Latin: *Beata Maria Virgo Perdolens*), recognized at the synod of Cologne in 1413. From that time, this image formed part of the devotionals (fundamental in the education of young women), highlighting the theme of the seven sorrows suffered by the Virgin (represented by seven swords piercing her heart), evoking

the prophesy of Simeon contained in Luke 2:35: "Indeed, a sword will pierce your own soul, too, so that the inner thoughts of many people might be revealed."

This model of the suffering mother carries a huge symbolic weight, as the Catholic tradition has reinforced the model of motherhood as a painful event, a model itself derived from Biblical tradition; "it will be painful for you to bear children" (Genesis 3:16) is the punishment women receive for having eaten the forbidden fruit. Motherhood condemns women to the physical pain of childbirth, but also to having it as their principal social function. This negativity associated with conception and birth is neutralised in depictions of the Virgin as a mother with child, publicly recognised images of the figure of Jesus, but not of his birth. Susan Sontag (2003: 21) suggests that "[t]he sufferings most often deemed worthy of representation are those understood to be the product of wrath, divine or human. Suffering from natural causes, such as illness or childbirth, is scantily represented in the history of art;" it is for precisely this reason that the representation of dramatic pain shines in the depictions of the Baroque martyrs, because, as Mercedes Alcalá (2012: 2) suggests, showing wounded bodies of women is a display of male power over them.

This idea of the sacrificed mother passed intact from the medieval Christian imaginary into the modern era and is present in both Rousseau and Freud, who, "with 150 years between them, elaborated an image of the woman that coincides remarkably: notable are her sense of self-denial and sacrifice" (BADINTER, 1991: 225); in other words, they do not become heroines by the use of force, but by their capacity for sacrifice and for stoically enduring suffering. Heroines become heroines by devoting themselves to others and showing their pain in public unhesitatingly and unrestrainedly. In this context, we can read the clear presence of a mother in our film who is wounded and bears her sufferings while protecting her son as they search

for the rest of the family, developing the formula that Molly Haskell (1987) posits in her classic study of the role of the woman in classical melodrama: self-sacrifice, suffering and redemption.

#### 4. NARRATIVE AND VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

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The way that the events in the film are narrated is very similar to the style of journalistic chronicles. The main protagonists are white, while the Asian victims, whom Dhiraj Murth (2011: 1-12) refers to as "subaltern victims" of post-colonialism, seem to form part of the backdrop. General explanations are omitted and the tragedy is narrated from the point of view of a single family (GALTUNG and HOLMBOE, 1965: 66-84), suggesting the assumption that audiences prefer stories that are specific and even morbid in their details.

The visual references for the film are the press coverage of the tsunami and previous disaster films. How many of the premises of this genre can we identify in the film? The first narrative coincidence is that the natural disaster occurs in an exotic setting where an international elite spend their holidays, and the luxury acts as a counterpoint to the chaos, where all comforts disappear. The tsunami is a simplifying metaphor for the complex global financial crisis that began in 2008, which is verbalised by the father of the family when he expresses his fear of losing his job.

Another conservative element of the film is that the local victims appear only incidentally, and the stories told are always the stories of Westerners. Local references are erased and replaced with familiar details. The critic for *The Guardian*, Alex von Tunzelmann (2012), remarked: "The Álvarez-Belón family's story is moving, dramatic and true, and there's no reason it shouldn't be told; but it's a shame that that the film excludes any meaningful acknowledgement of the disaster's Asian victims while doing so." It is significant that the social differences reappear at the end of



the film, when the family is rescued and can leave behind the disaster afflicting a developing nation.

The references to social position, to the father's job, to the mother's desire to work, or to their subsequent physical suffering are important, as the film constructs its political position by juxtaposing a large-scale event (the tsunami) against a small-scale event (the challenges faced by the family and their dramatic separation). Of relevance to this point is an essay by Slavoj Žižek (2007) in which the philosopher analyses disaster films as if they were family dramas: "The films which are furthest from family dramas are catastrophe films, which cannot but fascinate the viewer with a spectacular depiction of a terrifying event of immense proportions."

It is significant to note the constant reference made by the characters to returning to their roots, without identifying where those roots are, particularly considering the Spanish family is portrayed in the film by British actors. During the opening scenes, in a conversation before the tsunami, Maria expresses her desire to "go home", relating this to the possibility of going back to work, thereby subverting the meaning that "going home" has traditionally had for women. This suggestion doesn't please Henry, who replies "Well, you should think about it" just before the tsunami strikes. After the devastating wave the theme of returning home reappears almost immediately in the agonising survival scene when, after the obligatory cries for help ("give me your hand" or "hold on"), Lucas repeatedly asks his mother "Can we go home? I'm scared." In other words, in this catastrophic process the tsunami has changed the meaning of "go home", which shifts from being linked to female independence to a metaphor for the traditional concepts of safety and stability for the children.

The tsunami occurs just when Maria mentions the possibility of working to her husband. If we consider that disaster films often underscore the corrective function of the tragedy by having it



*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

coincide with a morally reprehensible event, we can deduce that the tsunami and the role of the woman are very closely related. It is not so much a criticism of a disaffected mother (when the hotel receptionist finds out that she is a doctor and has left her job to take care of the kids, she remarks: "I see, you got promoted") as a reflection of a gentle mother who has doubts about her destiny, and whose maternal instinct will be triggered by the tragedy. In this sense the tragedy of the tsunami plays the role of what Žižek (2007) describes as a "'vanishing mediator' whose function is to restore her sense of identity and purpose in life, her self-image [...]; once his job is done, he can disappear."

This is a film that employs the visual strategies typical of disaster films, but that integrates elements from religious cinema. In *The Impossible* we see scenes that recall imagery of the expulsion from Paradise, the Virgin and Child and even the rescue of Moses from the rivers of the Nile (WRIGHT, 2013:

58). In the film the family is expelled from their paradise of comfort and in this disaster the gentle, post-modern mother has a painful and atavistic experience of motherhood. This poses an extremely problematic gender reading. "Mom [...] I can't see you like this" her son tells her when he sees the wounds on her leg and chest and looks away. As Susan Sontag (2003: 21) remarks, "the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked. For many centuries, in Christian art, depictions of hell offered both of these elemental satisfactions."

While in the first minutes of the film we are presented with a female figure that possesses the elements of a lusty Eve, a tempter with sensual beauty, with the effects of the tsunami, the elements belonging to Eve disappear and the figure of the *Mater dolorosa* is adopted to represent Maria's body. This shift means that we now always see Maria covered in contusions, with black eyes and bleeding wounds. Maria's body is dragged, operated on, vomits up blood and mud and is even given up for dead on two occasions. From the moment of the disaster, it is a spectacle of pain and suffering, exposed to the gaze of her son and the spectators through the camera, which pauses briefly but precisely to show us details like her sores or her wedding ring. This kind of transfiguration of the protagonist's body as a spectacle of the pain of another is related, according to Sontag (2002:43), to religious thinking, which "links pain to sacrifice, sacrifice to exaltation", in this case making us stronger in our weaknesses, especially in those related to our gender roles.

This image also fits the way in which the international press depicted the news of the tsunami, where, as described in an article by Marilyn Childs (2006), women were represented in the press as the personification of the universal victim of a disaster: weeping, tormented and overwhelmed by the situation, while the males appeared bereft of emotion but engaged in action, participating in rescue work or helping other victims.

Similarly, the study by Porismita Borah (2009) examining how American newspapers portrayed the tsunami in the Indian Ocean compared with Hurricane Katrina revealed that the image most widely used by newspapers like the *Washington Post* for the tsunami was the picture of a mother crying over the lifeless bodies of her children. And in her study of the impact of the tsunami in the British press, Tracey Skelton (2006) highlights the number of stories she could find in the media of mothers trying to grab hold of their children and losing them in the waves. All these stories and anxieties related to dead or missing children underscore the role of motherhood. These are the same audiovisual strategies we see in the film, such as when Maria and Lucas find a child floating in mud and take him with them in a highly melodramatic scene. Mary Ann Doane (1987: 73) points out that "maternal melodramas are scenarios of separation, of separation and return or of threatened separation dramas which play out all the permutations of the mother/child relation."

As was the case of the women affected by the tsunami portrayed by the press, the figure of Maria in the film is essentialised: she is not a woman, she is only a mother. It is an exclusive vehicle of suffering and sacrifice that is shown to us in the close-ups of the face, the bleeding wounds shown quickly but constantly and that build up a picture of a heroine enduring physical pain. Maria grows agonisingly weaker before our eyes, while at the same time she acquires greater moral strength. She is a character sanctified for her dignity in the face of suffering.

It is our view that the *Mater dolorosa* is something more than a visual reference in *The Impossible* as it articulates and encapsulates all the narrative and visual discourses about the protagonist, which are fused into a character so simple that she borders on stereotype, yet complex enough to be the result of a long cultural tradition. This is due its nature as a quintessentialised representation of the mother and, to use an expression

of Badinter's (1991), a relational figure on which different ideological and cultural focal points are centred, including cinematic ones. This concept of superlative motherhood could be connected to an article by Adrienne McCormick (2010) analysing two extreme forms of motherhood in classical melodrama: "supermothers" and mothers who fail their offspring: "'Supermother' films coming out of Hollywood in the twenty-first century thus far feature mothers having to prove their mettle once again, no longer against insensitive husbands, racism, limited employment opportunities, and the like, but rather against terrorists, the supernatural, and aliens from outer space" (2010: 144-145).

In all these new scenarios, as in the case of the tsunami in *The Impossible*, mothers are punished on screen while ideals of a supermother capable of overcoming all manner of adversities are reinforced.



*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

Maria is the mother of three children whom she cares for equally; however, when the disaster strikes, in a highly significant twist, her maternal role is focused on the relationship with her eldest son, Lucas, who, after the first moments of the tragedy, takes on the role of Maria's male-protector in an ambivalent relationship; while he is with his brothers he is just another kid, but when the tragedy unfolds he comes to embody the essential mother-child

relationship, a relationship of care that at a certain point can be inverted so that the child can become a man capable of looking after his mother. On the other hand, in the scenes in the hospital, in spite of her qualifications as a doctor, Maria projects her motherly care running errands, connecting families, doing emotional work through her son Lucas. This introduces an interesting tension between the processes of mother/child identification-separation which, according to Doane (1987), form the basis of the classical maternal melodrama. In this way, we could view *The Impossible* as a story of learning and growth, a *Bildungsroman* in which the child becomes a hero upon passing a series of tests, the most important one being liberating himself from dependence on his mother. Along these lines of argument, it is interesting to note the comparison that Doane (1987: 90) makes between youth literature and melodrama, since "both boys and women are 'presubjects'; they are denied access to the full subjectivity bestowed on the adult male within a patriarchal culture." However, there is one substantial difference: while the hero of youth literature always achieves full subjectivity, the melodramatic heroine is always waiting, because "no *Bildung* takes place."

Maria is the victim who articulates no way out of the crisis situation other than rescuing another child (Daniel), an action that reinforces her condition of mother in relation to the narrative space of Henry, briefer but more active: a world of males who work together resolutely in the search for family members. Maria is the suffering mother and Henry is the wounded rescuer, each one conforming to a gender stereotype that keeps intact the traditional roles of the couple structure, which after a brief hesitation over their arrangement ("I can go back to work") are brutally reinstated by the disaster, which we can read as disapproving. Maria's maternal passivity is a way of returning order to the chaos



*The impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

that has been unleashed, and is exemplified in the scenes where Lucas takes the role of dominant male and begins making practical decisions and where, nevertheless, his mother continues to be the moral benchmark for him: when they hear Daniel's voice, Lucas doesn't want to respond, but his mother compels him to rescue the boy. In the hospital, Maria, transformed into the universal mother, asks again about Daniel, and encourages her son to become a useful person for the group.

As noted above, in cinema the models of "good mothers" acquire meaning in counterpoint to the models of "bad mothers". However, none of these models is stable. As Sarah Arnold (2013) argues from a psychoanalytical perspective, the good mother is a cultural construct which, in any case, is generally eclipsed by the father (as occurs in *The Impossible*): "the Good Mother is more often than not over-shadowed by a more powerful agent: the father, who either threatens or secures the family. The Good Mother retains

certain core elements such as selflessness and sacrifice, yet she is always determined in relation to a paternal figure. Her ability to nurture is dependent upon the third term of the father" (2013: 13).

The father is the active element in the plot who conquers an adverse space typical of adventure films, and the mother represents the passive element who waits to be rescued by her husband. Maria is the suffering, confined and powerless figure of melodrama, whose *pathos* is reinforced, according to Mary Ann Doane, "by the disproportion between the weakness of the victim and the seriousness of the danger" (1987: 73).

Maria is the mother who encapsulates the new "female destiny" of women in this period of crisis (BADINTER, 2011: 11) that began in 2008. This is not the first time in the last century that we have seen this kind of reactionary response. Susan Faludi (1991) also studied the backlash that occurred during the 1980s in the United States, and also in the period after 9-11 (FALUDI, 2009), moments when the media promoted the development of conservative ideas about the roles that each gender should fulfil. Finally, the financial crisis of 2008 has once again awakened the ghost of all-powerful motherhood through discourses of "New Domesticity" (MATCHAR, 2013), where the renewed interest in natural childbirth and attachment parenting (GONZÁLEZ, 2003) would be combined with personal solutions of many women who "choose" to remain very attached to domesticity. This renewed interest in more traditional child-rearing in the context of a financial crisis offers a new light under which to examine Maria's wounds. She is a character whose essentialism conceals the frustrating domesticity associated with child-rearing (FRIEDAN, 2010), and whose moral heroism only increases the anxiety provoked in women by these images of total motherhood (WARNER, 2005).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The central character in *The Impossible* is a mother who over the course of the story undergoes a transformation: from an “ordinary” mother she changes before the spectators’ eyes into a *Mater dolorosa*. To make this happen, various representative strategies typical of disaster films are employed, including their moralistic and religious features. The terror of the expulsion from paradise and the fear of nature as an instrument of divine vengeance are explicit in the audiovisual text.

The tragedy of the tsunami in 2004 is transformed in the film into an atemporal event, and the general human drama is essentialised in a single white, Western, bourgeois family. The financial (and social and family) crisis underpins the tragedy. The narrative solution posited in response to this widespread crisis situation is a return to traditional family values, in which the figure of the mother is expressed in a behaviour of unlimited sacrifice. This expression is realised on two levels: in the narrative development of the actions that unfold, but also inscribed on the body of the woman-mother, which is transformed before our eyes into a wounded, beaten and torn body... a body constantly bleeding and on the brink of death. This way of depicting motherhood recalls the artistic tradition of the Catholic world in its representation of the Virgin as tragic mother at the foot of her son’s cross on Calvary. By extension, all mothers are faced with an implicit association between motherhood and female saintliness.

The hyperbolic mother, whose main function is to endure pain, is the most spectacular element of the film. It is a traditional and post-modern visual spectacle that plays with cultural references, and that is instructive as it is linked to a crisis situation. It is a mechanism which, further supported by the representations of real victims from the press and television news, turns all wo-

men into mothers and all mothers into suffering victims, and that is extraordinary for its repetition in so many different media. The coincidence in the use of the *Mater dolorosa* in two visual and narrative systems as different as disaster films and general press images alerts us to the possible repercussions of this centrality of the mother and how they can act on stories of crisis.

The film focuses its narrative attention on the relationship between mother and child, the real protagonists of the film, revitalising the formulas of classical melodrama, which are mixed with the shocking realism of disaster films and confirmed in the complete submission of the woman to the family and in the fact that she is given no more evolution than her painful acceptance of motherhood as a revocation of action. The vision that the film presents of femininity is based on a motherhood so exclusive, passionate and demanding that it can only be sacrificial. These kinds of discourses disseminated by the general press but underscored in fiction return us to the idea that the personal development and life path of women is based on their role as mothers, as a consolation for them in a world in crisis that does not favour access to equality or social and representative justice.

In any case, we might well question the meaning of this film in a social context that is extremely complicated for women who want to be mothers. The reality is that we have a birth rate in Spain that is among the lowest in the world (1.33 children per woman), and the average age at which women have their first child is over 31. It is clear that the crisis has had a negative impact on these rates. What we are told in this film clashes paradoxically with the reality of many women who cannot become mothers because they have no work, economic resources or in any case lack the support they would need to be able to reconcile their public and private lives. ■

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## CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD BETWEEN DISASTER AND SACRIFICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

### Abstract

This text analyses the image of motherhood presented in the Spanish film *The Impossible* (2012) based on two different contextual elements: the disaster film and the stereotype of the *Mater dolorosa* (*Mother of Sorrows*). The argument put forward is that the figure of the sacrificial mother that appears in the film responds to a specific moment of financial and social crisis in which traditional figures of the sacrificing and care-giving mother provide assurance in a world of widespread uncertainty.

### Key words

Cinema; *The Impossible*; feminism; disaster; sacrifice.

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## LA MATERNIDAD CONTEMPORÁNEA ENTRE LA CATÁSTROFE Y EL SACRIFICIO. UN ANÁLISIS DE LO IMPOSIBLE

### Resumen

Este texto analiza la imagen de la maternidad que se proyecta en la película española *Lo imposible* (The impossible, Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012) desde dos elementos contextuales diferentes: el cine de catástrofes y el estereotipo de la *Mater dolorosa*. En él se argumenta que la figura de la madre sacrificial responde a un momento específico de crisis económica y social donde las figuras tradicionales de la madre sacrificada y cuidadora aportan seguridad en un universo de incertidumbre generalizada.

### Palabras clave

Cinema; *The Impossible*; feminism; disaster; sacrifice.

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# MEMORY AND MASS GRAVES: POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARIES<sup>1</sup>

JOSETXO CERDÁN

MIGUEL FERNÁNDEZ LABAYEN

## OVERVIEW: MEMORY, HISTORY AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

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In recent decades, memory studies has developed into a sophisticated transdisciplinary platform. In so doing, it has facilitated the exploration of the complex ramifications of cultural and social memory, whose transnational dimensions reveal the interaction between the local and global repercussions of the politics of memory (HRISTOVA, LEE, KERANGAT and FERRÁNDIZ, 2014).

In the specific case of the relationship between memory and documentary, we would like to draw attention to two aspects related to how memory is classified and organised. First of all, there is the question of the abuses of memory, as pointed out by Paul Ricoeur, who identifies three levels on which this occurs, which he refers to as the pathological-therapeutic level, the practical level and the ethico-political level. According to Ricoeur, “on the pathological, therapeutic level, the

disturbances of blocked memory will emerge; on the properly practical level, those of manipulated memory; and on the ethico-political level, those of a memory abusively summoned, when commemoration rhymes with rememoration” (RICOEUR, 2009: 57). This relationship between memory and its traumas, manipulations and abuses is key to understanding the tensions between individual and collective practices and governmental and institutional policies related to memory, which will be the object of study of this article.

The second aspect we would like to highlight is the difference identified by the historian Paloma Aguilar between historical memory and collective (or social) memory. For Aguilar, historical memory is a “‘borrowed memory’ of past events that the subject has not experienced personally, [...] [which] is kept alive through commemorations” (AGUILAR, 2008: 43-44). Historical memory, according to Aguilar, would therefore be somewhat similar to the third level of abuses suggested by

Ricoeur, on the ethico-political level. On the other hand, collective memory “is sustained by groups that share a common identity [...]. Although they might have originally been configured by the individual memories of certain members of the group, over time the cultural elite—who promote political initiatives based around the dissemination of ethnic or cultural elements—ultimately develop a simplified, common discourse on the past, suitable for consumption by the members of the shared identity and easily manipulated by the political elite” (AGUILAR, 2008: 50). Based on this, we might conclude that collective memory would always be threatened from two directions: on one side is the possibility of it being turned into historical memory (manipulated by the elite through commemorations); on the other, is the danger of it being erased (or minimised) by a different collective memory that is also raised to historic status. The open and ever-changing nature of collective memory itself is thus paradoxical: it is what enables it to survive in different contexts, but it also leaves it open to manipulation, minimisation or even erasure. In any case, as Ricoeur reminds us, it is not with “the single hypothesis of the polarity between individual and collective memory that we enter into the field of history, but with the hypothesis of the threefold attribution of memory: to oneself, to one’s close relations, and to others” (RICOEUR, 2008: 132).

In addition to the tangled trajectories of memory and its attributions, we should also consider the relationships that memory establishes with history. Although today we can think about cinema in terms of history, we should do so in the sense that Hayden White gave it as a *practical past*: “the kind of past ordinary people [...] carry around with them as an imagined ‘reality’ serving in lieu of both religion and metaphysics as a paradigm or bedrock of ‘the real’” (WHITE, 2005: 334). This *practical past* is therefore different from *professional history*, understood as scientific history. The *practical past* is a space that encompasses

documentaries that take the past, and memory, as their raw material. Therefore, the documentary is not, nor should attempt to be, scientific history. This fact should not, however, lead us to discount the capacity of the documentary to reflect on and confront us with the past. On the contrary, the *practical past*, as a psychological substitute for religion and metaphysics, occupies a central place in contemporary societies, and it is there where it can act politically. For this reason, documentaries, as *practical past*, should be expected to have an “intimate relationship [...] with art, poetry, rhetoric and ethical reflection” (WHITE, 2005: 335). Documentary filmmaking should thus distance itself definitively from the *discourses of sobriety* with which it has traditionally been associated.

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#### WHILE FROM THE LATE 1970S TO THE MID-1990S THE FOCUS WAS PRIMARILY ON THE HEROISM OF THOSE WHO HAD LOST THE WAR, SINCE THE MID-1990S THE EMPHASIS HAS SHIFTED TO THE DEPICTION OF THE REPUBLICANS AS VICTIMS

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In the Spanish context, since the mid-1990s a huge volume of literary and audiovisual material has been produced on the topic of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. But this is nothing new: since the years of the Spanish transition to democracy in the 1970s the recovery of the Republican memory has been realised through a wide range of historical, literary and cinematic texts. However, as noted by Ángel Loureiro (2008) and subsequently explored by Jo Labanyi (2010), in the mid-1990s there was a change in the approach used in the construction of this material. Specifically, while from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s the focus was primarily on the heroism of those who had lost the war, since the mid-1990s

the emphasis has shifted to the depiction of the Republicans as victims. In other words, there was a change in the narrative of the Spanish Civil War and, more specifically, of the Republican defeat. In the realm of film and television, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca was the first to bring attention to what he identified at that time as the *banality of good*, an inversion of the term *banality of evil* coined by Hannah Arendt with reference to the bureaucrats of the Holocaust: “*banality*, in that there is no moral challenge, no personal risk in the assertion, or any contribution whatsoever to the state of knowledge; good, to the extent that this banality is anchored in a noble, perhaps ethical, but now very distant origin, the vindication of the memory of the men, women and children who were sacrificed by the prevailing, merciless memory of the winners” (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2006: 315). Ángel Loureiro was rather blunter when he accused different fiction films, news features and documentaries made in the late 1990s and early 2000s of “winning over the public by means of a rhetoric of pathos based chiefly on the pain of the living relatives of the executed and on a simplified view of history” (LOUREIRO, 2008: 24).<sup>2</sup>

## **CORPUS**

Based on this historical and theoretical framework, it is our intention to examine a few independently produced documentary films that deal with the relationship between memory and the Spanish Civil War. We will show how these titles, far from exhibiting all the defects identified by Vicente Sánchez-Biosca and Ángel Loureiro, are able to develop complex discourses on memory and its different manifestations in relation to the identification and exhumation of those who died in the war. Specifically, the films analysed here question both the documentary value of the images recorded using audiovisual methods and their intended indexical signs, and the transparency of the testimony presented. In this way, a clear separation

can be made between the emotional use of memory as criticised by Loureiro and a sentimental memory that prevents the witnesses from being depicted as victims.

The main hypothesis of this essay is that the mode of production of a film that addresses issues of memory shapes and conditions the final form of the filmic product. To simplify the question further: independent production models, or, more generally, models less associated with institutions, can produce texts on memory that are distanced from the concept of commemorative historical memory described by Paloma Aguilar. As a result, these documentaries are able to engage politically from non-hegemonic and non-official positions, proposing dynamics for “bottom-up” readings of memory phenomena, close to the everyday practices of individuals who are not immersed in institutional logic. This might seem almost a truism, but our review of much of the literature on recent documentaries dealing with the memory of the Spanish Civil War has led us to the conclusion that it is a point that bears highlighting for an analysis of the topic that concerns us here.

We therefore need to discern between two main production models: institutional and independent. Although the boundaries between these two models would always be blurry, it is worth delimiting them in more detail to avoid erroneous classifications. The institutional mode of production involves the use of funds from a public institution established to provide production assistance, as well as television networks, public foundations and associations created or supported by institutions or political parties. In most cases, these films are produced using fairly consolidated structures, i.e., professional production studios. Conversely, films classified in the second category (independent production) are those that are financed by means other than those indicated above. Basically, these would include collective funding (including but not limited to the crowdfunding model) and personal financing. In such cases, as these films



are not linked to major production structures, they tend to face severe difficulties in gaining access to the hegemonic distribution channels and, as a result, are likely to be largely unseen. It is true that in recent years independently produced films have often subsequently found support from established producers who help them into the international distribution circuit. This generally occurs when the films are or are expected to be well-received on festival circuits. Between the institutional and the independent models there is thus a large, hazy territory of films that receive limited assistance, or that may be subject to certain institutional processes at a given moment; titles that fit into both categories and that are therefore difficult to classify.

As noted above, if we examine the profile of the documentaries about memory that generally appear both in the media and in academic publications, we will find that a very high percentage of them fall into the category of institutional productions. However, in this article we will be focusing on the far less structured field of independent documentaries. While compiling a corpus of institutional documentaries would entail the fairly simple task of reviewing the usual official records of film productions, the same cannot be said of independent documentaries. It would be safe to say that film production has expanded hugely with the digitalisation of cinema, but it is still impossible, at least to date, to map out a complete profile of independent films. For this reason, the methodology we have chosen for this article is the case study model. We thus take three films—one short and two feature-length productions—that have had a certain degree of visibility, albeit only in circuits outside mainstream theatres. These are three cases that fit within the parameters of independent production, and that specifically address the issue of mass graves. The films are: *Soldados anónimos/Soldats anònims* [Anonymous Soldiers] (Pere Vilà and Isaki Lacuesta, 2009), *Los materiales* [Materials] (Los Hijos, 2010) and *Dime quién*

*era Sanchicorrota* [Tell Me About Sanchicorrota] (Jorge Tur, 2013).

### **SOLDADOS ANÓNIMOS/SOLDATS ANÒNIMS (PERE VILÀ AND ISAKI LACUESTA, 2009)**

*Soldados anónimos* is a 24-minute film co-directed by Isaki Lacuesta and Pere Vilà. Apart from the small crew that worked on the film, the few credits recognise only the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, due to the fact that the team of historians and archaeologists who appear in the film were from this university. This is thus an example of a title produced completely outside the institutional production system. The film offers an observational record of a mass grave exhumation, which according to Lacuesta was the first ever conducted in Catalonia using scientific criteria (USEROS, 2014). Lacuesta and Vilà dispense with testimonies and the use of a voice-over narrator, providing no information on the event other than what the images show and the title highlights. The only words heard are those of the members of the forensic team carrying out the exhumation: dialogues stripped of any drama, about the best ways to carry out their work, where and how to proceed with the excavation, trivial comments on the remains they uncover, or even the occasional joke that helps break the monotony of the task.

With these few elements, and with the obvious descriptive intention already implicit in the film's title, viewers are confronted with a documentary free of any kind of empathic engagement with what they are watching, and nevertheless, an empathic reaction to the bones exhumed is inevitable. Around halfway through the film, in a brief scene showing an unearthed buckle being handled by the excavators, we hear a voice off camera remarking "if it is a Spanish Legion [buckle] or it is...", without ever finishing the sentence. And later there is a vague repetition of the idea that these are the remains of soldiers, an idea already suggested in the title.



Bones as generators of emotions in *Soldados anónimos*

*Soldados anónimos* places us in the challenging situation of reassessing the empathy we felt in response to the disinterred bones. In short, we are compelled to reconsider the presumed identification of the remains discovered. Because, as Loureiro suggests: “The remains of the buried victims in the graves acquire meaning only when we project our political interests onto their bodies. These bodies bring back the horror of the past only through a representation established in political pre-judgements, without which they would be reduced to mere bones bereft of meaning” (LOUREIRO, 2008: 335). Isaki Lacuesta himself is quite aware of this point: “in *Soldados anónimos*, on seeing the excavation, the spectator takes it as a given that it’s a mass grave of Republicans. [...] After that there is a moment when you confirm that they were soldiers (as the title suggests), and later that they were Fascists, and suddenly the whole emotion that was floating there is inverted” (USEROS MARTÍN, 2014).

This same, clearly controversial idea of an exhumation that begins as a search for the remains of a lost hero and ends up uncovering something quite different is also articulated in *Los condenados* [The Condemned] (2009), the fiction feature



The documentary value of evidence and the emotional expectations of spectators in *Soldados anónimos*

film that Isaki Lacuesta presented the same year at the San Sebastián Film Festival. In personal correspondence with Lacuesta, he confessed to us that “there are whole sentences spoken by Pablo (one of the protagonists in *Los condenados*) that come from my troubled journals from those days (of shooting *Soldados Anónimos*).”<sup>3</sup>

## **LOS MATERIALES (LOS HIJOS, 2010)**

The second case examined here is *Los materiales*, a film made by the Madrid-based collective Los Hijos, the first feature-length film directed by the group. *Los materiales* is an experimental piece that could be read as a fictional tale about failure or as a documentary reflecting on a certain tendency in contemporary cinema. Both readings are valid and both serve as interpretative keys for the purposes of this article. Although a brief synopsis could never do the film justice (which is perhaps why Los Hijos refused to provide one and chose instead to give the dictionary definition of “material” when asked for one), the film could be said to be the story of three filmmakers who travel around the vicinity of the town of Riaño in the province of León, relocated due to the construc-

tion of a dam, in search of an identity, of a memory. But during their search, these filmmakers (who have the same names as the three members of the collective) begin to lose interest in what they see, in what they hear, and in the original objective of the film. To this narrative outline, at least two formal points should be added. Firstly, the images shown in the film are taken from raw footage from the shooting process, without the polishing work that any film requires: 70 hours reduced to 75 minutes. Secondly, the soundtrack is also made up of what could be described as raw sounds, but which do not necessarily match up with the images they are paired with. However, one thing is absent from the soundtrack: the voices of the three protagonists. Instead of hearing them, we read their conversations in a series of captions, in the style of subtitles, that appear throughout the film.

We will return now to the two possible readings of *Los materiales*: as a fictional tale of failure or as a reflective documentary. With respect to the first reading, it is worth noting that when Los Hijos travelled to Riaño in the summer of 2009 they already had the idea of making a film based on what are normally outtakes: ends of shots, abrupt camera shifts in search of the next frame, accidental recordings... the filming of the documentary was thus conceived as if it were a traditional documentary, with establishing shots and analytical planning of scenes and interviews, which were also conducted. To this original idea all that was needed was to add the technique of having the dialogues appear only in subtitles to be able to understand the film as a fictional tale of the process of a failure: the failed attempt to piece together an identity (and therefore a collective memory) which is too scattered and which, due to this dispersion, ultimately loses its initial appeal during the work process. As a reflective documentary, *Los materiales* questions the ordered, balanced and transparent world that some documentaries have presented of Spain in recent years, but it is also positioned in opposition to those other filmmak-



**Up. Questioning indexicality in *Los materiales***

**Down. Outtakes as memory in *Los materiales***

ers who believe that it is enough to let the testimony speak for itself. The most obvious example of all this appears in the two scenes which, in this attempt to recover the memory, deal with the episodes of the Civil War and the post-war period through the supposed search for sites of memory. These two scenes appear near the middle of the film. In the first, we see the filmmakers preparing an interview in the middle of the woods with a local who turns out to be the only character in the film that we hear speak. Standing beside a fallen oak, the character (Pedro) tells a story, which his father told him, about a shepherd who killed a member of the Spanish Maquis and buried him right there because he was stealing sheep. In fact, Pedro never uses the word “Maquis” or “guerrilla”, but instead talks about “those people who wan-

dered homeless in the woods”, and “a man dedicated to stealing and killing sheep.” The body is still there, Pedro tells us, because nobody knows who it was; nobody has claimed it. Almost seamlessly, the testimony links this story with the story of the executions during the war and the Francoist period. In this case, we have the following words: “most of the people shot were from San Juan de Beleño, from San Juan de Beleño and around there. They called them the ‘*paseados*’ [i.e., executed without trial]. They brought them here and they killed them [...]. They were Republicans, they weren’t terrorists or anything, but were genuine democrats. But as it was the Franco dictatorship, well, they killed them.” Pedro’s memory, the film tells us, is incapable of constructing a coherent discourse on the war and the post-war period: the Republicans are democrats, but the Maquis are thieves. The following scene, which lasts for twelve minutes, goes further still. At the beginning of the scene, one of the subtitles announces that Pedro is going to drive the filmmakers to the grave of the people who were shot by firing squad. One of the three, Luis, decides not to go. After more than ten minutes of seeing Pedro walking through the forest, unable to find the place, the scene closes with a few terse subtitles:

What about the grave? (asks Luis)

Nothing.

We haven’t found it.

While *Soldados anónimos* explores the issue of the discursive baggage attached to an exhumation and the tumult provoked by the erroneous projection of our emotions onto it, *Los materiales* speaks to us of the fragile nature of memories. Both titles thus point to the same question: positing limits on the indexical value of the images. In addition, *Los materiales* questions the value of absolute truth that tends to be attributed to testimonies. Both points have been mythologised by many of the institutional documentaries of recent years, giving rise to what researchers like Francisco Ferrándiz have identified as a subgenre of “Civil War grave-

side testimony”, whereby testimony has been established as a cornerstone of the narratives on historical memory in media coverage (FERRÁNDIZ, 2008).

### **DIME QUIÉN ERA SANCHICORROTA (JORGE TUR, 2013)**

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This film was made in the context of the Punto de Vista Documentary Film Festival in Navarre, when its director, Jorge Tur, won the selection for the X Films Project in 2012. Of the three films studied here, this is the film whose production is most closely linked to institutions (the Navarre regional government), but its limited budget<sup>4</sup> and the mediation of the Punto de Vista Festival between filmmaker and institution place it on neutral ground.

In any case, *Dime quién era Sanchicorrota* is a film which, on paper at least, does not address the question of the memory of the Spanish Civil War. Instead, it examines the local myth of a bandit named Sanchicorrota, on the pretext of exploring Las Bardenas, a desert region in southern Navarre. In his quest for clues about the bandit, Tur constructs a mythical, human and sentimental map of the region. And it is there that the Civil War makes an appearance. We will consider two moments in the film here. The first occurs at the beginning. After a few establishing shots, we see a shepherd in a frontal close-up, and after hearing him stammering, we hear Tur’s voice off camera:

What do you know about Sanchicorrota?

A few things I’ve heard on documentaries on television. He lived in the era...

Wait, wait... Don’t talk about documentaries or anything; talk about what you’ve heard people say around here... [...] What do you know about Sanchicorrota?

It’s what I’ve heard around here, what I’ve heard around here...

While in the case of *Los materiales*, the character of Pedro tells the stories his father has told him, and we are aware that this transmission of



Tokata examines the remains of supposed firing squad victims in *Dime quién era Sanchicorrota*



Tokata's erratic memories as a means of avoiding pathos in *Dime quién era Sanchicorrota*

memory is fragmentary and contradictory, *Dime quién era Sanchicorrota* reveals that memories (and myths) are constructed with all kinds of material, including media material. Moreover, this is a way of warning us that we won't find any documentary certainty in this film.

After wandering around the desert lands of Las Bardenas for nearly an hour, Tur ultimately locates some human remains (several skulls and other bones) in a hut, and goes there with another of the characters in the film: Tokata, a retired farm worker. The character's reaction to the finding, due to the effect of the editing, is immediate: in a wide shot shows Tur and Tokata unblocking the entrance to the hut, and then we cut to Tokata looking at the bones and saying "these are the ones who were shot, there are five of them." He then thoroughly examines the five skulls and embarks on a somewhat erratic recollection. He tells how in his town, Arguedas, all but one of the bodies of those shot by firing squad have been recovered. And then he goes onto explain the recovery of his grandfather's remains. However, the camera, to avoid any excess of pathos, cuts and returns us to the desert landscapes while Tokata continues his narration in a voice-over. When the camera returns to the hut, the bones do not appear again, and we only have a close-up of the character as he continues telling stories of the repression after the war. But neither the stories he recalls (his

mother threatening one of his father's executioners with a knife in her hand) nor the attitude of the character himself convey any sense of pathos or victimisation. Tokata and the characters in his story (his mother, his Uncle Victor, the children of others who faced the firing squads) are characters who lost the war and suffered the consequences, but this does not mean they lost their capacity for action; they are characters with agency. Tokata's testimony is not a victim's testimony, nor is it transparent, nor does it encapsulate a conclusive truth. On the contrary, his discourse is erratic, resembling more a stream-of-consciousness narrative, and even contains internal contradictions, doubts and illogical reasoning. Yet far from reducing its value, this is what lends it legitimacy. ■

## CONCLUSIONS

*Dime quién era Sanchicorrota* is not a film about the Spanish Civil War, but it does touch upon it directly. Something similar could be said of *Los materiales*, where the search goes in a different direction, but the topic comes up because it is there along the way. In *Soldados anónimos*, the documenting of the exhumation reveals the risk of discursive excess in relation to some fairly neutral images and, as a result, we see how easily what Aguilar defines as historical memory can be politically manipulated. Meanwhile, *Los materiales* exposes the fragility of

memory and its contradictory construction. *Dime quién era Sanchicorrotá* recognises the constructed and mythical nature of memory, but also confronts us with characters who, beyond such collective constructions, have elaborated a memory of their own about these events, a memory brought out by any strategy that can activate it, even accidentally. Finally, in the interaction between the director and his character, Tokata, according to parameters distinct from those of the victim of the Francoist repression, a series of negotiations unfold in front of the camera that evade any pathos and allow the character to create a profile that has nothing to do with the defenceless victim, taking ownership of his performativity at the expense of its supposed discursive transparency. It is worth noting that by the time the film was released, an analysis of the remains had confirmed that they were in fact more than 100 years old, and therefore could not have been from the Spanish Civil War (ARIGITA, 2013: 33). The point is thus not what the bones might document, but rather, how they activate Tokata's emotional memory, an example, with all its contradictions and virtues, of a memory thought and felt from the "bottom up", in contrast with institutional historical memory.

The three case studies analysed here are products of the independent production model and, as such, touch on one of the most sensitive topics of recent years related to the memory of the Civil War and Francoism: the topic of mass graves. In this context, none of the three films falls into the trap of exploiting the pathos of the testimony or the banality of good; on the contrary, they each articulate an idea of collective memory that reveals the risks of manipulation and abuse that are always present.

In short, the films analysed here are examples that speak to us of how the practical past can be constructed without the sensationalist practices of institutional documentaries, represented by testimony as a source of pathos and emotion and the document as an index or sign that asso-

ciates the documentary form with discourses of sobriety. The titles studied here point to political transformations in film production dealing with memory, which, as Ricoeur suggests, articulate a necessary threefold attribution of memory: to oneself, to one's close relations, and to others. It is here that collective memories, constructed politically, acquire their full meaning. ■

## NOTES

- 1 This research has been conducted as part of the research project "Las relaciones transnacionales en el cine digital hispanoamericano: los ejes de España, México y Argentina" (CSO2014-52750-P), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.
- 2 The works cited by Loureiro include *La hora de los valientes* (Antonio Mercero, 1998) and *Les fosses del silenci* (Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis, 2003).
- 3 Personal interview with the author in April 2010 via email.
- 4 Only 8,500 euros at that time, of which 3,000 was the filmmaker's salary and 5,500 was for production expenses.

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## **MEMORY AND MASS GRAVES: POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARIES**

### **Abstract**

This article examines the political strategies of independent Spanish documentaries of the 2000s and 2010s in the context of debates about historical memory. The hypothesis of this research is that independent documentaries can operate as vehicles for practices and discourses that are free from the institutional domestication normally affecting film and television productions dealing with memory. It is thus argued that documentary film practices distanced from official political interests can challenge some of the common assumptions in discussions of historical memory and offer a bottom-up perspective, in parallel with a process that brings a grassroots element into public discussions of memory. First of all, the article examines some of the most prominent theoretical positions on memory. We then analyse the films *Soldados Anónimos/Soldats Anònims* (Pere Vilà and Isaki Lacuesta, 2009), *Los materiales* (Los Hijos, 2010) and *Dime quién era Sanchicorrotta* (Jorge Tur, 2013) as examples that illustrate these ideas. Based on a study of these films, we question the use of testimony and the indexical value of the document as the foundations of the discourse of the film documentary, and propose a distancing from these practices as a way of avoiding the sentimental use of memory evident in official political positions on the Spanish Civil War.

### **Key words**

Historical Memory; Mass Grave; Independent Documentary; Spanish Civil War; Pere Vilà; Isaki Lacuesta; Los Hijos Film Collective; Jorge Tur.

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## **MEMORIA Y FOSAS COMUNES: ESTRATEGIAS POLÍTICAS DEL DOCUMENTAL INDEPENDIENTE**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo examina las estrategias políticas del documental independiente español de las décadas de los 2000 y los 2010 en el contexto de los debates sobre la memoria histórica. La hipótesis de la investigación es que dicho documental independiente vehicula unas prácticas y discursos alejados de la domesticación institucional de las producciones audiovisuales que abordan la memoria. Por consiguiente, se entiende que estas prácticas documentales alejadas de los intereses políticos oficiales problematizan algunos lugares comunes de los debates sobre la memoria histórica y ofrecen una visión desde abajo, en consonancia con un proceso de fuerte calado popular a la hora de debatir públicamente sobre la memoria. En primer lugar, el artículo recorre algunas de las más destacadas posiciones teóricas sobre la memoria. Posteriormente, se analizan las películas *Soldados Anónimos/Soldats Anònims* (Pere Vilà e Isaki Lacuesta, 2009), *Los materiales* (Los Hijos, 2010) y *Dime quién era Sanchicorrotta* (Jorge Tur, 2013) como ejemplos que materializan estas cuestiones. A partir del estudio de estos filmes, se cuestiona el recurso a los testimonios y el valor indexal del documento como fundamentos del discurso del documental cinematográfico y se propone el distanciamiento de estas prácticas para superar el uso sentimental de la memoria presente en las políticas oficiales sobre la guerra civil.

### **Palabras clave**

Memoria histórica; fosas comunes; documental independiente; guerra civil española; Pere Vilà; Isaki Lacuesta; colectivo Los Hijos; Jorge Tur.

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## GUIDE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF ORIGINAL PAPERS

### I. Receipt and approval of original papers

*L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* approves of publishing unpublished papers on interdisciplinary or monothematic topics related to the theory and/or practice of cinema which are also remarkable for their innovative style. Articles must be submitted via the website of the journal ([www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com)), as a .rtf, .odt or .docx file using the template provided for this purpose. The files of the author's statement (.pdf) and images (.psd, .png or .jpg), if any, must be uploaded to the web as complementary files. There are two periods for the call for papers along the year: January (for the papers to be published in the edition of January-June of the following year), and June (for papers to be published in the edition of July-December). These dates are illustrative, as the final deadlines will be posted on the website. Authors will be informed of the approval of their texts in a term of six months maximum. The topic of the monograph for every edition will be published in advance on the website [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com). As long as the text is original, and it respects the guidelines of the journal and fulfills the standards and rigor of a humanities journal, the Editorial Board will carry out a process of external assessment of peer review, respecting the anonymity of the authors and the reviewers in order to avoid possible bias. In the event that the number of articles received in a given call is very high, the Editorial Board will make a selection before the peer review, discarding those less suitable. If the essay does not satisfy the initial clauses, it will be rejected without external query intervening. *L'Atalante* does not offer remuneration for publishing collaborations.

### 2. Publishing guidelines

What follows is an excerpt of the publishing guidelines. Those interested in them may visit the complete version in Spanish and English, and download the template for the submission of original papers on the website [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com).

The length of original papers may vary between 5000 and 7000 words (including notes, references and complementary texts).

Regarding the format, texts must be in Times New Roman font, have font size of 11 points and a justified alignment. The text must be single-spaced, without any kind of indentation and without additional separation between paragraphs. Title and section titles must be in bold type. Notes, if they exist, must be as brief as possible and will be included at the end of the text without using

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### I. Recepción y aceptación de originales

*L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* acepta la publicación de ensayos inéditos sobre temas interdisciplinarios o monotemáticos relacionados con la teoría y/o praxis cinematográfica que destaquen por su carácter innovador. Los textos deberán enviarse a través de la página web de la revista ([www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com)), guardados como archivo .rtf, .odt o .docx utilizando la plantilla proporcionada para dicho fin. Los archivos de la declaración del autor (.pdf) y de las imágenes (.psd, .png o .jpg), si las hubiere, deberán subirse a la web como ficheros complementarios. Se establecen dos periodos anuales de recepción de originales (*call for papers*): enero (para el número publicado en enero-junio del año próximo), y junio (para el número de julio-diciembre). Estas fechas son orientativas, ya que los plazos definitivos se publicarán en la página web. La aceptación de los manuscritos se comunicará a sus autores en el plazo máximo de seis meses. El tema del monográfico de cada número será publicado con la debida antelación en la página web [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com). Siempre que el texto sea original, se adecúe a las normas de estilo de la revista y cumpla con los estándares y el rigor propios de una revista de humanidades, el Consejo de Redacción lo someterá a un proceso de evaluación externa por pares, que respetará el anonimato de autores y evaluadores (sistema de doble ciego o *peer review*) con el fin de evitar posibles sesgos. En el caso de que el número de artículos recibidos en una determinada convocatoria sea muy elevado, el Consejo de Redacción realizará una selección previa a la evaluación por pares, descartando aquellos menos adecuados. De no cumplirse las cláusulas iniciales, el ensayo será desestimado sin haber mediado consulta externa. *L'Atalante* no ofrece remuneración alguna por las colaboraciones publicadas.

### 2. Normas de publicación

A continuación se refiere un extracto de las normas de publicación. Los interesados pueden consultar la versión íntegra en español e inglés, y descargarse una plantilla de presentación de originales en la página web [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com).

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En cuanto al formato, los textos se presentarán en tipografía Times New Roman, tamaño 11 y alineación justificada. El interlineado será sencillo, sin sangría en ningún caso y sin separación adicional entre párrafos. El título y los ladillos se destacarán en negrita. Las notas, si las hubiere, serán lo más breves posibles y se incluirán al fi-

the automatic tool of word processors. These notes must be signalled with a superscript in its corresponding place (<sup>1</sup>); at the end of the text, under the heading Notes, the corresponding explanation for each note must be written after the number linked to it, in Times New Roman font with a font size of 9 points.

Texts must come with

- An abstract around 120-150 words long;
- 5 to 8 key words;
- A curricular note of each author of around 60-80 words, where place and year of birth of the author must be specified, as well as his or her profession, his or her current research lines and published materials or recent works (if they exist).

Original papers may be sent in Spanish and/or English.

If it is decided that the manuscript is to be published in a bilingual issue, the author will provide the translation and cover the costs derived from proofreading (in some cases, such as students and unemployed scholars who prove their situation, this cost will be zero).

Italics must be applied only on foreign words, for emphasis on words and quotations of works and films.

For textual quotations, American and British quotation marks must be used in the following order: "...".

The first time a reference to a film is made, it must be written as follows: *Title in the language of the article* (Original Title, Director, Year).

Harvard citation system [(SURNAME, Year of publication: pages)] must be used in the corpus of the article. The complete reference must be at the end of the text, under the heading Bibliography, where the authors must be mentioned in alphabetical order considering the surname, according to the international bibliographic citation system APA [SURNAME(s), Name of the author (year of publication). *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher]. For the bibliographic citation of articles, book chapters, minutes or other textual and audiovisual materials, please check the complete version of the publishing guidelines, available on the aforementioned website, several examples are also mentioned there.

Authors must provide images with a 300 ppi format (.jpeg, .tiff or .psd file) to the editorial staff to illustrate their articles. It is advisable to use 4 to 6 images to illustrate each article. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* will only accept images with the express authorization of the author or the publisher. The publication of images will be carried out on promotional, didactic or research purposes only. The source and the name of the author of the work mentioned must be specified in the corpus of the article

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- Un abstract o resumen de 120-150 palabras;
- De 5 a 8 palabras clave;
- Una nota curricular de cada autor/a de 60-80 palabras, en la que se hará constar el lugar y año de nacimiento, la afiliación laboral, líneas de investigación en curso y publicaciones u obras de creación recientes (si las hubiere).

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Para las citas textuales se emplearán comillas angulares, inglesas y simples según la siguiente gradación: «... " '... '... '... '... »

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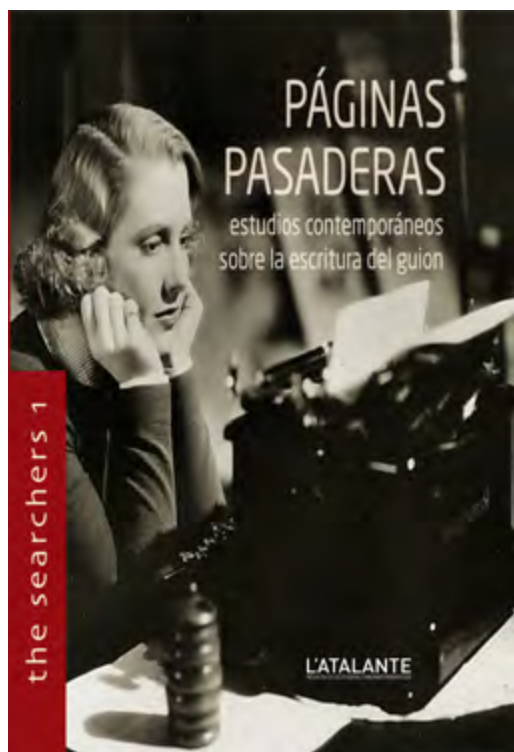
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Balzac

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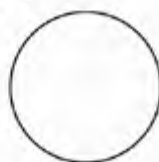
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