

TRANSNATIONAL DANCES: THE MUSICAL FILMS OF CARLOS SAURA*

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INTRODUCTION

Theories about a form of Hispanic filmmaking rooted in shared cultural elements has been common currency in commercial, political and academic discourse since the second decade of the twentieth century. In the field of communication studies, such theories have been given a new boost thanks to the recent emergence of the concepts of “transnationality” and “globalisation”. However, despite the abundance of studies on this question, it would appear that scholars have yet to identify common denominators valid enough to trace a complete map of a geopolitical area as heterogeneous as the Spanish-speaking world—or Ibero-America, if we include the Portuguese-speaking nations in our definition.¹ The wide variety of cultural exchanges and industry practices imposed by international networks, as well as by digital technology, facilitates a range of aesthetic and discursive possibilities that seem to resist univocal taxonomies, instead allowing approaches that recognise the flexibility both of the notion of transnational cinema itself and of the different modes associated

with it. For this reason, many texts considered canonical today, like Mette Hjort’s *On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism* (2010: 12-33), stress the need to map out “the transnational” according to a compendium of modes of narration, production, distribution or reception that aim to do justice to the reality of the increasingly interconnected and internationalised world of filmmaking, a world characterised by multiple and sometimes contradictory dimensions and implications.

In a contribution to the anthology *Theorizing World Cinema*, Paul Julian Smith (2012) points in this direction when he proposes a classification of the ways in which transnational cinema is organised in the Latin American region. Smith offers three possible models: the genre film, the festival film, and the prestige film. The first two of these models are of special interest for my study here: “genre movies (apparently international) may exploit transnational subtexts [shared cultural references in the Latin American context] that remain more or less hidden to foreign audiences; ‘festival films’, on the other hand (normally known as art, auteur or specialist features), which are held to be

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personal and local, may well be yet more transnational than genre movies in both production and aesthetics” (Smith, 2012: 72).

Smith’s article, although studying films in a broad context that considers production, distribution and reception stages, points out aesthetic aspects connecting films that could be identified as belonging to each category. The inclusion of “auteur features” within the category of “festival films” underscores the fact that, in addition to being understood as a creative figure who leaves his or her imprint on the film production, the auteur plays a role in a distribution system whose launching points are the international film competitions. To express it in the words of Linda Haverty-Rugg, the auteur needs to be placed in relation with the global context insofar as he or she is “by definition a filmmaker of international stature who is understood paradoxically as representative of a national culture while at the same time transcending national boundaries” (2005: 221). The same notion of film auteur implies a series of more or less fixed patterns of reception, to which the filmmakers themselves tend to adhere; one of these patterns is the equivalence between creative figures and their country of origin—which would not, however, prevent any spectator from relating to the film in question, by virtue of an “assimilation stage of reception” (Haverty-Rugg, 2005: 221) that plays down the signs of foreignness to establish a direct connection between creators

and audience. In the Spanish case, filmmakers like Luis Buñuel, Pedro Almodóvar or Carlos Saura are perceived, at least in the festival circuit and among lovers of specialist films, as artistically metonymic for “the Hispanic”.

Based on this concept of the auteur as a transnational figure, we can examine the praxis of a filmmaker like Carlos Saura, who in his last creative stage has focused on the creation of films which, in offering samples and vestiges of music associated with the Iberian and Latin American space, create a particular formulation of the musical genre, combining traces of a documentary style that have an impact on the authenticity of the performances depicted, with a strong aesthetic impulse that highlights the constructed and artificial nature of those depictions. In this article, I will define Saura’s stylistically homogeneous musical corpus in the terms proposed above, as examples of “festival films” which, in powerfully auteurial and potentially globalising registers, turn away from what previously would have placed them within the category of “genre films” of a more commercial or, if preferred, popular nature.² At the same time, I will attempt to do justice to the last stage of the filmography of one of the most important filmmakers in the Hispanic world, who in that stage has been taking a series of reflections on myths and images associated with popular traditions, and on his own cinematic trajectory, to unexpected levels of sophistication.

**SAURA’S MUSICAL FILMS: FROM THE
NATIONAL TO THE TRANSNATIONAL**

It is necessary, first of all, to take a moment to define the study corpus and its place in the Aragonese director’s career. To date, his strictly musical filmography consists of thirteen films³ that explore different imaginaries within the Ibero-American context. I define these films as musicals because their plots revolve around the depiction of different modes—instrumental, vocal or dance—and



Flamenco, flamenco (2010)

variants of a musical genre, style or tradition, including opera, flamenco, and jota. Although music occupies a privileged place in Saura's poetics in general (see Sánchez-Vidal [1988: 147-148, 158, 164] and Bloch-Robin [2011]), it is in this cycle that the relationship between music and the audiovisual discourse is most effective. Its use does not represent merely a support or complement to a plot or main discourse; on the contrary, the representation of the music and of the imaginaries associated with it are intrinsic to the creation of each film.

Although the first five films of the corpus—his so-called Flamenco trilogy, made in the 1980s in collaboration with the dancer Antonio Gades and producer Emiliano Piedra, and the films *Sevillanas* (1992) and *Flamenco* (1995), both produced by Juan Lebrón—focused on popular genres widely typified as *Spanish*, the work that followed used the same models applied to these musical styles to explore forms of expression belonging to very different geographical contexts: tango, fado, northern Argentine folk, and jota. Pascale Thibaudeau (2007) has defined Saura's musicals as a cinematic repertoire that is constantly updating the musical heritage of one or more specific regions. Every *palo*, song and performer featured in Saura's films becomes part of a heterogeneous canon where, through an aesthetic approach that will be

analysed in the following section, very different styles and trends are blended together. We are thus dealing with the gradual creation of a cinematic map based on what has been referred to as “affinitive transnationalism” (Hjort, 2010: 17-18), which brings together forms of expression, now considered archetypal, of the members of an imagined cultural community to construct a mosaic of shared references that transcend national boundaries. Such a model of transnationalism would adopt the forms, as suggested by Robin Lefere (2012: 211) and David Asenjo Conde (2013: 181-215), of a reflection of *trans-Iberian* dimensions.

Throughout the cycle, the casting of figures of worldwide renown, like Camarón de la Isla, Paco de Lucía, Julio Bocca, Sara Baras, Mariza, Caetano Veloso or Chico Buarque, and the allusion to great artists of the past, like Imperio Argentina, Amália Rodrigues or Tita Merello, reinforces the strategy of building a cast that ensures both the excellence of the musical performances and a positive international reception by “an audience interested in the music and its relationship with the performing arts, in addition to audiences of musical cinema and Latin cinema” (Díaz López, 2015: 272). It might therefore seem paradoxical that Saura's musical films have not been big commercial successes and have not sparked enthusiasm among critics in

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national markets—in Spain, for example—although his films are well received at international competitions.

This could be explained to a large extent by the direction Saura's career has taken since the beginning of the 1980s, when he made his *Flamenco* trilogy. As demonstrated in early studies by Manuel Palacio and Agustín Sánchez Vidal (1983 and 1986, respectively), Saura's work suffered a notable drop in prestige in Spain after the end of the Transition, when audiences—both the general public and specialist critics—that had traditionally supported his films because they identified them with the resistance to the Franco regime began losing interest, because “the added value given to a product by the fact of its opposition to the Regime [had] disappeared” (Palacio, 1983: 58). This coincided, however, with increasing international success: not only were his films being featured at festivals like Cannes, Venice, Montreal, Karlovy Vary and Rio de Janeiro, but also both the British Film Institute and the Hollywood Academy paid tribute to him in the summer of 1986 (Sánchez Vidal, 1986: 379). Saura's lack of importance at the national level—again in Spain, despite enjoying sporadic successes with critics, like *Carmen* (1983), a number of his films have been spectacular flops, such as *El Dorado* (1988)—seemed to be compensated for by his prestige on the international festival circuit—many of his musical films, like *Fados* (2007) and *Io, don Giovanni* (2009), premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, while *Flamenco, Flamenco* (2010) premiered at the Latin Beat Film Festival in Japan. It would therefore seem reasonable to define the films of this corpus,

based on their reception and circulation, primarily as “festival films”.

The final point worth highlighting here is how Saura's musicals explore themes and formal motifs of his earlier work from a new perspective. My analysis of these films will be based on the model proposed by Marvin D'Lugo in his monograph *The Films of Carlos Saura: The Practice of Seeing* (1991). D'Lugo highlights the director's obsession, throughout his career, with pointing out and questioning the conceptual frameworks used to define the society and culture in which we live. Through characters who, from a distanced position, look at and participate in the traditions, clichés and myths associated with their lives, such frameworks are revealed to be mere conventions that create meaning for the individual and collective experience. This obsession, along with other recurring themes associated with it, like the exploration of the artificial nature of the cinematic medium (see Sánchez Vidal, 1988: 69), is expressed with special intensity in the director's musical corpus. In the next section, I will describe the three aesthetic features that I believe effectively define that corpus, and which contribute to its transnational quality.

MINIMALISM, REITERATION, REFLEXIVITY

Despite the fact they were made over a span of several decades, the musical films of Carlos Saura possess a remarkable thematic and stylistic unity. It is my contention that their main aesthetic features can be grouped into three concepts, which are closely interrelated in Saura's filmmaking praxis.

I. Minimalism

First of all, Saura's musical films are defined by the abstraction of their narrative and scenographic elements. While some of the titles in the corpus have at least a basic plot, always based on canonical tales—Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, Merimée's *Carmen*, the myth of Salome, etc.—that tend to

eliminate any possibility of a “dramatic surprise effect”, most are limited to a succession of musical numbers lacking a conventional narrative thread.⁴

The stripped-down storyline finds its correlative in a *mise-en-scène* that places singers, artists and dancers on bare stages, essentialised and self-contained, with hardly any references to a naturalist context. These sets, populated by spotlights, panels, screens and mirrors, may be viewed as more or less equivalent to a rehearsal studio for the preparation of a “show to be performed”.⁵ The result is, on the one hand, a greater concentration of visual motifs and resources that will be repeated obsessively throughout this cycle, and, on the other, a reduction of the participating artists’ work to its purest form. It is a process of subtraction, in relation to different expressions of musical tradition, of anything that does not reflect the idea of “pure art”, of aesthetic expression captured in the splendour of its unfolding. To this end, these expressions are stripped of the social and historical contexts in which they emerged and evolved, which are only referred to incidentally. The films themselves visually underscore this idea of a self-contained space, a universe for the performance of only the most unadorned artistic expression: *El amor brujo* [Love, the Magician] (1986) opens with the image of a hangar door closing slowly, as the natural light from outside gives way to the artificial illumination of arc lamps and spotlights positioned around what is very obviously a film set; *Sevillanas, Flamenco* and *Argentina* (Zonda, folclore argentino, 2015) end with a group dance number captured by the camera in a shot that sweeps slowly upward to show a set made up of luminous panels, misshapen mirrors and large windows through which the daylight passes.

The decision not to locate the musical performance and performers in a recognisable space and



Performance of Jota de Tárrega in *Jota* (2016)

time differentiates Saura’s musicals from earlier and contemporaneous films of the same genre. If we compare *Flamenco* (1995) with Edgar Neville’s film of the same name (released in Spanish as *Duende y misterio del flamenco* in 1952), a film that was also very successful on the international circuit, we find that Neville’s insistence on locating each of the *palos* and variants of flamenco music in contexts that are as specific as they are spectacular—like the final *martinete* in front of the El Tajo gorge—contrasts notably with Saura’s lack of interest in setting the same musical forms in specific locations.⁶ Abandoning the stereotypes of a film tradition born out of the Franco regime’s policies of representation, and of other aesthetics of resistance that called for a more realist depiction of the world of flamenco⁷ (Gómez González, 2002: 91-101), Saura’s first musicals seem to advocate more of an aestheticist approach, experimental in nature, closer to the attempts of the Generation of ’27 to blend the avant-garde and popular culture, or the spirit of films like *Embrujo* [The Spell] (Carlos Serrano de Osma, 1947), where the flamenco performance is subjected to a process of “foreignisation”. Ángel Custodio Gómez González (2002) has demonstrated that Saura’s musical filmography, up to *Salomé* (2002), proposed a reformulation of the flamenco stereotype through a filing



Portrait of Sonia de Klamery [Lying] (1913) by Hermenegildo Anglada Camarasa

down of many of the symbols associated with the flamenco tradition and its hybridisation with other contemporary forms of musical expression—in *Flamenco* we find canonical modes coexisting with others considered “bastard” forms, like the traditional *cantes* of the Utrera sisters with Keta-ma’s incursions into pop.

Saura develops an aesthetic of allusion (Jullier, 1997) in which what matters is not so much the references to images associated with the national archetype as the recreation of those images and the dialogue and hybridisation between them. There is perhaps no better example of this than the beginning of *Flamenco, Flamenco*, articulated around a long crane shot running through an almost empty warehouse, populated only with panels bearing large reproductions of iconic works by Gustave Doré, Ignacio Zuloaga and Julio Romero de Torres, through which the camera will begin to wander. Paraded before our eyes are works belonging to different eras and artistic contexts: the romantic *costumbrismo* of Doré, the realism of the Generation of ‘98 exemplified by Zuloaga, the modernism of Hermenegildo Anglada Camarasa, the Art Deco

of Rafael de Penagos or the symbolist *costumbrismo* of Romero de Torres. But all of these without exception allude, albeit incidentally (like Anglada Camarasa’s *Portrait of Sonia Klamery*, painted in 1913, in which the model poses in a Manila shawl), to a whole imaginary of Spain in general, and to flamenco culture in particular, which is presented to us as such.⁸ Saura makes use of images, in their material and symbolic sense, not to explain their origins and historical, social, or cultural development, but to turn them into objects of pure aesthetic pleasure.

The allusive method could be extended not only to the use of theatrical-style sets, lighting that evokes different moments of the day, or posters, photographs and projects that depict cultural milestones associated with the “glorious past” of forms of artistic expression, but also to the mechanics of the dance, in which the dancers’ bodies, positions and attitudes construct stories, moods or feelings.

The reformulation of cultural archetypes systematised through aestheticising subtraction and playing with images has been extended to other Ibero-American forms of music, following the same formal patterns or expanding their scope, streamlining and enriching them with the introduction of new scenographic and filming techniques.

2. Reiteration

Saura’s musical corpus is striking not only for its combination of processes of abstraction and aestheticism, but for how these processes are reiterated from one film to the next. This constitutes a clear serial model perfected over the years, which Saura uses to revisit the same narrative and formal models over and over again. Although it could offer an extremely interesting digression, for my purposes here I will adopt the definition of Saura’s musicals as prime representations of what theorists like Omar Calabrese have called the aesthetic of repetition or seriality. However, I believe that the application of these labels should be explored further in the interests of identifying a powerful strain in specialist film circuits, as productive as

it is artistic, which we might call “auteur seriality”, and which filmmakers like Hong Sang-soo or Matías Piñeiro could be said to legitimise. Nevertheless, I will focus here on the operation of repetition, or of a model of theme and variations, which Saura’s musicals put into practice.

Leaving aside what Calabrese describes as repetitive modes in production and consumption⁹ (1999: 45-46), I will analyse one or two of the most representative scene-units of the cycle. The matrix or invariant for all these scenes lies in the tribute to the great artistic figure associated with the musical tradition in question, such as Atahualpa Yupanqui or Mercedes Sosa in the context of Argentine folk, or José Antonio Labordeta and Imperio Argentina in the case of the Aragonese jota. The system of tributes is based on a scheme of showing photographs or footage of the artists in question, enlarged on a gigantic screen, to an audience that watches them attentively. There are very few variations on this model. Sometimes there are no spectators at all, as in the tribute to Pedro Azorín, where it is understood that the spectators are us. In other cases, it is enough to include a recording of one of the popular numbers of the performer in the soundtrack while other images, which allude to the content of the song, appear one after another on a large screen, as in the case

of the tribute to José Antonio Labordeta in *Jota* (2016), in which a class of primary school students watch as their whiteboard is transformed into a canvas showing archive footage of the Spanish Civil War while we hear “Rosa Rosae”, an autobiographical song by the Aragonese singer-songwriter.¹⁰ The space of a classroom—suggested rather than faithfully recreated—also appears in the tribute to Mercedes Sosa in *Argentina*, where the students perform a simple percussion backing to the images of the singer-songwriter performing her famous song “Todo Cambia”. In short, the basic scheme of a group watching and connecting with the iconic vestiges of past “milestones” is present in all cases. The repeated presentation of these tributes *in this particular way* encourages us to identify connections between different films, musical styles, artists and contexts.

It is also worth highlighting that the scenographic structures of these sequences, the movie screens, fulfil a role analogous to that of the translucent panels or mirrors, in the sense that they replicate the images of the artists and performers celebrated in each film, while at the same time abstracting them. The images of dancers, in front of mirrors that multiply their reflections or panels that outline their figures, no longer form part of a mere realistic representation that seeks to offer a

Sequence devoted to José Antonio Labordeta in *Jota* (2016)



THE OBJECTIVE IS TO CONSOLIDATE THE IMAGINARIES OF FLAMENCO, TANGO OR FADO FROM A PURELY ICONOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

meticulous rendering of a musical number; on the contrary, they reinforce the status of these films as iconographic games, as creations inserted in a closed and self-referential space, although based on very recognisable traditions and images. The objective is to consolidate the imaginaries of flamenco, tango or fado from a purely iconographic perspective: “Both flamenco and contemporary dance or fado [or other forms of cultural expression] are separated from their environment and shifted to a new space offered to them by the film” (Thibaudeau, 2013: 233). The archetypal images lose their original nature through their constant reproduction, either from one film to the next, or through the technical and scenographic devices used in each individual scene. With the advent of sophisticated digital technologies, films like *Iberia* (2005) or *Jota* have redoubled this interest in multiplying images and icons: in *Jota*, during a version with musicians and dancers of the classic “Jota de Tárrega”, we see a screen replicating the digitally modulated images of the performers while their shadows and reflections are cast on the floor and on the screen itself. The stillness of the musicians and the movement of the dancers, along with the combination of their bodies, shadows and background projections, add complex effects of contrast to this scene, in which the figures filmed subdivide and proliferate, in a style like Muybridge’s chronophotographs, although the camera shots are long and generally frontal. The various innovations included in these musicals thus extend or expand

aesthetic assumptions that we find in earlier films; in this sense, they add to a formal line that seeks renewal without betraying its basic mould.

Repetition, duplication and seriality appear in different modes—self-references, pastiches, set designs, symmetrical images, etc.—at every level of Saura’s musicals—narrative, formal, iconic—and reinforce the idea of essentiality and abstraction of the whole series. At the same time, the tendency to work with a minimum of base elements appears to entail the obsessive combination and reformulation of those elements: “a love of regulated variation and of rhythm converge in virtuosity, a quality increasingly necessary in performance and updated today by the use of increasingly sophisticated technology” (Calabrese, 1999: 62). Indeed, technical and aesthetic virtuosity is evident in Saura’s musicals, as can be seen in the elaborate sequence shots that open and close *Iberia* and *Fados*, shots that once again share significant iconographic and structural features, such as the exposure of the filming device itself, the camera.

This revelation of the mechanisms of representation leads us to the third pattern of the aesthetics of Saura’s musicals, which is complemented by the first two.

3. Reflexivity

Sequence devoted to Imperio Argentina in *Jota* (2016)





Images from *Goya in Bordeaux* (*Goya en Burdeos*, 1998) summoned in *Jota* (2016)

In his study published in 1991, Marvin D'Lugo applied his idea of “distanced participation” to Saura’s Flamenco Trilogy of the 1980s, focusing the core of his analysis on the figure of the performer, i.e., the dancers who play “the part of fictional characters who are bound inextricably to fatalistic scenarios; individuals whose identity as dancers is itself the result of a willed submission to a cluster of artistic and social mythologies; finally, the figure of the Spaniard as a performer of a cultural ethos to which his own identity appears irrevocably bound” (D’Lugo, 1991: 193). The aforementioned use of mirrors finds an interesting formulation here, as they do not merely duplicate the images of the dancers, but function as entities that confront the dancers with themselves: in response to their reflections, they perform their dance. The mirror is thus revealed to be a kind of metaphor for the conventions to which artists adapt when re-presenting a tradition—flamenco, in the case of the trilogy with Gades.

The model proposed by D’Lugo can be applied to Saura’s other musical films. Over the course of this cycle, there is an increasing emphasis on these characteristics of “distanced participation”, whereby a group of artists consciously embody a role, oscillating between a faithful and distanced performance of an established cultural tradition. The figure of the mirror allows the director to combine repetition and reflection: all the films in the cycle are “mirrors”, new representations of a consolidated tradition, with its conventions and clichés, which will be reflected but at the same time signalled as such. Their constantly repeated proposition through combinations of minimal elements lays bare the artificiality of the representation itself. Reiteration is thus justified on the basis of the reflexive, meta-referential impulse that pervades Saura’s musicals.

Returning to the tribute scenes, we find significant examples of the above in *Jota*, in the homage to Imperio Argentina, the star of the successful regionalist musical *Nobleza baturra* [The Nobility of

the Peasantry] (Florián Rey, 1935). Saura stages the screening of an excerpt from the film, watched by various spectators as if they were attending a master class on traditional dance. While we witness a scene where the actress and her male partner dance a traditional jota, the teacher leading the class says to her pupils: “Do you know a difference between the dance as it used to be and as it is now? Before, the jota was a courtship dance. In a society with less freedom, where men and women could not touch in public, the dance allowed them to get close, and there was much more intimacy. Now it has changed because it is no longer necessary to use a dance to court someone. Now the dancers are much further apart and dance as if their movements were being reflected in a mirror.”

The scene marks the distances between two very different views of the dance: its traditional, sociological function, and its situation today, as a cultural vestige rescued and configured in a new sensibility, more academic perhaps, but also more self-conscious. The depiction of this cultural gap through a screening with commentary reminds us of Saura’s auteurial obsession discussed above and also underscores the role of film as a mediator in this respect: the spectators watch a screen showing a series of images of Imperio Argentina, a symbol of tradition; it is through these images that the differential discourse emerges.

Another scene in *Jota* pays tribute to Pedro Azorín, a historical representative of the Aragonese jota, but also to the actor Paco Rabal, through the screening of a non-musical film by Saura himself, *Goya in Bordeaux* (*Goya en Burdeos*, 1998). The excerpt chosen shows the Aragonese painter together with other Spanish liberals exiled in France at a dinner table in a hostel, where they are treated to an improvised jota by Pedro Azorín. After the lively dance, the melancholy Goya, played by Rabal, gets up to dance a few steps of the traditional dance of his homeland. The tribute this time is staged in a radically stripped-down form: Saura’s camera zooms in to focus on two screens onto

which the scene described is being projected, until finally it frames only one of the screens, leaving a slight space beneath so that the reflections of the images on the hardwood floor of the stage can remind us that we are watching a projection. Here we find several elements to consider. Once again, the recovery of a cultural object is presented in the context of an awareness of the artificial nature of the presentation. However, now that object is not only the world of the jota, but Saura’s own work. By choosing a scene from his own filmography, the filmmaker seems to redirect the discourse towards an examination of his own role as “interpreter” of a series of cultural traditions associated with the “Hispanic”: in this case, the jota, but also the figures of Rabal and one of the best-known Spanish artists in the world, Francisco de Goya.¹¹

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have attempted to demonstrate how Saura’s musical films construct a transnational model on several levels: on the international status of the director, on his thematic choices of musical styles, figures and myths of a supposed shared Ibero-American space, on the circulation of his films at international competitions; but, above all, on the aesthetic forms that are brought into play. The analysis of these forms—which, obviously, fall in line with theories of post-modern aesthetic modes—should be used not to delineate a self-sufficient poetics, but to relate that poetics to its larger context. The three aesthetic characteristics of Saura’s musicals offer a code for reading different forms of cultural expression and myths which, by underplaying many aspects associated with them, make their objects of representation more accessible, at least on the international circuits for specialist features. The auteur filmmaker is established as a mediator between the audience and a series of cultural phenomena that are placed on the same level by his gaze, by his unique aesthetic treatment. Returning for a moment to Cala-

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brese and one of the formulas he proposed to identify the aesthetic of repetition between different texts, that of *the identical nature of various different objects* (1999: 47), from the perspective of their representation, popular forms of expression in different parts of the Ibero-American world are equated in Saura's films, always through subtractive, serial and reflexive processes. The repetition of stylistic patterns and the persistent multi-referential impulse acts as constant markers, signs of attention from the main enunciative figure presiding over the series: Carlos Saura, who goes from being a cultural ambassador of "the Spanish" to posit himself, with these films, as a "representative" of a supposedly transnational cultural community.

This Aragonese filmmaker's approach is not the only one in the realm of auteur films. Directors like Fernando Trueba have built on the international profile achieved by Latin American musical styles and their hybridisations with jazz in documentaries like *Calle 54* (2000), much of which repeats the strategy of focusing on the performances of the musicians, highlighting the authenticity of their performances and, at the same time, the inherently artificial nature of their representations. But perhaps the most interesting case is that of the Argentine filmmaker Leonardo Favio (also a successful singer-songwriter), who for what became his final film decided to return to the plot for one of his most celebrated pictures, *El romance del Aniceto y la Francisca* (1966), a brief tale with a realist flavour and an ordinary setting, and to create a musical version with an abundance of ballet and tango numbers. The film was shot entirely in a studio and has a markedly the-

atrical *mise-en-scène* that exposes the artifice behind the story itself, while at the same time highlighting its pronounced aestheticising features.

The return to archetypal figures from national or regional imaginaries, whether stories, musical styles, performers, or the filmmakers themselves (like Saura or Favio) turned into ambassadors for a region's unique qualities, appears to be a common trend in what is colloquially referred to as the "prestige musical", which tends to recycle a music phenomenon in the interests of achieving an "artistically legitimised" reception—examples are documentaries like *Buena Vista Social Club* (Wim Wenders, 1999) or the film series *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues* (2003). However, as much the reformulation of established imaginaries may prompt reflection on the loss of supposed cultural essences, the reality is that what such trends actually point to, as Fredric Jameson suggests, is their "replacement either by a centralized commercial production for world export or by their own mass-produced neotraditional images" (Jameson, 1995: 3). In short, the local continues to exercise considerable power over efforts to articulate an identifying mark for certain products in spaces for transnational circulation, even in those considered relatively free from the logic of the globalised market, such as auteur film circuits. ■

NOTES

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- 1 Despite the problematic nature of the use of the terms, in the interests of clarity I have chosen to use "Ibero-America" to refer to the region made up of the

- countries of the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America—or Latin America: the nations in the Americas whose official languages are Latin-based. Saura's musicals move thematically in the Ibero-American space and, in my view, promote a *trans-Iberian* discourse on the historical and cultural projection of the Iberian Peninsula on the peoples across the Atlantic; the concept is José Saramago's (1990: 5-9).
- 2 On the role of popular culture—with music and film as the main standard bearers—in the construction of a Spanish national imaginary, see Alonso, Arce et al. (2010). For an analysis of the role that musical films have played in the dissemination of Latin American cultural imaginaries, see D'Lugo (2010: 160-186).
 - 3 These films would be *Blood Wedding* (Bodas de sangre, 1981), *Carmen* (1983), *El amor brujo* [Love, the Magician] (1986), *Sevillanas* (1992), *Flamenco* (1995), *Tango* (1998), *Salomé* (2002), *Iberia* (2005), *Fados* (2007), *I, Don Giovanni* (2009), *Flamenco, Flamenco* (2010), *Argentina* (Zonda, folklore argentino, 2015) and *Jota* (2016). It is worth noting that even *I, Don Giovanni*, despite being set in Neoclassical Europe, is nevertheless an exploration of one of the most quintessentially Spanish myths of all: Don Juan.
 - 4 This tendency began with *Sevillanas*. Pascale Thibadeau points out that, although in films like *Flamenco* and *Flamenco, Flamenco* "Carlos Saura and his cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, have made an effort to construct a common theme based on temporality and light (the passage from day to night and then to dawn [...]), this progression is structural and symbolic rather than narrative in nature" (2013: 232).
 - 5 This is particularly visible in *Blood Wedding*, *Carmen*, *Tango* and *Salomé*, where the musical performances are framed within the storyline of rehearsals preparing for a work or show.
 - 6 This does not mean that information on the musical forms presented is completely absent. Introductory stage directions, in the form of either superimposed captions (*Argentina* or *Jota*) or a voice-over comment (beginning of *Flamenco*) are present in various titles of the cycle. Other contextualising elements, like traditional outfits or stage props—such as the prototypical chairs in the flamenco performances—may also appear.
- However, their presence is very muted, and they barely interfere with the aesthetic proposal displayed in the films.
- 7 Neville's film might have been an inspiration for these, but their main models would be titles like *Los Tarantos* (Francisco Rovira Beleta, 1963), *La Carmen* (Julio Diamante, 1975) or the TV documentary *Rito y geografía del canto* [Ritual and Geography of Flamenco Singing] (1971-1974).
 - 8 Notable among the variety of images in this sequence are those that represent the mythologised Spanish woman. Thus, one of the most prominent panels in the collection is a Doré illustration for an edition of Merimée's *Carmen*. And it is no accident that most of the work in the collection is by Julio Romero de Torres, who dedicated his art to the cultivation of a particular brand of *costumbrismo* with a hint of transcendence, in which female racial iconographies played a central role. The importance of Romero de Torres in the articulation of a "flamenco" iconography is even recognised in such popular works of music as the pasodoble "La morena de mi copla" (1939) by Villagas Cernuda and Castellano Gómez: "Julio Romero de Torres / pintó a la mujer morena / [...] Morena, / la de los rojos claveles, / la de la reja floría / la reina de las mujeres. / Morena, / la del bordao mantón. / La de la alegre guitarra, / la del clavel español." [Translation: Julio Romero de Torres / painted the dark-skinned woman / [...] Dark-skinned woman, / the one with the red carnations / the one on the pretty balcony / the queen of women. / Dark-skinned woman / the one with the embroidered shawl. / The one with the joyful guitar, / the one with the Spanish carnation.]. Saura's own career has been marked by an obsession with the myth of the Spanish woman, as is obvious in *Carmen*, whose femme fatale archetype is echoed in *Salomé*, where the Biblical myth and Oscar Wilde's reformulation of it enter into a dialogue with flamenco stereotypes.
 - 9 These modes could be applicable here if we take into account, firstly, that the production processes of these films follow a rather standardised model—with similar funding channels, through a series of governmental, regional, national and transnational institutions,

like the ICAA in Spain, MiBAC in Italy, INCAA in Argentina, or Eurimages and Ibermedia in Europe and Ibero-America, which support each film in accordance with the musical tradition it presents, and with a technical and artistic team that tends to be made up of the same people, such as Roque Baños as director of the soundtrack and musical arrangements, José Luis López Linares or Vittorio Storaro as cinematographers, and Carlos Saura Medrano as assistant director—and, secondly, that the fact that the films are screened mainly in specialist circuits means that they have a very specific audience.

- 10 The importance of the Spanish Civil War in Saura's work is beyond question: from somewhat veiled allusions in *The Hunt* (La caza, 1965) or *The Garden of Delights* (El jardín de las delicias, 1970) to a direct treatment of the theme in *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1990), or in the final scene of *Bunuel and King Solomon's Table* (Buñuel y la mesa del rey Salomón, 2001), where archive footage of the war appears reflected on the magic table of the title, which, significantly, is referred to as "the mirror of the generations".
- 11 Goya's art, specifically his *The Disasters of War* series (1810-1815), would serve as iconographic inspiration for one of the dance scenes in *Tango*, where a dance company rehearses a choreographed piece that evokes the times of the "Dirty War" in Argentina.

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TRANSNATIONAL DANCES: THE MUSICAL FILMS OF CARLOS SAURA

Abstract

Since the 1980s, the prestigious Spanish director Carlos Saura has been developing a series of musical films that collect different examples of Ibero-American popular traditions that are articulated in these films through particular aesthetic forms. Through the examination of Saura's musical cinema and using previous work on the subject, we intend to study how such cinema develops new representations of musical folklore that are suitable for its circulation in international networks focused on auteur cinema.

Key words

Transnational; Musical; Carlos Saura; Auteur cinema; Festival Film.

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DANZAS DE LO TRANSNACIONAL: EL CINE MUSICAL DE CARLOS SAURA

Resumen

El prestigioso director español Carlos Saura ha ido construyendo, desde los años ochenta hasta la actualidad, un ciclo de películas musicales que recoge distintas muestras de las tradiciones populares iberoamericanas, siempre representadas mediante unas particulares formas estéticas. A través del examen del cine musical sauriano y apoyándonos en otros estudios previos, se pretende analizar cómo este desarrolla nuevas representaciones del acervo musical adecuadas para su circulación en redes internacionales consagradas al cine de autor.

Palabras clave

Transnacional; musical; Carlos Saura; cine de autor; película de festival.

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