

L'ATALANTE

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CINEMATOGRAFICOS

Notebook

THE IMPACT OF JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION ON SPAIN

(Dis)agreements

BEYOND THE SPORADIC SUCCESSES OF
ASIAN FILMS: THE CIRCULATION OF KOREAN
AND JAPANESE CINEMA IN SPAIN

Dialogue

CARLA SIMÓN AND CELIA RICO:
ECHOES OF JAPANESE CINEMA



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THE IMPACT OF JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN: CIRCULATION, RECEPTION, AND INFLUENCE

BLAI GUARNÉ

Some years ago now, the actor and director Clint Eastwood explained to a group of students and researchers at Stanford University how his work in the Spaghetti Westerns directed by Sergio Leone in Spain had provided him with unexpected training to deal with the challenges of working with multilingual film crews. Eastwood recalled his experience as an actor in Almería on productions with actors performing in different languages, in a kind of random linguistic jigsaw puzzle that only got put together when it reached the dubbing studio. This anecdote came up in the discussion after the screening of *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006), a production for which Eastwood had directed actors performing entirely in Japanese,

thereby completing his cinematic diptych on the Battle of Iwo Jima in the War of the Pacific.

Viewed from a distance, it seems ironic that it was the experience of filming under the direction of Leone that prepared Eastwood for filming the Japanese counterpart to *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) forty years later, given the lawsuit that the producers of the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa filed against the Italian filmmaker for stealing the storyline for *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964) from *Yojimbo* (1961).¹ Equally ironic is the fact that the profits that the Italian film would end up making for the Japanese filmmaker were substantially bigger than what he had made from his own film. The anecdote re-

THE MULTIPLE INFLUENCES THAT HAVE FOUND THEIR WAY INTO AN INCREASINGLY INTEGRATED WORLD, EVEN IN AN INDUSTRY TRADITIONALLY DOMINATED BY WESTERN MODES OF REPRESENTATION AND INFORMED BY THE DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF AMERICAN CINEMA

called by Eastwood reflects the complex tangle of linguistic, cultural, narrative, financial and legal factors involved in the production and transnational circulation of films, and ultimately reveals the multiple influences that have found their way into an increasingly integrated world, even in an industry traditionally dominated by Western modes of representation and informed by the discourses and practices of American cinema.

In considerations of this question, the global circulation of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual productions has emerged as a singular object of study, both for the aesthetic representational configurations it has disseminated (see Bonillo Fernández, 2019; Hinton, 2013; Kinsella, 2014; Morisawa, 2019; Pellitteri, 2018; Tezuka, 2012; Wee, 2014) and for the multiple narrative forms (transmedia, crossmedia) and platforms (media mix) it has articulated (see Jenkins, 2008; and also Hernández-Pérez, 2017; Loriguillo-López, 2016, 2018; Villa Gracia, 2019). In addition, its contributions to the creation of innovative consumer practices and subcultural expressions (see Annet, 2014; Galbraith and Karlin, 2012; Hills, 2016; Iwabuchi, 2010; Lamarre, 2006; Lee and Nornes, 2015; Miller, 2017; Otmazgin and Lyan, 2013; Sabre, 2016; Steinberg, 2012, 2017; Yoon and Yong, 2017) constitute another source of interest.

In Spain, the impact of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual culture on local production has been quite diverse. Examples range from the influence of Studio Ghibli's anime pictures on the

pioneering work of Baltasar Pedrosa Clavero (e.g. *Gisaku*, 2005) and of productions broadcast on television in the 1990s like *Dragon Ball* (A. Toriyama, Fuji TV: 1986-1989), *Captain Tsubasa* (Y. Takahashi, TV Tokyo: 1983-1986), *Saint Seiya: Knights of the Zodiac* (1986-1989) and *Sailor Moon* (Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon, 1992-1997) on the work of brothers Emilio and Jesús Gallego (e.g. *Shuriken School*, Xilam and Zinkia Entertainment, France 3: 2006) (see Horno, 2014) and Carlos Vermut (see Venet Gutiérrez, 2019) with his constant explicit references to Japanese pop culture, and somewhat more incidental allusions to Takeshi Kitano's *Dolls* (2002), in his film *Magical Girl* (2014), to the indirect connections between Alberto Rodríguez's *Marshland* (La isla mínima, 2014) and Bong Joon-ho's *Memories of Murder* (Salinui chueok, 2003) (see Kovacsics and Salvadó, in this issue), and even the more oblique resonances in the work of Carla Simón and Celia Rico (see Garín and de Vargas, *ibíd.*). To these examples we could add Isabel Coixet's neo-Orientalist turns in *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (Mapa de los sonidos de Tokio, 2009) with its unsuccessful emulation of the poetics of Wong Kar-wai, and the very obvious parodies of Japanese culture in Álvaro Díaz Lorenzo's *Los Japón* (2019).

Despite the fragmentary nature of these examples, the influence they reflect is indicative of a profound change in global audiovisual culture that is having as much of an impact in Spain as it is anywhere, a change characterised by a spectacular increase in the transnational circulation of Japanese and South Korea audiovisual products. Following the interest in Japanese manganime that began more than twenty years ago with the appearance on Spanish television of the series mentioned above—preceded in the two decades beforehand by others like *Marco, 3000 Leaves in Search of Mother* (Haha wo tazunete sanzen ri, 1976), *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (Alps no shōjo Heidi, 1974), and *Mazinger Z* (1972-1974)—came the success of J-pop and K-pop music among the younger

segments of the population. Meanwhile, on television K-drama and Japanese *doramas* have found enough of a niche to be included in the catalogues of major subscription video-on-demand platforms like Netflix, with huge potential audiences. Japanese and South Korean music, graphic products, and audiovisual productions now form an integral part of the media consumption of Spanish society, exerting a powerful influence on the redefinition of Spaniards' tastes, interests, and pastimes.

As occurred in earlier eras with the literature, cuisine, martial arts and video games associated with these countries, Japanese and South Korean audiovisual production has become a part of Spain's social landscape, consolidated as one of the most powerful transnational flows of contemporary popular culture in the world. Its worldwide impact has once again challenged the theories of the mid-1990s that conceived of globalisation in terms of Westernisation, as a one-way phenomenon whereby the global was understood as Western influence in a world defined on the basis of local peculiarities. These theories identifying the phenomenon of globalisation as a process leading towards the ultimate formation of a homogeneous global culture with Euro-Atlantic patterns conforming to an American model (e.g. *McDonaldization*,² *Disneyfication*³) were contested in the mid-2000s by studies that called attention to the international circulation of non-Western media and cultural production, especially from the Asian continent. In this sense, the emergence and subsequent consolidation of Japan and South Korea as cultural superpowers has forced a reassessment of the debate about cultural globalisation from the perspective of a plurality of centres that generate content and meaning circulating unevenly around the planet.

The work of Koichi Iwabuchi (2002; 2004; 2004 *et al.*^{4,5}) and Kim Youna (2008; 2013; 2019) constituted a turning point in academic research in this field. Iwabuchi (2002) has "re-centred" the globalising processes on East Asia by pointing out

JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN MUSIC, GRAPHIC PRODUCTS, AND AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS NOW FORM AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE MEDIA CONSUMPTION OF SPANISH SOCIETY

the central role played by Japan in the circulation of audiovisual productions and pop culture products in the region. He has been particularly influential for his analysis of the attempt to eliminate the "cultural odour" of Japanese products, presenting them as culturally neutral (*mukokuseki*) in order to ensure their penetration into markets that are still resistant to an influence that repeats Japanese imperialism in Asia in the economic and cultural spheres. The global boom of South Korean popular culture, epitomised by the phenomenon of *Hallyu* ("Korean wave"), has in turn served to "decentre" Japanese dominance over media flows within Asia. Kim Youna (2013) has analysed this question extensively, considering the social, cultural, and political implications of a global expansion closely tied to the rise of digital media and social networks. Especially notable is his analysis of the role played by the South Korean government in the planned development of cultural industries as a national project to compete in a context of globalisation and to attempt to capitalise on it. Specific initiatives like the Film Promotion Law of 1995, which provided powerful industrial conglomerates (*chaebol* like Samsung, Hyundai, or Daewoo) with incentives for investment in the audiovisual sector, have succeeded in displacing Hollywood productions from their dominant position in the South Korean market with domestic blockbusters that are also released internationally, in a system that provides the same support to film production as that given to exports of industrial products like cars and household appliances. In this way, Korean cinema, TV fiction series (a driving force behind the "Korean wave"), K-pop (systematically

designed and monitored star products targeting an international audience) and online games (a sector in which the country is a leader) have turned into highly popular consumer products both within and outside Asia, as well as objects of desire for new generations that promote their global circulation.

It is precisely this idea of “circulation” (Guarné and Hansen, 2018; Lee and LiPuma, 2002; Tsing, 2000; Valaskivi and Sumiala, 2014) that has emerged in recent years as a useful concept for understanding the complex cultural, political, and economic interactions that define transnational flows in the context of globalisation. Its analytical value lies not only in the way it captures the multifaceted nature of the global dissemination of images and information but also in the way it clarifies how this happens through the constant reconfiguration of the processes and practices that define circulation itself.⁶ The Asian boom has thus acquired an unquestionable status in the revision of the principles guiding academic studies of cultural globalisation, which have abandoned theories that equated it with Westernisation.

THE ASIAN BOOM HAS THUS ACQUIRED AN UNQUESTIONABLE STATUS IN THE REVISION OF THE PRINCIPLES GUIDING ACADEMIC STUDIES OF CULTURAL GLOBALISATION

However, there does not appear to have been the same level of questioning of the “global/local” equation in studies in this field. Since its origins, research on globalisation has sought to explain the interaction between global and local forces using different theoretical frameworks like the paradoxical tension between homogenising and hetero-

genising tendencies (Appadurai, 1996; 2001), integration and differentiation (Featherstone, 1990; 1995⁷), and connection and disconnection (Ferguson, 1999; 2006), to cite only the main examples. Concepts like *global mélange* (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995; 2004), *global ecumene* (Hannerz, 1992; 1996) and cosmopolitanism (Mathews, 2000) have served to express with varying degrees of success the complex effects of the dynamics of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (García Canclini, 1996) that shape the contemporary world. Nevertheless, the realm of the local continues to be understood largely as a counterpoint to the global that reflects, either in resistance or in adaptation, its most specific impact. The undeniably creative dimension that underscores this perspective lies in the conceptual developments involving notions like “glocalisation” (Robertson, 1992; 1995), “domestication” (Tobin, 1992), “creolisation” (Hannerz, 1992), “hybridity” (García Canclini, 1996), “localization” (Long, 1996) and “indigenisation” (Appadurai, 1996), among many others. The extent to which these different heuristic concepts have been able to convey the interpretation in terms of adaptation and cultural appropriation of what, in reality, constitutes specific, ontologically original developments, arranged in clusters of multiple relationships (social, economic, political, and cultural) is the subject of a discussion that is beyond the scope of this introduction. I will only note here that the fact that the “global/local” equation continues to be obfuscated by the modern categories of “origin/destination” and “original/copy” (Allen and Sakamoto, 2006), rather than clarifying, actually hinders our comprehension of a multilinear and multifaceted phenomenon resulting from transnational dynamics operating in an increasingly interconnected world.

Discussions related to whether manga is a uniquely Japanese product, whether music made by non-Korean groups could be considered K-pop, or whether anime can really be called Japanese if much of its production is outsourced to studios

outside Japan, if its international circulation depends on foreign distributors and its content is constantly rearticulated by a fandom that translates, reinterprets and disseminates it via alternative channels of a “remix world” (McLelland, 2018) are recurring questions that confuse the focal point of the analysis, placing it on supposed essential characteristics defined in national terms. If manga or anime become labels despite their “uncompromising ‘otherness’”, to use Napier’s terms (2005: 9), it is precisely because of their hybrid, dislocated and mixed nature, resulting from a constellation of different influences and relations that interact outside what can be captured in binary formulations like “global/local”, “universal/particular”, “international/national”, which ultimately reduce the post-modern complexity of a period of advanced or late capitalism (choose your preferred term) à la Jameson (2002) to modern terms.

All of this is complicated still further when processes of cultural appropriation are enacted by those claiming legitimate ownership (e.g. political agencies, government programs, public diplomacy initiatives) who see the cultural and creative industries as fertile ground for international political operations ripe for the application of their particular agendas. The convergence of political agenda and cultural production has thus contributed to the reification of the idea of “national culture” through soft power strategies (Nye, 1990; Shiraishi, 1997)⁸ that compete in the global economy of nation branding (e.g. Cool Japan, South Korean *Hallyu*),⁹ putting what by their very nature are multiple, diversified and fragmentary expressions of popular culture at the service of univocal discourses.

The problematising of the cultural dimension in Japanese and South Korean audiovisual productions, i.e., the problematising of what “Japanese” and “Korean” are understood to mean in such productions, opens a debate about what we mean by constructions like “Western”, “American”, “European” and “Spanish” and, in doing so,

THE CONVERGENCE OF POLITICAL AGENDA AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION HAS THUS CONTRIBUTED TO THE REIFICATION OF THE IDEA OF “NATIONAL CULTURE” THROUGH SOFT POWER STRATEGIES

raises questions about the transcultural nature of their visual discourses, narrative articulations and aesthetic conceptualisations that need to be answered by means of cultural analysis. This task becomes even more important in contexts traditionally neglected by academic researchers in these areas, like the Spanish context compared to the profusion of studies focusing on the dissemination, reproduction, and consumption of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual production in English-speaking and Asian contexts. In this issue of *L’Atalante* we have sought to explore all these issues in the interests of offering a state of the question that could lay the foundations for research on the circulation, reception, and influence of audiovisual expressions of Japanese and South Korean popular culture in our country. With this objective, and leaving aside the primacy of the approaches taken to the question in the English-speaking world, the articles that comprise this issue’s Notebook section consider the impact of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual production in Spain in the broadest sense of the term.

Daniel Ferrera opens the issue with an historical approach to the presence of Japanese commercial animation on Spanish television during a key period for its consolidation, the 1990s. “Analysis of anime programming on generalist television in Spain (1990-1999)” explores how the creation of private networks on the Spanish television market established a dynamic of intense competition in which anime played an instrumental role through a series of bold programming and coun-

terprogramming strategies. Through an analysis of the television schedules of the five national networks (the two public broadcasters TVE1 and TVE2, and the private networks Antena 3, Canal+, and Telecinco), Ferrera describes how anime programming involved an operation of “testing and experimentation” in which counterprogramming objectives took precedence over the adaptation of content to the viewing audience. Worthy of special attention is his consideration of the fact that, of all the anime programs broadcast by Spanish networks during this period, productions originally conceived by their creators for child audiences represented a smaller percentage of the total than those intended for an adult male audience, despite the fact that the broadcasts themselves invariably targeted children. The lack of understanding among programmers of the taxonomy of genres and subgenres that make up anime, added to the societal prejudice that viewed animation as a product aimed solely at children, sparked controversy over the harmful nature of Japanese animated series, with the question of their popularity on Spanish television becoming the subject of alarmist discussions in national newspapers. It was a controversy that emerged in other European countries as well, with repercussions and ramifications on other entertainment products associated with Japan and erroneously identified with child audiences (e.g. video games). Beyond the contextual aspects of the debate, the anime boom in those years, both on national and regional public television and on private networks (with Telecinco standing out in particular for its key relationship with the Italian market and the prior experience of broadcasting anime series in that country) turned commercial Japanese animation into a regular, recognisable product on the Spanish audiovisual landscape, with an enduring impact on the collective imaginary of several generations, ultimately proving essential to the phenomenon of the formation and consolidation of communities of anime fans in Spain.

In line with this question but taking a different and (for that very reason) largely complementary analytical perspective, Luis Deltell Escobar and Carla Folgar Arias offer an exploration of the hyperactive communities of fans of audiovisual culture associated with *Hallyu* (“Korean wave”), and especially with its most dynamic manifestation, K-pop, a genuine “hook” of interest due to its presence in Spain. Using a hybrid quantitative and qualitative research method combining a survey with in-depth interviews, their article “*Hallyu* 한류 in Spain: spectators, fanbases and new forms of audiovisual consumption” takes a pioneering approach to the analysis of the communities of Spanish followers of the “Korean wave”, their interests, motivations and consumer practices in our country, as well as the importance of digital media in the social consolidation of the cultural phenomenon of *Hallyu*. For Deltell and Folgar, the influence of South Korean audiovisual products is generating a radically different form of cinephilia unique to the digital era, where spectators participate in the development and expansion of content in an active and engaged way, quite different from the traditional consumption of film and television narratives. The result is a new type of spectator who, far from being contented with the passive consumption of audiovisual productions, assumes an operative role in their production and distribution, thereby forming a creative social audience that organises, interacts and grows via social networks and media used by the “digital swarm” (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Insta-

**THE RESULT IS A NEW TYPE
OF SPECTATOR WHO, FAR FROM
BEING CONTENTED WITH THE PASSIVE
CONSUMPTION OF AUDIOVISUAL
PRODUCTIONS, ASSUMES AN OPERATIVE
ROLE IN THEIR PRODUCTION
AND DISTRIBUTION**

THE NEW WAVE OF EXPRESSIONS OF SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL CULTURE COEXISTS IN SPAIN WITH ITS FILM PRODUCTION. DESPITE HAVING CEDED SOME OF THE ATTENTION IN THE SPECIALISED MEDIA, SOUTH KOREAN FILMS STILL MAINTAIN A STRONG PRESENCE AT THE SPANISH BOX OFFICE AND AT FESTIVALS

gram, blogs, mobile apps, YouTube channels, etc.). Particularly interesting is the approach that Deltell and Folgar take to these digital *loci* as spaces of counterpower where it is possible to construct a network of sympathies and contacts between spectators which, as they are not identified with mainstream audiovisual language, find outside the hegemonic narratives and musical forms not only a space for alternative entertainment, but a “form of cultural activism”. Deltell and Folgar thus argue that the consumption of *Hallyu* by Spanish youth constitutes a clear case of resistance and counterpower against the global predominance of the American audiovisual industry, contributing substantially to the process of integration of the South Korean audiovisual imaginary into our country.

Emerging in parallel with the music movement analysed by these authors is another of South Korea’s most popular cultural exports, *K-drama*. Juan Rubio de Olazabal’s article explores one of the popular titles distributed on the Netflix streaming platform, *Memories of the Alhambra* (Jae-Jeong Son, TVN-Netflix: 2018). With locations inspired by the city of Granada, a global tourist icon, this series offers an interesting example of reverse Orientalism (Guarné, 2017) in its exoticist and romantic representation of the construction of Spain in the South Korean imaginary. “South Korean audiovisual production

in Spain: Granada as a ludic world in the series *Memories of the Alhambra*” explores the intrinsically playful way in which South Korean television drama visually appropriates the landscape of a city (supposedly Granada) converted into a virtual setting for an augmented reality game with a markedly Spanish character. Of special interest is Rubio de Olazabal’s analysis of how the dialogue between this ludic appropriation and the cultural appropriation of the visual references and aspects most universally associated with Andalusian folklore and, by extension, with Spain as a whole. The series thus reinterprets the urban space through a complex repertoire of overlapping worlds with their own time-frames, ranging from the fictional Granada in the story to the ludified Granada in the alternative reality of the game that it inspired. In considering this process, Rubio de Olazabal explores the movement between the fictional real world and the digital illusory world, which echoes on the imaginary plane the magic attributed to an idealised city in an orientalisng *tableau vivant* of mirages and ambiguities that are in turn reproduced in the depiction of the characters and the plots that guide them. Worthy of special attention is the view the author offers of the ludic-fictional textures that connect the game with the story of the series through a production which—both in its narrative and in its visuality—attempts to convey the conventions of both genres, positing a blurry boundary separating “the primary and the ludic worlds”, “the real and the illusory”, “sanity and madness”, ultimately pointing to the paradox of a game that enhances reality in exchange for reducing it.

The new wave of expressions of South Korean audiovisual culture coexists in Spain with its film production. Despite having ceded some of the attention in the specialised media, South Korean films still maintain a strong presence at the Spanish box office and at festivals, and the next two articles in this issue deal precisely with the-

se points. In the first, Sonia Dueñas focuses on the reception in Spain of the films of Yeon Sang-ho, a filmmaker of special interest for challenging the limits of *auteurship* and conventional distribution with a career that has ranged from the mode of production of independent cinema to that of the blockbuster. Dueñas examines how with *Train to Busan* (Busanhaeng, 2016), Yeon Sang-ho has managed to make the leap not only from independent animation to live-action cinema, but also to mainstream cinema with a production (itself a metaphor for the homogenisation of society) that seems designed to turn into a cult film. “Between independent cinema and the blockbuster in South Korea: Yeon Sang-Ho’s films and their reception in Spain” approaches the phenomenon of the South Korean blockbuster as a hybrid product that integrates the Hollywood model of genre cinema and big special effects with narrative elements closely associated with South Korea’s national identity and recent history. His films feature actors who form part of a locally and regionally recognisable star system and benefit from big budgets and effective marketing strategies that in most cases have resulted in major commercial successes domestically with an international impact as well. South Korean animated films and their presence on Spanish screens are a different matter, as they come in the wake of their Japanese counterparts, and have thus been largely invisible to spectators, as has the participation of their valued professionals on internationally successful pictures whose production is outsourced to South Korean studios. Of special interest is Dueñas’ consideration of the extent to which *Train to Busan*—an exception due to its status as a zombie horror picture in a context typically identified with the thriller genre—and other live-action and animated productions by the same director, released as supposed sequels or prequels thereto, have contributed to the creation and consolidation of South Korean cinema as a “quality brand”. It is a label

recognised by both critics and spectators, which acts as a kind of positive sign that enhances the appeal of South Korean cinema in Spain, which film festivals and exhibitions have also contributed to, as analysed in detail in the next article.

Violeta Kovacsics and Alan Salvadó focus their attention on the programming structure of the Sitges Festival—one of the beacons of South Korean film production in our country—and its essential role not only in the reception and interpretation of “New Korean Cinema” in Spain, but in the categorisation and recognition of genres in that cinema. Avoiding an abstract transcultural approach and taking the Sitges Festival as a case study, Kovacsics and Salvadó explore the paratextual system of the festival and its contribution to the recognition of the idea of “New Korean Cinema” associated with the thriller, based on the identification of a series of features that have come to be viewed as idiosyncratic of Korean cinema, such as the way of depicting violence, the mixture of black humour and drama, and the historical interrogation of the country’s recent past. “*Made for Sitges?* The reception of the South Korean thriller in Spain through a case study of the Sitges Film Festival” explores how the paratextual promotion of these elements has helped Spanish audiences to recognise a common style in a series of productions which, beyond auteurial and classical generic qualities, prove difficult to classify. This process has in turn been reflected in the shift from a broad auteurial perspective to a more specialised genre-focused perspective in the assessment of these films, in a shift directly related to the progression from “visibility to hypervisibility” that currently defines the presence of South Korea in the Festival’s programming. Especially revealing is the conclusion in the article that this shift has in turn transformed the structure of the festival itself, both directly and indirectly, through the creation of specific sections like Orient Express and Órbita, which have turned the thriller into a genre closely associated with South Korean ci-

nema, and South Korea into a country closely associated with the festival. Kovacsics and Salvadó thus describe a process of synergy that over the last twenty years has given the Sitges Festival an active role as an influencer in the adaptation of Spanish tastes to “New Korean Cinema”, while at the same time establishing the festival itself as a “place of transition and transaction” that has helped support the reception of South Korean films in our country.

Finally, the Notebook section closes with a paper that explores the political use of the image in the context of the War of the Pacific, to which I referred at the beginning of this introduction, through an analysis of the reception in Spain of newsreels made in Japan about the war in Asia in the 1930s and the early 1940s. For this topic, which has received very little attention in academic research, Marcos Centeno adopts a historical approach in order to trace the circuitous route of migration, distribution and recycling in our country of newsreel footage on the Japanese war in the context of the Spanish Civil War and World War II. “Reediting the war in Asia: Japanese newsreels in Spain (1931-1945)” offers a critical analysis of a series of images in which the representation of current affairs became a powerful tool for social (de-)mobilisation at the service of the constantly changing interests of the Franco dictatorship, which didn’t hesitate to manipulate their interpretation, articulating a Falangist agitprop discourse that was reoriented after the fall of the Axis Powers in the interests of legitimising the Francoist regime. In this res-

pect, Centeno examines the theory posited by other authors that despite the geographical remoteness of the conflict, Japan’s war with China served the Franco dictatorship to depict Japan as its Asian alter-ego in the global crusade against communism. Centeno thus interrogates the footage not only in relation to their original context but especially to the context of their reception in Spain, revealing an adaptive strategy whereby the correspondences with the pro-fascist discourse of the Japanese imperial system gave way to the traditionalist, National Catholic rhetoric of the Franco regime, in a subtle effort of revisionism aimed at reconciling with the Allies in response to the new international geopolitical context after World War II. In this way, the constant re-editing of images from Japanese war newsreels tuned this film footage into a kind of polysemous, contradictory palimpsest that ultimately tells us more about the needs and interests of the totalitarian regime controlling Spain at that time than about the conflict in Asia.

The Notebook section is complemented by the Dialogue section, featuring two of the most important new voices in Spanish cinema: the filmmakers Carla Simón and Celia Rico. Yasujirō Ozu and Hirokazu Koreeda are some of the names appearing in this conversation in which Manuel Garin and Ferran de Vargas explore the influence of Japanese cinema on the filmography of these two Spanish directors, and especially on their award-winning first feature films: *Summer 1993* (Estiu 1993, 2017); and *Journey to a Mother’s Room* (Viaje al cuarto de una madre, 2018). It is an open conversation in which the filmmakers reflect on their connection with Asian cinema, their contact with Japanese visual culture and the contributions of films from Japan to the development of their perspectives in subtle and often unnoticed ways, in the composition of space, the circulation of gestures and the portrayal of emotions, and in the timing, rhythm and framing of their films. Simón and Rico unpack these ques-

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OF IMAGES FROM JAPANESE WAR
NEWSREELS TUNED THIS FILM FOOTAGE
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CONTRADICTIONARY PALIMPEST**

A RECONSIDERATION OF THE “GLOBAL/LOCAL” BINARY IN THE ANALYSIS OF THIS PHENOMENON

tions in relation to their most personal interests as directors, ranging from family relationships, childhood and loss to the tensions between city and country, the social pressure of gender roles and the representation of economic and political concerns in the most intimate everyday details. Garin and de Vargas thus engage in an open dialogue in which cinema itself is revealed to be an extensive, ongoing conversation between films and filmmakers, continuously filtering the depiction of reality through the echo of the films that have influenced us.

Continuing with this exploration of the porous nature of our audiovisual production in relation to its Japanese and South Korean counterparts, the (Dis)Agreements section brings together the people responsible for the most important festivals for the screening of Japanese and South Korean films in Spain, with the aim of gauging the status of these films from the perspective of these points of entry into the Spanish market. Quim Crusellas and Domingo López (director and programmer, respectively, of the Asian Summer Film Festival in Vic, Catalonia), Menene Gras (director of the Barcelona Asian Film Festival), José Luis Rebordinos (director of the San Sebastián International Film Festival in Donostia, Basque Country) and Ángel Sala (director of the Sitges Film Festival in Catalonia) answer a series of questions asked by Guillermo Martínez-Taberner and Antonio Loriguillo-López about the circulation of these films in our country, with topics as diverse as the place they occupy in the festivals in the context of a digital media boom marked by the extraordinary popularity of video-on-demand pla-

tforms; the role of competitions and exhibitions in giving visibility to films from distant countries that still tend to be consumed in waves or fads; the questioning of the idea of “peripheral film industries” in relation to productions that play a substantial role in the global renewal of audiovisual languages and narratives; the disconnect between the films featured at the festivals and the bulk of audiovisual production in their respective countries; and the role of cultural agencies, critics and niche audiences in their circulation and reception in Spain, leading us back to a reconsideration of the “global/local” binary in the analysis of this phenomenon.

As always, this issue of *L'Atalante* closes with the various contributions to the Vanishing Points section. A series of studies of titles as diverse as *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928), *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966), *Heart of Glass* (Werner Herzog, 1976), *Werckmeister Harmonies* (Béla Tarr, 2000), and *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008) thus close an issue that we hope will be of interest to our readers. ■

NOTES

- 1 This was not the first time that a Kurosawa film was transposed to the Wild West. Another Western shot four years earlier, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), had taken another film by the Japanese director, *Seven Samurai* (Shichinin no Samurai, 1954) and relocated it in the American west, in this case after purchasing the rights and casting big name actors.
- 2 See Ritzer (1993; 2006); Ritzer and Malone (2000).
- 3 See Bryman (1999, 2003, 2004).
- 4 With Muecke and Thomas (2004).
- 5 With Chua (2008).
- 6 From this perspective, the GREGAL Japan-Korea-Catalonia/Spain Cultural Circulation (SGR 2017 SGR 1596) research group at the Department of Translation and Interpretation and East Asia Studies of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona analyses the circula-

tion, reconfiguration and integration of the cultural, linguistic and representational flows through which Japan and South Korea, as strategic vectors, affect and transform the Spanish social reality in globalising processes on a planetary scale.

- 7 With Lash and Robertson (1995).
- 8 Also Bukh (2014), Iwabuchi (2015), Tsutsui (2011), Watanabe and McConnell (2008).
- 9 See Craig (2017); Chua and Iwabuchi (2008); Daliot-Bul (2009); Kang (2015); Kim (2007); Kim (2011); Kim (2013); Kuwahara (2014); Lie (2015); Lim, Ping and Tseng (2016); Marinescu (2014) and Valaskivi (2013), among others.

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THE IMPACT OF JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION ON SPAIN: CIRCULATION, RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE

Abstract

In recent years, Japanese and South Korean audiovisual productions have become an integral part of the Spanish social landscape, while their global circulation has turned Japan and South Korea into veritable cultural superpowers. In considering this idea, this introduction offers a critical review of the main theories applied to the study of cultural globalisation, refuting notions that conceived of its development in terms of Westernisation and questioning the usefulness of the global/local equation based on the worldwide impact of the Japanese and South Korean audiovisual cultures. From this perspective, I present the various contributions related to the circulation, reception and influence of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual productions in Spain that comprise the Notebook section of this issue, which cover topics like commercial Japanese animation on Spanish mainstream television in the 1990s, the hyperactive communities of fans of audiovisual culture associated with *Hallyu* ("Korean wave"), South Korean fiction available on Netflix that uses Spain as its setting, the reception of the films by South Korean filmmaker Yeon Sang-ho, and the role of the Sitges Film Festival in the interpretation and recognition of "New Korean Cinema" in Spain, as well as the political use of the image in the manipulation of Japanese war newsreels during the Franco dictatorship. Finally, I outline the main points explored by the filmmakers Carla Simón and Celia Rico in the conversation contained in the Dialogue section, as well as the points of view offered in the (Dis)Agreements section by the organisers of the main film festivals presenting Asian films in Spain.

Key words

Japanese popular culture; Korean popular culture; Japanese cinema; Korean cinema; Cultural circulation; Reception; Cultural consumption.

Author

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EL IMPACTO DEL AUDIOVISUAL JAPONÉS Y SURCOREANO EN ESPAÑA: CIRCULACIÓN, RECEPCIÓN E INFLUENCIA

Resumen

En los últimos años, las producciones audiovisuales japonesas y surcoreanas han pasado a formar parte del paisaje social español al ritmo que su circulación global convertía a Japón y Corea del Sur en auténticas superpotencias culturales. En la consideración de este tema, el artículo revisa críticamente las principales teorías aplicadas en el estudio de la globalización cultural, refutando las tesis que habían concebido su desarrollo en términos de occidentalización y cuestionando la utilidad de la ecuación global/local a partir del impacto de las culturas audiovisuales japonesa y surcoreana a escala planetaria. Desde esta perspectiva, se presentan las distintas contribuciones sobre la circulación, recepción e influencia de las producciones audiovisuales japonesas y surcoreanas en España que componen la sección Cuaderno de este monográfico y que abarcan temas como la animación comercial nipona en la televisión generalista de los noventa, las hiperactivas comunidades fans de la cultura audiovisual asociada a la *Hallyu* («ola coreana»), la ficción surcoreana ambientada en nuestro país disponible en Netflix, la recepción de las obras del realizador surcoreano Yeon Sang-ho y el papel del Festival de Sitges en la interpretación y reconocimiento del «Nuevo Cine Coreano» en España, así como los usos políticos de la imagen en la manipulación de los noticiarios de guerra japoneses durante la dictadura franquista. Finalmente, el artículo traza las líneas principales desgranadas por las cineastas Carla Simón y Celia Rico en la conversación recogida en la sección Diálogo, así como los puntos de vista expuestos en la sección (Des)encuentros por los responsables de los principales festivales de cine con presencia audiovisual asiática en España.

Palabras clave

Cultura popular japonesa; Cultura popular coreana; Cine japonés; Cine coreano; Circulación cultural; Recepción y consumo cultural.

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NOTEBOOK

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ANALYSIS OF ANIME PROGRAMMING ON GENERALIST TELEVISION IN SPAIN (1990-1999)

DANIEL FERRERA

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing interest in anime among Spanish academics. There have been numerous studies that analyse the genre from historicist perspectives (Horno López, 2012), others that consider the context of production (Mangirón, 2012), and still others that focus on the text, both in terms of representation (García Pacheco and López Rodríguez, 2012; Pérez Guerrero, 2013; De Pablo Rodríguez, 2014) and in relation to the aesthetics of the genre (Horno López, 2013) or its narrative (Hernández Pérez, 2013; Loriguillo-López, 2018). With regard to their introduction in Spain, Mas López (2005) analyses the process of translating anime series into Catalan, while Torres Simón (2008: 3) focuses on the characteristics of the manga reader and the appearance of the first anime series. Madrid and Martínez (2010 and 2011) study the arrival in Spain of Japanese popular cultural products, focusing especially on *manga*

and anime, while Montero Plata (2012) and Santiago (2012) analyse their insertion into the Spanish market. All this research, conducted mainly over the last decade, has helped compensate for “the shortage or complete absence of formal academic documentation” (Horno López, 2013: 7) on anime in Spain. However, in relation to reception, there has been no detailed, systematic analysis of the way that anime has been programmed on Spanish networks.

The first anime television program to appear on Spanish television was *Kimba the White Lion* (Jungle Taitei, O. Tezuka, Fuji TV: 1965), broadcast in Spain in the late 1960s as *Kimba, el león blanco* and later known as *El emperador de la jungla*. In 1976, anime had its first ratings topper with *Heidi* (Alps no shōjo Heidi, I. Takahata, Fuji TV: 1974), “a veritable national event that was broadcast on Saturdays at 3:30 p.m.” (Palacio, 2008: 93). In early 1977, *3000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (Haha wo tazunete sanzen ri, Nippon Animation, I. Takaha-

ta, Fuji TV: 1976; Spanish title: *Marco*) premiered on Spanish television, followed by *Mazinger Z* (G. Nagai, Fuji TV: 1972-1974) in March 1978. During the first years of Felipe González's Socialist government (starting in 1982), anime represented 4% of children's programming (Paz Rebollo, 2018: 725); by the late 1980s and early 1990s it had increased its presence "thanks to regional generalist channels" (Madrid and Martínez, 2011: 56). Notable in this period was *Dragon Ball* (A. Toriyama, Fuji TV: 1986-1989), broadcast in Spanish as *Bola de dragón* and premiering on Galician TV on 8 February 1990 as *As bolas máxicas* (Montero Plata, 2012: 50), a series that can be considered a major milestone in anime broadcasting in Spain (Estrada, 2012).

But it was not until the 1990s, with the creation of private television networks under the new regime of open competition established by the Private Television Act (*Ley de Televisión Privada*) enacted on 3 May 1988, that anime became a regular feature on the television schedules of channels with national coverage. In a context of change and uncertainty marked by skyrocketing production costs (Contreras and Palacio, 2003: 116-117), anime programming proved especially profitable because, compared to US and European productions, "it was a cheaper product and its serial format won over a loyal audience" (Mateos-Pérez, 2012: 537).

The beginning of the 1990s brought with it the advent of what Palacio, extrapolating the terminology of John Ellis to the Spanish context, refers to as an age of abundance for Spanish television (2006: 318). And this abundance, a consequence of the larger number of channels and the increase in daily broadcasting hours, led to an increased concern about the effects that television consumption could have on children, as explored by Mateos-Pérez (2012: 526) in the introduction to his study analysing children's programming in the first half of the 1990s. In a context of testing and experimentation, programming and counterprogramming, the consolidation of anime on

Spanish television gave rise to a certain degree of alarm that was reflected in the press of the time.

This period has been studied extensively by some of the authors cited above, such as Contreras and Palacio (2003), who focus on programming, and Palacio (2008), who explores the history of television in Spain. There are also studies focusing on Spanish programming from its origins until well into the 1990s (Gómez-Escalonilla, 1998), and others that examine the context of competition in the television market since 1990 (Artero, Herro and Sánchez Tabernero, 2005), or that analyse children's programming after the appearance of private television networks under the regime of open competition (Mateos-Pérez, 2012).

Notable among these studies is the monograph edited by Montero Díaz (2018), which offers an overview of audiences and television programming since 1956. The book's epilogue describes the programmatic context of the first five years of the 1990s and defines the elements of change to the television model following the introduction of private television networks and the evolution of programming for children and youth since then (Mateos-Pérez and Paz Rebollo, 2018: 839-845).

This article offers an analysis of programming in the 1990s, focusing specifically on anime series broadcast on Spain's national networks.

CONTEXT

In order to fully understand the implications of anime programming in Western countries, it is necessary to take into account a series of characteristics of this type of animation that distinguish it from other animated series entering Spain from Europe or the United States.

Firstly, anime was traditionally conceived as a product for domestic consumption (Madrid and Martínez, 2011: 56). When introduced to foreign markets, it has always passed through a phase of resistance in the receiving country before being accepted (Yui, 2010a: 48 and 2010b: XXIII). In Ita-

ly, its arrival caused a profound impact (Pellitteri, 2004: 20) that affected not only the audience's perception of Japanese cultural forms but even Italian cultural production itself (Pellitteri, 2006). And although its success in Italy coincided with the boom in anime programming between 1978 and 1984 (Pellitteri, 2014), "the 'Japanese wave'" reached Spain later than it did in other European countries (Madrid and Martínez, 2011: 58). While Catalonia played an important role in its introduction in Spain (Llovet Ferrer, 2018) and the regional channels were the country's main broadcasters of anime in the 1980s, the establishment of private networks in 1990 resulted in a quantitative increase in anime programming at the national level. With this in mind, this analysis focuses on anime programming on national channels from 1990 to the end of the decade, which would lead to the explosion of the manga market in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century (Bouissou, Pellitteri, *et al.*, 2010: 255).

Another aspect to take into account is the classification of manga and anime in Japan according to the demographic characteristics of its consumers. Cho, Disher, *et al.* (2018) classify anime according to nine variables, the first of which is target audience. Based on this approach, anime is subdivided into five basic genres (Torrents, 2015: 163): *kodomo* (aimed at children), *shōnen* (targeting male adolescents), *shōjo* (for female adolescents), *seinen* (for a young adult male audience) and *josei* (for women). This taxonomy serves to contextualise the main hypothesis on which this research is based: of all the anime programmes broadcast in the 1990s in Spain, those aimed at children (in their original Japanese context) represented a relatively small percentage, while productions intended for male audiences were the most common during this decade.

ANIME WAS TRADITIONALLY CONCEIVED AS A PRODUCT FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION

In this period, anime programming was consolidated in Spain and experienced a boom on national networks; Spanish television was filled with Japanese animation productions, all of them aimed at children, which led to a series of problems reflected in the press of the time.

This problem of reception stemmed from a lack of knowledge of these genres (or subgenres within the anime genre, as Denison (2015: 2) points out when highlighting the difficulties of classifying anime as a genre or as a type of audiovisual production encompassing diverse genres), their norms and conventions. Such knowledge is indispensable not only for classifying the different anime productions or theorising about them, but also for audiences to be able to make sense of them. Indeed, this is a fundamental aspect of the conception of genre itself (Neale, 2004: 1).

Although Creeber (2004) offers a broad and meticulous overview of the most important aspects of television genre studies, he does not include an in-depth analysis of the subdivisions that can be established within a genre as specific as Japanese animation. Donnelly (2004: 73-75) discusses adult animation and its proliferation in Western countries during the 1990s (as well as the success of anime as early as the mid-1980s), while Wells (2004a: 107) refers to its growing popularity, reflected in children's programming in the North American context that the author describes. However, in spite of references to the different audiences that animation may target (in relation to the adult/child dichotomy), and even to the censorship resulting from the presence of violence and/or content associated with "potential sexual confusion" (Wells, 2004b: 104), none of these studies connect this issue to the ignorance in Western nations of the five genres into which anime is demographically subdivided in Japan.

This lack of knowledge is linked to the problem of reading and understanding the audiovisual text and its relationship with the audience (Morley, 2005: 195-199). A decontextualised text can have its meaning distorted, resulting in a misguided reception, and the receiving culture may reject “certain inherent elements of the source culture” (Richard Marset, 2009: 137). The meaning originally proposed by the authors is lost due to the ignorance of the audience targeted by their productions, because the text needs to be understood in its context (Casetti and Di Chio, 1999: 293-294). The dominant reading becomes a reading negotiated at the moment of translation and in the programming of the different productions on the television schedule, making the reception of the final viewer problematic.

In view of the above, the objective of this article is to determine the time slot that anime was most frequently assigned, the subgenre that was programmed the most, how anime programming evolved in the 1990s, and the differences between public and private network programming, all with a view to analysing how this content was received in the decade under study.

SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHOD

This study has involved the analysis of television programming from 1 January 1990 to 31 December 1999 on all five national networks: two public (TVE1 and TVE2) and three private (Antena 3, Canal + and Telecinco). The data on this programming was obtained from the daily TV schedule pages of four national newspapers (*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País* and *La Vanguardia*), alternating between newspapers each month and referring to two or more sources whenever a possible anomaly was detected. Included as part of children’s variety programmes that featured several series, if on specific days a series was not listed in the newspaper schedules, the same series broadcast on previous and subsequent days has been coun-

ted, except when the series was not listed for periods lasting longer than a week. The study does not include region-specific broadcasts on national public networks, which included anime programming from the very first days of 1990 (e.g. *Princess Knight*, broadcast as *La Princesa Caballero* [Ribon no Kishi, O. Tezuka, Fuji TV: 1967-1968] on 8 January on TVE2 in Catalonia), or films broadcast on national networks.

This research has resulted in a database consisting of 21,834 entries, each corresponding to the broadcast of an episode, classified according to nine variables:

- 1 Year of broadcast.
- 2 Month of broadcast.
- 3 Day of broadcast.
- 4 Date of broadcast.
- 5 Start time.
- 6 Television network.
- 7 Title.
- 8 Genre: *kodomo*, *shōnen*, *shōjo*, *seinen*, *josei* and co-production (between Japan and other countries).
- 9 Notes (this section includes anomalies such as the multiple names with which some anime series are known in Spain).

Of these 21,834 entries, 9.42% are broadcasts of co-productions between Japan and countries such as Italy, France or the United States. Due to their unique characteristics, although some could be classified in the categories of *kodomo* or *shōnen*, these eleven series do not fit entirely within the anime genre, so they have been omitted from the analysis, leaving 19,777 entries. In addition, this analysis is complemented by recordings from the period (author’s personal files) and a data search in the four newspapers that were used to create the database covering the period under study. Around twenty articles have been analysed to determine whether anime was characterized in a positive or negative way and whether press publications might have influenced the composition of the television schedules.

RESULTS

Although anime broadcasts have been identified right from the beginning of 1990, both in region-specific broadcasts on national networks and on different regional networks, it was not until Antena 3, a “pioneer in offering ‘animated breakfast television’” (Mateos-Pérez and Paz Rebollo, 2018): 841), began regular programming on Thursday 25 January, that an animated series produced in part by a Japanese studio appeared on national television: *Jinete Sable and los Comisarios Estrella* (Sei Juushi Bismarck, World Event Production, Nippon Television Network, 1984-1985), a US-Japanese co-production originally broadcast in the US as *Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs* and in Japan as *Sei Juushi Bismarck*.

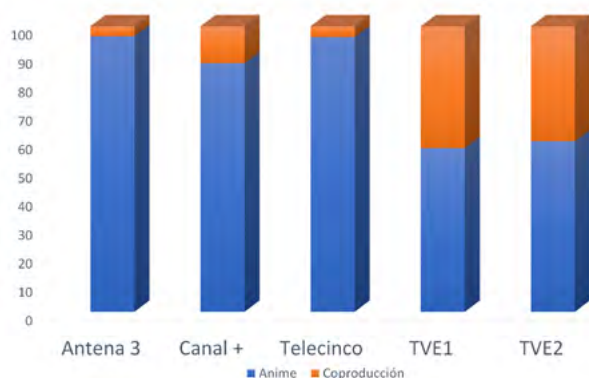
For research purposes, the decision to eliminate these co-productions¹ from the global total resulted in a 3.47% reduction in entries for Antena 3, 3.80% for Telecinco, 12.95% for Canal +, 42.66% for TVE1 and 40.26% for TVE2. These figures reveal the first difference identified between private and public television programming: co-productions were much more common on the public networks, although the difference in the number of broadcasts is much smaller than the different percentages may suggest: 529 more co-production episodes were broadcast on the

two public networks than on the three private networks combined.

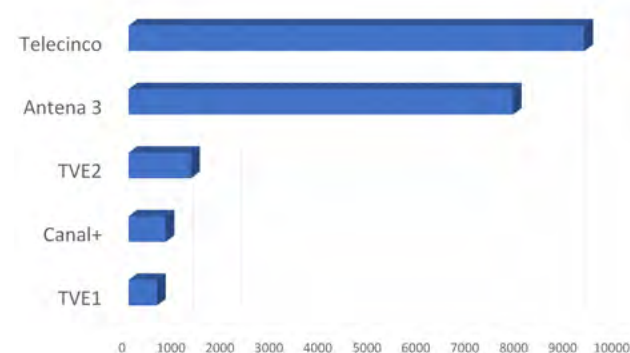
It was not until March, with the launch of Telecinco, that the first anime appeared on national television. Starting its broadcasts on Friday 3 March with an inaugural gala special, that same weekend its schedule would include *Story of the Alps: My Annette* (Alps monogatari watashi no Annette, K. Kusuba, Fuji TV: 1983; Spanish title: *Las montañas de Ana*), and *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (Grimm Meisaku Gekijou, H. Saito, N. Fujimoto, Y. Yamamoto, TV Asahi: 1987-1988; Spanish title: *Soñar con los ojos abiertos*). And while anime programming on Telecinco would be daily, it would not be until April that an entirely Japanese animation production would appear on any other networks. However, from that first weekend in March, at least one anime series would be broadcast every day throughout the rest of the decade, with the sole exception of Saturday, 4 October 1997, when the television schedules were altered for the broadcast of Princess Cristina’s wedding.

The early appearance of anime on Telecinco can be explained the fact that it was “created following the model of Italy’s Canale 5, owned by Silvio Berlusconi” (Cascajosa and Zahedi, 2016: 61), which exported much of the content that had already been broadcast in Italy, including anime.

Percentage of co-productions per network in relation to total anime series



Anime broadcasts by television channel



The early appearance of anime on Telecinco, together with its availability and its adoption of the Italian television model, resulted in it becoming the network with the most Japanese animation content in its programming in the 1990s. With a total of 9,309 broadcasts, Telecinco positioned itself as the leader in this type of content, followed by Antena 3 with 7,851, TVE2 with 1,276, Canal + with 759 and TVE1 with 582.

On 5 March 1990, the first Monday in Telecinco's programming history, the network—with Miguel Durán as president and Valerio Lazarov (previously responsible for Canale 5) as general director—took a decision that has itself entered the annals of Spanish TV programming history: it scheduled *Captain Tsubasa* (Y. Takahashi, TV Tokyo: 1983-1986; Spanish title: *Campeones*) in the same time slot as TVE1's flagship news program

TELECINCO POSITIONED ITSELF AS THE LEADER IN THIS TYPE OF CONTENT

Telediario. Although the anime series did not beat the TVE1 program in the ratings, it gained considerable public attention (Contreras and Palacio, 2003: 75). These broadcasts would continue to occupy the 8.30 p.m. time slot (which marked the beginning of prime time in those days) until September 1991. *Captain Tsubasa*, a *shōnen* focusing on the world of football, would be the first anime series to occupy this time slot—a time slot that would feature at least one anime series for the rest of the period, except for a stretch from July to mid-September 1990 and a few weeks in July 1991. Despite the show's success, "it aroused a lot of criticism among adults for the competitive spirit of its protagonists" (Mateos-Pérez and Paz Rebollo, 2018: 843). *Captain Tsubasa* would be followed by *Ganbare, Kickers!* (Ganbare, Kikkāzu!, N. Nagai, Nippon Television Network: 1986-1987; Spanish title: *Supergol*), a series with a similar theme that was presented as a

sequel (although totally independent, the translation of the Italian dubbing had characters in this series referring to characters from *Captain Tsubasa*). The repeat broadcast of these two series was followed by *Touch* (M. Adachi, Fuji TV: 1985-1987; Spanish title: *Bateadores*) and *Attacker You!* (S. Koizumi, TBS: 1984-1985; Spanish title: *Dos fuera de serie*), dealing with the world of baseball and volleyball, respectively. All these series have sport as a common denominator, and most of the broadcasts, between 5 March 1990 and 2 July 1991, were of the series whose main theme is soccer. They also belong to the *shōnen* genre, targeting a male adolescent audience, with the exception of *Attacker You!*, a *shōjo* series which only occupied this time slot between 26 August and 13 September 1991.

On the other private networks there was an attempt to cover this time slot on Sundays between 9 September and 11 November 1990 on Antena 3 with *Ashita no Joe* (Ashita no Jō, I. Kajiwara, Fuji TV: 1970-1971; Spanish title: *El campeón*), dealing with the world of boxing, and from 1 February to 5 April 1995 at 8:05 p.m. on Canal + with *Maple Town* (Maple Town Monogatari, C. Asakura, TV Asahi: 1986-1987; Spanish title: *La aldea del arce*); but these were occasional appearances without much significance.

While in 1990 anime programming was quite widely distributed across different time slots, with 20.59% of the broadcasts in the morning time block (before 1 p.m.), 26.06% between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., 36.75% between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. and 16.59% after 8 p.m., the morning soon became the preferred block for programming not only of Japanese animation but of all kinds of children's content, as shown by the average time-slot distribution of broadcasts for the decade (79.13%, 8.73%, 10.1% and 2.03%, respectively).

As for the subgenres of anime broadcast on national networks, the total data for the decade show that at no time was content targeting adult women (*josei*) programmed. The other subgenres are all represented, with *shōnen*, aimed at an au-

Percentage of broadcasts by year and demographic genre

	Kodomo	Shōnen	Shōjo	Seinen
1990	41,52	29,71	24,93	3,82
1991	39,94	33,84	22,97	3,22
1992	33,88	29,89	24,56	11,65
1993	36,61	49,97	13,15	0,25
1994	28,8	56,85	11,24	3,09
1995	29,54	31,66	24,87	13,92
1996	41,65	22,82	14,5	21,01
1997	44,49	47,65	5,96	1,89
1998	43,76	48,17	5,98	2,07
1999	36,32	50,65	13,01	0

dience between 12 and 20 years of age (García Pacheco and López Rodríguez, 2012: 126), being the favourite of programmers with a total of 7,977 broadcasts (40.33%). This is logical, as it is also the most popular anime subgenre in its home country, where its production far surpasses the rest (Drummond-Matthews, 2010: 62). *Kodomo* represented 37.19%, while *shōjo* and *seinen* accounted for 16.09% and 6.37%, respectively.

Although in some years the percentage of *kodomo* exceeded 40%, it was only in the middle of the decade that it was the subgenre with the most broadcasts, and at no time did it reach 50%.

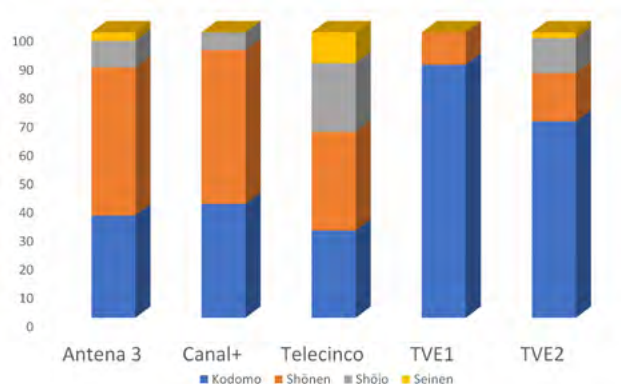
Of the subgenres broadcast, *seinen* is the one aimed at a more adult audience. With 1,261

broadcasts, this genre represented 6.37% of the total number of anime broadcasts between 1990 and 1999. *Lupin* (*Lupin Sansei*, M. Punch, Yomiuri TV, Nippon Television Network: 1971-1985) was the most popular series in this subgenre, with 798 broadcasts (representing 63.28% of all *seinen* broadcast in Spain in the period studied²). Between April 1991 and June 1998 it was broadcast in various time slots: in the morning (between 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.); the afternoon (between 2:30 and 3:15 p.m.); and in the evening (between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m.). It was used to replace both non-Japanese animated productions and *kodomo*, *shōnen* and *shōjo* series, constituting a clear example of the common conception that all animated series were merely children's products.

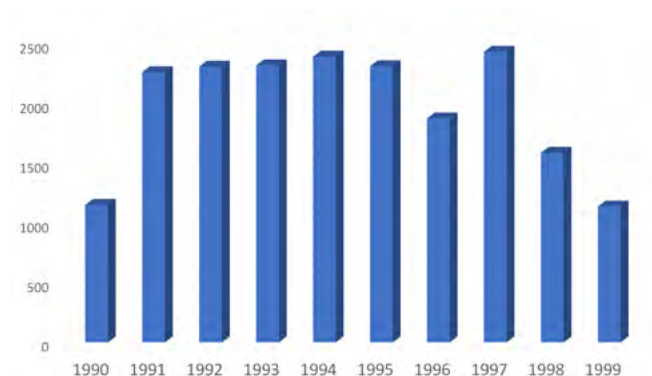
The number anime broadcasts per year practically doubled from 1990 to 1991 (from 1,151 to 2,263), despite the fact that the percentage of broadcasts of content aimed at children and young people did not experience such a pronounced increase (Mateos-Pérez and Paz Rebollo, 2018: 840). These numbers would remain stable until 1998, when they fell to 1,588 broadcasts, and 1999, when they fell to a lower figure than the one for 1990: 1,137 broadcasts.

This decrease is mainly due to a decrease in the number of anime series present on Telecinco's schedule. While it started with 732 broadcasts in 1990, the annual figure from 1991 to 1997

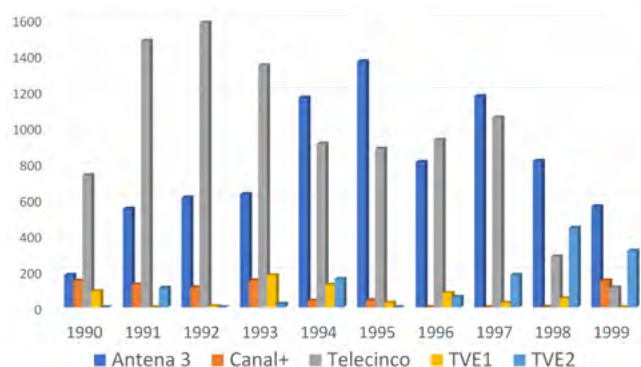
Percentage of broadcasts by genre and television network



Anime broadcasts per year



Anime broadcasts per network and per year



ranged between 909 and 1,582; however, in 1998 it fell to 282 and in 1999 it would fall to 110. This decrease was not due to a decision to eliminate anime from the network, but to a reduction in children's programming, with the cancellation of daily morning programmes aimed at children in parallel with the introduction of more news content on the network.

In terms of its reception, anime generated controversy among Spanish viewers, as reflected in the press of the time. In 1994, Elba Astorga wrote an article published in *El País* with the headline: "The Japanese export to the world the cartoons they forbid their own children to see." In this article, Astorga suggests that "Japanese children do not watch trashy cartoons. The kings of animation [...] are attentive to every detail of the products they consume at home. Violent, competitive and destructive series are for export only."

This concern for the content broadcast in time slots assigned to children's programming has of course been patent practically since television began, as is well documented in an article published in *ABC de Sevilla* in 1978, "Mazinger Z, a robot that is influencing your children" (Fernández, 1978). However, in the 1990s newspapers were filled with all kinds of references to the impact of Japanese animation on young people. In 1993, Expósito published an article in *ABC de Sevilla* about violence in children's programming, while in 1995 *El País* started a campaign against

Ranma ½ (Ranma Nibun no Ichi, R. Takahashi, Fuji TV: 1989-1992). This *shōnen*, which premiered on Antena 3 in March 1993, was the subject of two articles on the same page of *El País* on 4 January 1995. In the first, Albert (1995: 44), in addition to quoting Neil Postman, describes the complaint raised against *Ranma ½* by Spain's Association of Television Viewers and Radio Listeners (ATR), which decried it as an "anti-educational and anti-social" series. In the second, Pérez de Pablos (1995: 44) compiles the opinions of children between the ages of five and eleven about the series: "it is a little strange that some characters turn into girls"; "he [Ranma, the protagonist] spends his time spying on Akane when she's having a bath"; "Ranma is good because he hits people but he doesn't kill them"; "when Chen sees white knickers he gets strong and always wins." The following day, 5 January 1995, *El País* published an anonymous article titled "Ranma is no longer on the air" (1995: 47). A series that had been on Spanish TV for almost two years thus disappeared in January 1995 and would not reappear on a national network for the rest of the decade.

Although such concern, complaints and negative associations in response to anime were commonplace, there were also less alarmist views expressed in the press of the time and even humorous defences of the genre. One example of this is the article by Peirón (1995: 3) in *La Revista de La Vanguardia*, titled "Ringleader of the Dragon Ball organisation arrested", which reports that "the Dragon Ball terrorist group began operating in February 1990" and that «Son Goku is facing numerous charges of wanton corruption of children in broad daylight."

**THE MORNING SOON BECAME THE
PREFERRED BLOCK FOR PROGRAMMING
NOT ONLY OF JAPANESE ANIMATION BUT
OF ALL KINDS OF CHILDREN'S CONTENT**

This debate seems to arise from a conception of animation as a product strictly for children and from the programming of series intended for older audiences in children's time slots. And although this practice was common on all networks, the public television stations exhibited a greater awareness of this issue, programming a higher percentage of *kodomo*. On the other hand, in 1998 and 1999, TVE2's broadcasts of the *shōjo* series *Marmalade Boy* (W. Yoshizumi, TV Asahi: 1994-1995; Spanish title: *La familia crece*) was included in a programme aimed at youth rather than pre-teen viewers.

CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals a boom in anime broadcasts during the 1990s on Spain's national television networks, as well as a widespread conception of all Japanese animation as products for children's consumption.

With a wide disparity between networks in the number of broadcasts, Telecinco maintained its position as the biggest broadcaster of the genre in Spain until 1998, when its number of anime broadcasts fell considerably and it gave up first place to Antena 3. In 1999, TVE2 reached its highest annual figure ever and Canal + recovered ground. Thanks largely to Telecinco's relationship with the Italian television market, 1990 was the year in which anime series arrived in Spain to stay.

Several points are worth noting in relation to the subgenres into which anime can be divided. Firstly, *josei*, aimed at adult female audiences, made no appearance on Spanish national television networks. Of the remaining four subgenres, there was an unequal representation on the different networks. While *kodomo*, aimed at children, was the predominant subgenre on public television, the global total shows that *shōnen*, for male adolescents, had the biggest proportion of broadcasts, while *seinen* (young adult male) was

absent from Canal + and TVE1, being broadcast mostly on Telecinco.

Kodomo represented only 37.19% of anime programming in Spain in the period studied. Of the remaining 62.81%, 74.37% was made up of series aimed at male viewers (teenagers and adults), while only 25.63% consisted of series targeting (adolescent) females. Therefore, in addition the priority given to broadcasts not originally aimed at a child audience (under twelve years old), there was a clear orientation towards male viewers.

In the references to anime found in the Spanish press of the period, there is notable concern about the *shōnen* series, and particularly about issues related to violence and gender (there are complaints about the confusion generated by the male-female duality of the protagonist of *Ranma ½*, but not about the sexism present in *Lupin*, which was originally aimed at an older audience than *Ranma ½*). 80% of the references found reflect unfavourable opinions and, in the case of the aforementioned articles on *Ranma ½* published in *El País* in January 1995, it is noteworthy that after their publication the series never reappeared on any national network in the period analysed.

In the first years of the decade, there is some evidence of experimentation by the networks with their programming, as they tried to determine the most appropriate time slots for each type of content and took decisions related to scheduling and counter-scheduling.

Particularly noteworthy is Telecinco's decision to schedule an anime series at 8:30 p.m., in competition with TVE1's news programming, as well as the choice of the type of animation to program in this time slot. In a country with an obvious football obsession, the anime productions scheduled between March 1990 and July 1991 were *shōnen* series about football. With the exception of the summer school holidays (when, curiously, children's programming decreased, in contrast with the pattern in later years), young viewers were

THE PUBLIC TELEVISION STATIONS EXHIBITED A GREATER AWARENESS OF THIS ISSUE, PROGRAMMING A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF KODOMO

able to sit down in front of the television to follow the adventures of a bunch of football-playing cartoon characters. And later, between July and September 1991, they would again have the chance to watch stories that took sport as their theme unfold on their TV screens.

While such experimentation would typify these early years, most anime programming soon shifted to morning time slots, on both weekend and weekday programs for viewing at breakfast time before school. Although anime was still present on the children's variety programmes scheduled on the networks during the break time between morning and afternoon classes, and in the time slot right after school hours when children arrived home for their afternoon snack, it was the morning time block that contained the highest percentage of Japanese animated series. This scheduling trend in 1990s Spain was similar to the pattern in Japan until 2003, as reflected in the last report by the Association of Japanese Animation (AJA). This report shows a predominance of anime in the so-called daytime block targeting children and family audiences, with eight times as much anime programming in this time block than in the late night block for adult viewers in the year 2000, falling to three times as much in 2003, and continuing to drop until 2015, by which time the late night block had overtaken the daytime block (Masuda, Hikawa, *et al.*, 2019). In Spain, late night programming of anime would be dominated by Telecinco, apart from very few attempts by other private networks, while the public networks would never schedule Japanese animation in this time block.

In short, anime, which had made its first appearances on Spanish television in the late 1960s and had enjoyed great success nationally during the second half of the 1970s with *Heidi*, became a common and recognisable audiovisual product, not without controversy in many cases. Assimilated into Spanish audiovisual culture, its daily presence on Spanish television in the 1990s contributed to the construction of the imaginary of an era, which also explains the profusion of studies on anime carried out in recent years by Spanish researchers. ■

NOTES

- 1 The list is completed by *Alfred J. Kwak* (H. van Veen, VARA: 1989-1990), *Banner y Flappy* (Seton Dôbutsuki Risu no bannâ, F. Kurokawa, TV Asahi: 1979), *Dogtarian and the Three Muskehounds* (Wanwan Sanjushi, C. Biern Boyd, TVE1: 1981-1982; Spanish title: *D'Artacán y los tres mosqueperros*), *Galaxy High* (C. Columbus, CBS: 1986), *Inspector Gadget* (B. Bianchi, A. Heyward, J. Chalopin, France 3: 1983-1986), *Around the World with Willy Fog* (La vuelta al mundo de Willy Fog, C. Biern Boyd, TVE1: 1983), *Mega Man* (Capcom, Syndication: 1994-1996), *Reporter Blues* (M. Pagot, G. Pagot, RAI 3: 1991-1996), *Sherlock Holmes* (Meitantei Hômuazu, M. Pagot, N. Pagot, H. Miyazaki, TV Asahi: 1984-1985) and *Vicky the Viking* (Chîsana baikingu Bikke, Nippon Animation, ZDF: 1974-1976; Spanish title: *Vickie, el vikingo*).
- 2 If we include *Emergency Departure Rescue Kids* (Kinkyuu Hasshin Saver Kids, M. Punch, TV Tokyo, 1991-1992; Spanish title: *Niños al rescate*), Monkey Punch's work represents 76.44% of all *seinen* broadcast in Spain.

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ANALYSIS OF ANIME PROGRAMMING IN GENERAL TELEVISION IN SPAIN (1990-1999)

Abstract

The nineties began with the expansion of the Spanish television scene through the incorporation of three new channels of private ownership (Antena 3, Telecinco and Canal +). In a context of uncertainty and changes in broadcast programming, *anime* became an economic product for the networks, producing a boom in their television broadcasts. The present investigation analyzes *anime* programming in Spain between 1990 and 1999, for which a database of TV broadcast programming of the decade has been prepared, consisting of a total of 21,834 records. Complemented by a hemerographic analysis, the research concludes that Telecinco (and its relationship with the Italian Canale 5) has great importance in the implementation of *anime* in Spanish networks, that all Japanese animation is considered a product of child consumption and that the morning schedule is the one that concentrates most anime broadcasts.

Key words

Anime; Reception studies; Television programming; Children's television programming; Spain; nineties.

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ANÁLISIS DE LA PROGRAMACIÓN DE ANIME EN LA TELEVISIÓN GENERALISTA EN ESPAÑA (1990-1999)

Resumen

La década de los noventa comenzó con la ampliación del panorama televisivo español mediante la incorporación de tres nuevos canales de titularidad privada (Antena 3, Telecinco y Canal +). En un contexto de incertidumbre y cambios en las parrillas televisivas, el *anime* se convirtió en un producto rentable para las cadenas, produciéndose un auge en sus emisiones. La presente investigación analiza la programación de *anime* en España entre 1990 y 1999, para lo que se ha elaborado una base de datos de las parrillas televisivas de la década que consta de un total de 21.834 registros. Complementada con un análisis hemerográfico, la investigación concluye que Telecinco (y su relación con el Canale 5 italiano) tiene una gran importancia en la implantación del anime en las cadenas españolas, que toda la animación nipona es considerada producto de consumo infantil y que la franja matutina es la que más emisiones de *anime* concentra.

Palabras clave

Anime; Estudios de recepción; Programación televisiva; Programación infantil; España; Años noventa.

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HALLYU (한류) IN SPAIN: VIEWERS, FANBASES AND NEW WAYS OF CONSUMING AUDIOVISUAL CONTENT

LUIS DELTELL ESCOLAR

CARLA FOLGAR ARIAS

IN THE DIGITAL SWARM: A NEW KIND OF CINEPHILIA

In 1990, Joseph Nye defined “soft power” as the new way for states to exert control and position themselves internationally. His study explained how this practically invisible power was filtered through culture, prestige, and audiovisual entertainment. In contrast with the old, unruly power of warfare, relations now would be established by means of this soft power rather than by military might (Nye, 1990). Thus, while the former USSR had striven to maintain a huge army, China and (especially) the United States had diversified their strategic efforts in order to disseminate their culture through success in sports, contributions to the arts and sciences, and film production. Twenty years after Nye formulated his theory, soft power is recognised as a highly effective weapon of control and influence between nations. Audiovisual entertainment is thus understood not merely as a

pastime, but also as a way that states can interact and assert their prestige.

It was precisely when the theory of soft power was first being developed, at the end of the twentieth century, that Korean television series began gaining popularity in China. Little by little, these audiovisual narratives began conquering the Asian giant, and it was Chinese journalists who were the first to give a name to all the Korean audiovisual and musical products invading their country: Hallyu (Yang, 2012: 105), written 한류, which translates roughly as “Korean Wave”. As noted by Kim (2015), Hallyu refers to a characteristic way of producing and consuming dramas, *doramas*, films and music made in South Korea.

Towards the end of the last century, Korean drama series began taking over television programming in China, and in other Asian countries as well. Although these series were widely disparaged as “women’s stories” or sentimental melodramas, they very soon became a clear example

of soft power (Nye and Kim, 2013) that found fans not only in China but also in Japan (Oh, 2009), throughout Southern Asia (Yang, 2012) and even in Latin America (Zarco, 2018). In less than two decades their impact had become global, and *Hallyu* had been consolidated as a new form of globalised audiovisual entertainment (Kim, 2015).

Although its expansion began at the end of the twentieth century, it was not until the development of social networks and the widespread use of the Internet that Hallyu reached every corner of the world (Kim, 2015), as online platforms facilitated the mass distribution of South Korean productions (Jang, 2012). Unlike other movements in film or television, Hallyu began as a vocation for a socially engaged audience, and more specifically for a creative audience, i.e., consumers who were eager to participate and generate new content (Deltell, 2014). These productions demanded a new kind of attitude from their audiences. Marinescu (2014) explains that Hallyu is not just a type of cinematic, television or musical production, but a way of understanding relations between an audiovisual product and its audience. Korean audiovisual content has established a form of communication between its film and music creators and their audiences. Fans of the Korean Wave contribute to its programming and to the reception of these productions in different parts of the world. Without referring directly to the Asian movement, Castells (2009) describes this new kind of viewer whose preferred viewing schedule is not “prime time” but “my time”; in other words, active viewers who consume content and share their personal experience on digital media.



Promotional poster for the successful drama *Descendants of the Sun*

Reports by KOCIS (Korean Culture and Information Service) clearly indicate that Korean music, or K-pop, represents the tip of the iceberg of Hallyu culture. K-pop has achieved its huge success thanks to the Internet and the thousands of followers of the movement who have shared and created forums for exchange, the so-called “fanbases” (KOCIS, 2011a, 2011b and 2015). These online fan forums became the best way of disseminating and expanding the reach of South Korean musical and audiovisual products. Thanks to the actively social audience willing to redistribute the message, South Korean products spread quickly in the most diverse contexts. The purpose of Hallyu, and of any soft power model, is to achieve worldwide recognition for these audiovisual productions and to blend their iconography in with the local culture. In this process, it is essential that each local audience view the Korean movement as something familiar or even as their own. To do this, as Kim and Ryoo (2008) point out, from the outset Hallyu has sought to construct a global referential universe.

The spread of Hallyu has been anything but random and, as numerous authors have suggested, the different South Korean governments over the years have supported this globalisation strate-

gy (Nye and Kim, 2013). Korean audiovisual products have opened up previously unimaginable avenues of communication between China, Korea and Japan (Oh, 2009). The musicians, actors and directors of the series and films in this movement have been effectively disseminating the culture of their country. As Lee Don-Yeon notes, K-pop solo artists now represent a recognisable international star system in most countries in Asia, the Americas and Europe (Lee and Nornes, 2015). The image of K-pop singers forms part of the personal imaginary of young people all over the planet, but this powerful audiovisual and musical representation has only been established thanks to the co-creation of spontaneous communities of followers who have adopted Hallyu modes of representation as their own. Thanks to these fans, Korean pop culture has been consolidated not only in Asia (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008), but all over the world (Kuwahara, 2014).

Hallyu's worldwide expansion would not have been possible without the contributions and cultural activism of its fanbases. As Dal Yong Jin and Kyong Yoon (2016) describe so well, foreign fans are engaging in an ongoing campaign to build a social mediascape in which Korean productions can be distributed and understood. In every country that receives Hallyu content, an active audience emerges that begins sharing news, comments and experiences online until the movement has positioned itself as a recognised and accepted fashion. This has happened in countries as diverse as China (Chen, 2017), Peru (Flores Yapuchura, 2013), Palestine and Israel (Otmazgin and Lyan, 2013), Bolivia (Rosas, 2015) and Switzerland (Hubinette, 2012). These fanbases are not just participatory audiences that share things online, as occurs in Spain with other audiovisual content (Quintas Froufe and González Neira, 2014; Claes, Deltell and Congosto, 2015), as these fans act almost like cultural ambassadors for Hallyu. This new type of viewer is identifiable for displaying a highly conscious form of activism.

The activism of Hallyu followers and their fanbases reflects a creative audience that is not satisfied with merely consuming audiovisual narratives, but participates by commenting, critiquing, praising and discussing them. This is the cinephilia of the twenty-first century, where the viewer is also a content creator. Just as the cinephilia of the French New Wave contributed to a reappraisal of Hollywood cinema in Europe (Baeque and Tesson, 2004), these fanbases are consolidating the Hallyu universe around the world. The new audiovisual media not only generate their own unique modes of distribution and exhibition, but also encourage a new kind of commitment in viewers.

Thus, in some cases, this content is distributed and exhibited almost exclusively via these new promotional channels (Jung and Shim, 2017), and it is the followers who, with their comments and actions, whip up excitement over South Korean audiovisual productions. Fanbases thus serve as the central pillar of this cultural activism that promotes and consolidates Hallyu in different countries (Jung, 2012). The Korean-German philosopher Byung-chul Han suggests that one of the new forms of contemporary interaction is what he calls the digital swarm, referring to collectives of individuals who come together online or via mobile apps (with social networks, blogs, apps or fanbases) to share a vision of reality. The loose community of Hallyu followers constitutes a clear example of this digital swarm model (Han, 2014).

As foreseen by Bauman (2010), these digital swarms or fluid groups have left the traditional models of human relations behind. The purpose now is not merely to consume musical and audiovisual products from South Korea, but to form part of this vast digital swarm constituted by Hallyu. Fanbases are a key part of the process, as their proselytism and capacity for content creation maintain the appeal of and interest in Korean entertainment. In countries where the fanbases begin to weaken, as has recently occurred in China, the influence of

Hallyu appears to have been challenged and rejected on ideological grounds (Chen, 2017).

The new Korean Wave has also begun its entry into Spain, although it is in a rather more embryonic stage than that found in many countries in Asia and the Americas. This study explores how this new consumption of audiovisual and musical products has developed, and especially how this network of new fans—this digital swarm—has been created. To this end, we have conducted a survey on 1,058 Spanish subjects who shared or followed any websites, Twitter accounts or fanbases in Spain on Hallyu-related topics. The objective of this study is to show not only how Korean audiovisual products are creating a market niche in Spain, but also (and especially) how their audience is evolving into a digital swarm, in which each viewer feels the need to create and disseminate content and to build a network of co-creators around audiovisual content from South Korea. This phenomenon reflects the birth of a new kind of cinephilia unique to the digital era.

Spain offers a number of interesting aspects for studying Hallyu and its influence on audiovisual consumers. The first of these is the fact that the young people of this European country are far removed from the tensions of Asian soft power and the rivalry between China, Japan and Korea. The second aspect is that as the Hallyu effect began much later in Spain (around the middle of the 2010s), its evolution and characteristics can be observed more clearly. And finally, as has already been explored in other studies, Spain has one of the most actively social and creative audiences (Claes and Deltell, 2015). All of this makes tracking and studying the influence of Hallyu on Spanish youth particularly interesting.

When Altman (1999) attempted to define what a film genre is, he noted that the attitude of the audience was key to understanding whether a particular group of films could be described as belonging to a given genre. The American theorist argued that Hollywood had managed to impose

its thematic universe on the world because any filmgoer on the planet could recognise the codes of its films and interpret them correctly. It is the audience that identifies and names the genre of a film. Hallyu is one of the few audiovisual and musical phenomena from outside the West that have managed to consolidate their own status as a genre; and it has also managed to win over a faithful, active audience all over the world.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the influence of South Korean audiovisual and music content in Spain. As noted above, Hallyu is a movement that constructs its own digital swarm, and its success is founded on a tightly woven web of local viewers and consumers who identify the universe of South Korean productions as their own. This virtual network is only possible thanks to social networks and fanbases. The web of communicative interactions that defines the digital era offers a new way of understanding audiences and their behaviour: each viewer is necessarily a creator of content and of opinions about the films and series they watch (Osteso, Claes and Deltell, 2014).

The fandom or fanbase phenomenon is characterised by its fluid construction. Although fans may occasionally interact as a group on websites or blogs, they more often use more flexible forums for exchange, like microblogging websites (Twitter) or social networks (mainly Facebook and Instagram). The swarm-like nature of fanbases make them difficult to pin down, as they are not fixed meeting spaces but forums accessed sporadically. In the case of Hallyu, these sporadic forums are the Spanish websites dedicated to the South Korean audiovisual movement, as well as events like concerts, Korean (and Japanese) art weeks, meet-ups and others.

For this research, a survey was conducted on Hallyu followers. This survey was offered openly via the Google Forms service. It was distributed

throughout Spain (including the Canary and Balearic Islands and the territories of Ceuta and Melilla) and was open to Spanish residents over the age of 14. No compensation or prizes were offered to survey participants and submissions were controlled by means of participant IP addresses and email addresses. The questionnaire was made available from the 8th to the 19th of May 2019. The distribution method was by spreading word of the survey on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. One specific source of distribution was the Spanish blog on Hallyu, La BA NA NA, and its associated Twitter account @bloglabanana.

The total sample was n=1,058. The confidence level of the survey is 97% and the respondents

were from all over Spain. As can be seen in Table 1, the respondents are quite evenly distributed around the country, as the percentage of surveys received from each region is roughly in proportion with its population except for the Autonomous Community of Madrid, which has a rather higher percentage of survey respondents than its percentage of Spain's total population. However, in the other autonomous communities and cities, the deviation is insignificant.

Ten in-depth interviews were also conducted on the people responsible for websites like the La BA NA NA blog and for Korean institutions in Spain like Centro Cultural Coreano de Madrid, the Spanish-based K-pop artist Hyemin (혜민), and anonymous followers of Korean music concerts. These interviews were qualitative in nature and sought to shed light on the experiences of the respondents with Korean music and audiovisual products.

In addition to the survey and interview information, data was obtained from the following online platforms:

- YouTube (views by users in Spain of the video clips and official videos of Korean groups; and views by users worldwide of video clips and official videos of Korean groups), to determine each group's positioning in Spain compared to its global audience in terms of views.
- VLive, a Korean platform for streaming Korean audiovisual content (number of fans of each group on this platform).
- Twitter and Facebook (Spanish-based followers of each group on these social networks).
- Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) statistics on Spain's total population, age and geographical distribution.

HYPOTHESIS

The main objective of our research was to demonstrate that the influence of Korean audiovisual and music content in Spain is generated by an

Geographical distribution of survey respondents across Spain

AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY	PERCENTAGE POPULATION	
	SURVEY	CSIC
ANDALUCÍA	14,8	17,99
CATALUÑA	14,6	16,08
COMUNIDAD DE MADRID	19,8	14,1
C. VALENCIANA	10	10,59
GALICIA	6,9	5,78
CASTILLA Y LEÓN	3,9	5,16
PAÍS VASCO	4,3	4,65
CANARIAS	5,7	4,51
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA	3,7	4,35
REGIÓN DE MURCIA	3,2	3,16
ARAGÓN	2,5	2,82
ISLAS BALEARES	1,8	2,52
EXTRAMADURA	2	2,28
PRINCIPADO DE ASTURIAS	2,8	2,19
NAVARRA	1,3	1,38
CANTABRIA	1,4	1,24
LA RIOJA	0,9	0,67
CEUTA	0,3	0,18
MELILLA	0,2	0,18

Table prepared by authors based on survey data.

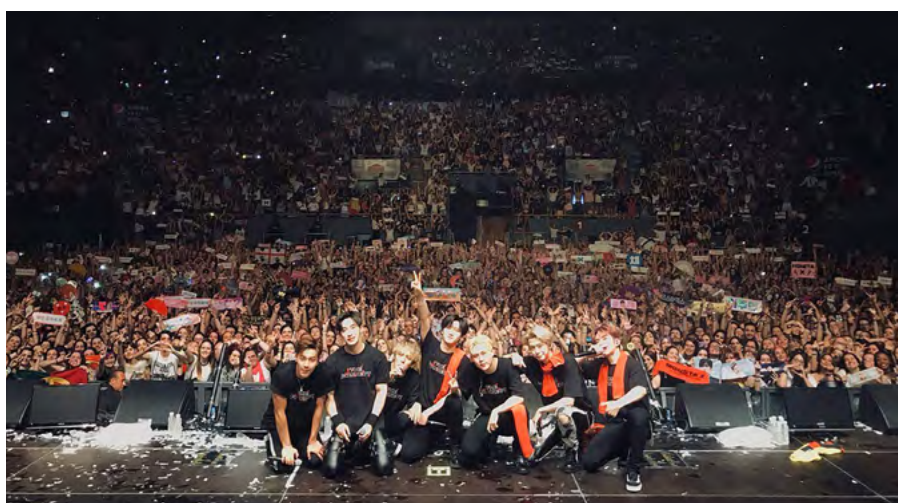
identifiable group of viewers who not only consume television and film content but also participate actively as a social and creative audience. These Spanish viewers, many of whom are grouped in fanbases, engage in a form of cultural activism to spread and expand the Hallyu movement. In contrast with traditional cinephilia, this is a new kind of viewer who is active and committed to the creation of a virtual network through which Hallyu content can be developed and disseminated.

DISCUSSION: A NEW KIND OF AUDIENCE

The results of the study offer one very clear and significant piece of information about this new kind of audience: 91% of respondents identified as women, compared to only 6% who identified as men and 3% who preferred not to state their gender. These figures clearly reveal one of the key features of the Hallyu movement. As has been observed previously in China and other countries, Korean audiovisual content initially attracts a female audience. A lot of South Korean entertainment is labelled with the same disparaging description given to the Hollywood genre of melodrama in the 1940s and 1950s: “women’s stories”. However, in all countries, after starting off with a predominantly female audience, the gender distribution of Hallyu consumers gradually balances out, although there is always a slightly higher percentage of female viewers.

While in China it was adult women who were the first to

become fans of Korean series and *doramas* (Kim, Lee and Min, 2014), in Spain, the interest in Korean audiovisual content has begun with younger females. Around three quarters (74%) of survey respondents were in the 14-21 age group, while respondents over the age of 30 represented only a tenth of the sample. These data obtained in the survey were confirmed in the in-depth interviews, where respondents spoke of predominantly female audiences at concerts and events related to Hallyu and K-pop. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the overwhelming majority



In the image (above), the group BLACKPINK (블랙핑크) in their Barcelona concert at Palau Sant Jordi. In the image (below), the group MONSTA X (몬스타엑스) in their Madrid concert at Palacio Vistalegre.

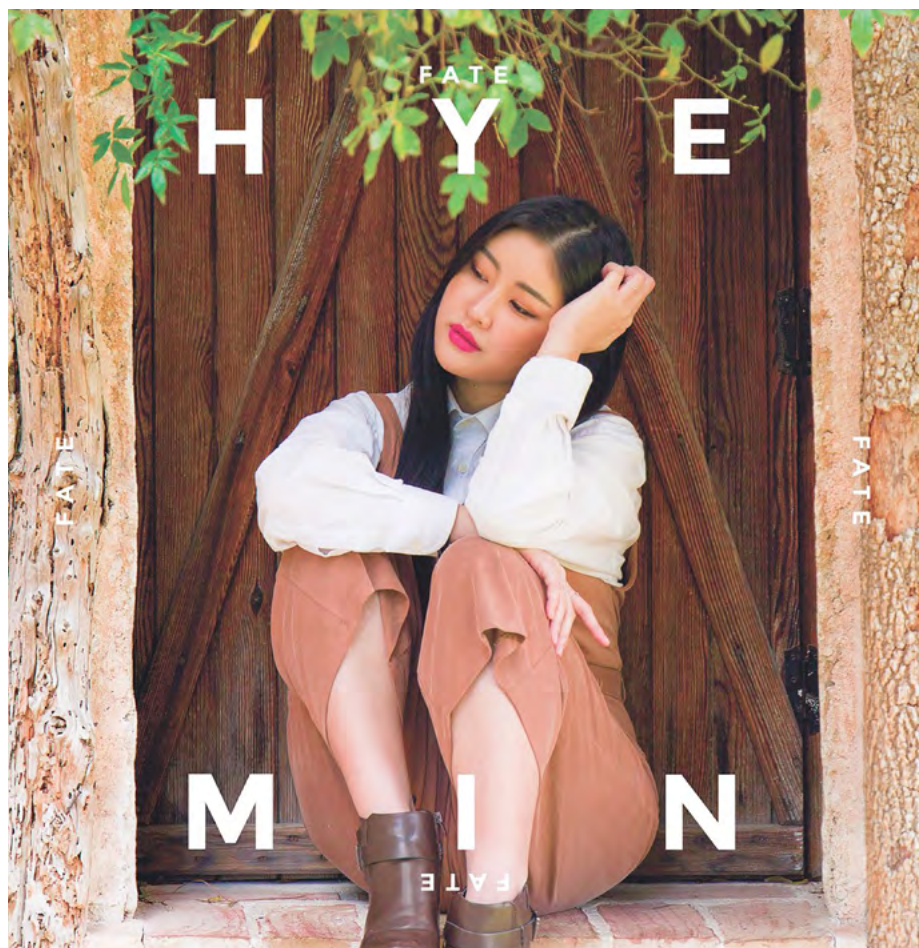
of Hallyu fans are women aged between 14 and 30. Moreover, nearly all respondents use social networks and the Internet daily as a means of social interaction.

Another significant piece of data on Spanish audiences is that Hallyu has won fans over mainly through K-pop rather than through films and television series. In the survey, 95% of respondents indicated that they followed South Korean music. It is therefore unsurprising that the preferred activity of Hallyu fans in Spain is attending concerts (68.2%), which have quadrupled in number in only one year, followed by manga or anime conventions (62.6%) or exhibitions (30%) where activities focusing on Korean music take place. Moreover, the fact that the South Korean artist Hyemin (혜민) has settled in Madrid to pursue her

music career is a clear sign that K-pop has begun to gain prominence in Spain.

Based on the survey results, it would seem that fanbases currently have less of a presence in Spain than they do in other countries. Only 20.4% of respondents belong or contribute actively to a Hallyu fanbase, blog or website. However, of this group, 44% spend more than one hour a day creating content on South Korean entertainment (audiovisual products, music or other digital creations). This group constitutes a community of fans who are genuinely motivated to help spread Hallyu content, who view their relationship with Korean audiovisual production not merely as a source of passive enjoyment but as an opportunity for cultural activism. For this reason, they write, comment, translate episodes of series or post photographs of their favourite South Korean actors.

Cover of *Fate*, debut single for the singer Hyemin (혜민) in Spain.



Interview respondents suggested that most fanbases develop content around events that will take place in Spain, such as future concerts, meet-ups, new episodes of series translated into Spanish or other activities. But they also describe events in other countries, and thus Spanish followers receive full daily information on their favourite singers or series. The data obtained suggest that fanbases serve a powerful function in reinterpreting the Korean audiovisual imaginary to help make it more understandable to Spanish audiences.

The survey offers an interesting piece of data related to understanding and appreciation of Hallyu: the comparison between Korean audiovisual content (which was given

Views of South Korean groups on YouTube in Spain

GROUP/SOLOIST	YOUTUBE SPAIN		
	2017 April	2018 April	2019 April
PSY	7 1 091 692	149 021 158	157 551 158
BTS	27 066 730	91 648 521	14 844 8521
EXO	10 843 276	24 448 280	31 213 163
BIGBANG	11 794 611	24 094 163	27 654 413
BLACKPINK	5 665 898	23 117 434	55 467 434
Girls' Generation	7 440 811	15 205 189	16 565 189
TWICE	3 767 218	14 460 543	25 049 543
GOT7	5 644 928	11 625 671	15 959 253
RED VELVET	3 041 931	10 049 564	15 263 564
SUPER JUNIOR	4 041 469	7 980 477	11 440 477
MONSTA X	2 752 230	6 911 831	10 652 411
GFRIEND	2 163 272	5 886 523	8 026 523
SHINee	3 118 742	6 791 064	8 221 064
SEVENTEEN	1 689 960	5 826 431	9 286 431

Prepared by authors based on YouTube data.

scores between 8 and 10 by 80% of respondents) and Spanish productions (which received ratings between 5 and 8 from 80% of respondents). These data are corroborated by the in-depth interview respondents, who highlighted the fact that Korean audiovisual content is viewed as more original and more appealing than Spanish content.

According to this study, one of the most common ways of consuming Korean audiovisual content is viewing it on YouTube, especially to check out music videos by K-pop groups. Table 2 shows the total number of views by users in Spain of South Korean music videos, with three control dates: April 2017, April 2018 and April 2019.

As can be observed, the annual growth has been huge, with a practically exponential upward trend. In addition to the YouTube statistics, it is important to consider those of VLive, a platform similar in use to YouTube but dedicated exclusively to Hallyu content, which offers live streaming of showcases, concerts, talks, awards ceremo-

nies, and even singers and actors themselves talking directly to camera, chatting with their fans.

This type of music is consumed almost exclusively online, as reflected in our findings; platforms like YouTube and VLive host all Hallyu-related audiovisual content, especially K-pop. But it is also important to note other platforms like Netflix, Viki, and other online sites that offer live streaming of Korean television networks. Thanks to these sources, consumers can easily browse and watch concerts, performances, interviews or any other type of entertainment content, most of which is subtitled in Spanish, thus removing the language barrier. The huge importance of the Internet (the distribution of this

content would be practically impossible without the web) has prompted researchers to coin the term "Hallyu 2.0" (Lee and Normes, 2015). In Spain, according to our study, all viewers use the Internet to access this content.

K-pop and South Korean audiovisual productions are consumed at a frantic pace; every day there is new viewing material being accessed by an international audience. High viewing figures are achieved not only by the major series and videos of older pop groups, known in their day as the Golden Era of K-pop (Kim, 2015), but also by so-called New Era bands, and even younger stars, or "rookies". The success of some of these rookie groups is reflected in Table 3.

One essential feature of Hallyu is its nature as a complete entertainment network that demands a huge level of dedication from its audience. As Sun Jung (2012) observes, viewers of Hallyu audiovisual content tend to spend hours watching these productions every day. In our survey we

Views and followers of South Korean “rookie” groups

New groups	Social Networks		Fanbase		YouTube	
	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Worldwide	Spain
STRAY KIDS	1 151 261	353 304	11 574	-	316 000 000	5 010 000
ATEEZ	255 224	41 024	9 597	-	-	-
TXT	2 000 926	398 420	9 597	44	130 000 000	1 440 000
G-I-DLE	323 953	158 029	4 353	-	385 000 000	3 520 000
LOONA	293 459	95 807	6 925	-	-	-
IZONE	571 813	230 170	1 105	-	235 000 000	941 000

Prepared by author with information from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

found that more than half of respondents (52.4%) spend more than two hours a day watching series, *doramas* or other Korean audiovisual products. The time invested in viewing K-pop music videos would also need to be added to these figures.

THE DIGITAL SWARM AS A NEW KIND OF VIEWER: FANBASES

One of the constants observed in every country where Hallyu content has found an audience is the confrontation between the local discourse (or the Hollywood audiovisual discourse, understood to be the dominant one) and that of South Korean

productions, which were and continue to be perceived as a minority resistance or counter-hegemonic force. As Michael Foucault (1977) famously stated, all power necessarily generates resistance. Just as has been observed in Peru, Japan and Indonesia, Hallyu followers in Spain identify this content as a new form of cultural entertainment that challenges the dominant audiovisual and musical discourse. For Hallyu to be accepted by the domestic audience of each country, its fanbases must engage in constant cultural activism through blogs, social network accounts and profiles and comments in chat rooms, to foster a resistance against the dominant audiovisual tastes and promote an alternative way of understanding the South Korean movement.

Manuel Castells (2009), in his exploration of the issue of power and resistance (*contrapoder*, or “counterpower”, is the term used by this Spanish author), suggests that technology is the effective weapon of choice for these dissident groups. Castells refers to this phenomenon, which allows individuals who do not control the media to generate a new discourse (in this case, a new taste for non-canonical audiovisual production), as mass self-communication, and it constitutes a powerful form of cultural activism.

In Spain, both the interview respondents and the fanbases observed in this study define them-

In the image, participants and winners of the 2018 K-Pop Competition in Madrid



selves as individuals or groups seeking to spread the Korean Wave. As was the case in other countries, traditional Spanish media (both digital and analogue) originally treated K-pop and Hallyu as a laughable spectacle of minor importance. The news offered on the phenomenon always focused on highlighting the marginal nature and compulsive behaviour of its followers; this reaction is evident in Pablo Gil's article on the phenomenon for the national newspaper *El Mundo* (Gil, 2012) or the news reports on the La Sexta TV network in 2012.

Hallyu's profile in Spain as a form of resistance or counterpower has been fostered by its fanbases, and through websites and information blogs. These forums have offered a different view of South Korean audiovisual content and have constructed alternative ways for Hallyu followers to consume that content. The main characteristic of these websites used to be that they provided a meeting space for individuals who did not iden-

tify with the dominant audiovisual language, or who wanted to discover and enjoy one that was new (and that for a long time had been disparaged). Today, the fanbases have become the reference points for information on K-pop in Spain. Each fanbase has specialised in a particular group of singers or actors and every day they post information, images and translated videos to boost the popularity of those artists in Spain.

Each fanbase has effectively become a database that can be used to promote concerts, audiovisual series and even events related to South Korea. In this way, the community of digital followers has been able to create a way of understanding Hallyu, and offers a new paradigm, in the sense described by Kuhn (1975), for the reception of audiovisual content. Hallyu audiences don't just consume South Korean products but also contribute to their dissemination and assimilation in their own countries, in a kind of cultural activism in support of the movement.

Increase in Spanish fanbase sizes on social networks

FANBASE	TWITTER			FACEBOOK		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Astro	2 490	5 404	10 241	-	-	-
B1A4	5 673	5 855		4 237	4 234	
B.A.P	5 883	6 734		11 207	11 268	
BTS	27 663	69 678	123 661	37 696	62 752	70 867
EXO	9 004	9 738	13 395	16 267	16 530	16 181
GOT7	3 581	9 517	14 627	3 035	1 656	2 362
Infinite	4 545	5 234	5 559	73 483	71 424	69 229
Monsta X	3 004	5 079	12 441	2 100	2 086	2 240
NCT	6 296	9 848	14 928	200	508	1 392
Nu'est	6 715	7 601	8 114	8 087	7 918	7 675
SHINee	6 307	6 724	6 516	8 236	8 621	8 424
Teen Top	8 173	8 143	7 606	3 257	3 133	3 019
VIXX	4 636	5 814	6 535	4 946	4 930	4 870

Prepared by authors based on Twitter and Facebook data.

Table 4 shows the thirteen most important fanbases in Spain and their evolution on the social network Facebook and the microblogging space Twitter.

As can be seen in the table, the growth of the fanbases on Twitter has been huge, while on Facebook the growth patterns are more irregular. In terms of the number of followers on Twitter, the growth of the most popular groups has been exponential, while there has been a slight drop in numbers for a few other groups; these latter cases are groups of the Golden Era who have either broken up or are no longer recording and performing. What these figures reveal is a true digital swarm that produces content and discussion related to Korean audiovisual and music content.

CONCLUSION: THE HALLYU WEB IN SPAIN

In the discussion of this research we have referred to Michel Foucault and his famous observation that where there is power, there is resistance. The consumption of Hallyu content by Spanish youth constitutes a clear case of resistance in the form of a digital swarm that challenges the dominant model of audiovisual representation led by Hollywood cinema. As is the case with most spaces of counterpower, the creation of this space has been possible thanks to the construction of a web of engagement and contact among new viewers who have found a form of entertainment of their own outside the dominant narrative and musical styles.

Our study has revealed that Spain's Hallyu audience is made up mostly of young women. This audience is spread evenly across the country and reflects a new paradigm for audiovisual consumption. Many of these viewers exhibit a strong predisposition for posting content and comments online to advocate for South Korean music and audiovisual content. In contrast with traditional audiences, which consume films or television series without sharing a particular

THE SPANISH HALLYU AUDIENCE IS MADE UP PREDOMINANTLY OF YOUNG WOMEN

response to them, these young Hallyu fans act daily to defend and promote their tastes and to build the network of their digital swarm. This is a radically new kind of cinephilia, with the consumption of videos and audiovisual creations dependent on YouTube and other digital platforms.

In Spain, nearly all Hallyu followers identify themselves as K-pop fans, while a smaller percentage also identify as fans of South Korean audiovisual content (series, *doramas* and films). All of them check online for news on K-pop and audiovisual productions on a daily basis, and a high percentage use fanbases and informational websites, which serve as forums of exchange for the construction of a local perspective on Hallyu.

As has been found in international studies in relation to other groups of foreign followers of South Korean content, Spanish fanbases clearly perform a mass self-communication function aimed at transforming South Korean discourse into a comprehensible narrative for the receiving culture. These fans thus become privileged viewers who contribute to the correct interpretation of the Hallyu movement in Spain. As other studies have suggested, Hallyu and K-pop constitute a significant model of soft power, as they foster an engagement with the language, culture and traditions of South Korea.

In short, this study has shown that a virtual web has been constructed in Spain, made up of a creative audience that consumes South Korean audiovisual content and contributes to its promotion. This community forms a digital swarm of new viewers who interpret their passion for South Korean audiovisual content not only as a form of entertainment, but above all as a form of cultural activism. ■

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HALLYU (한류) IN SPAIN, AUDIENCE, FANBASES AND NEW WAYS OF CONSUMING AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

Abstract

This article presents the results of a study of the influence of Hallyu, the new Korean Wave, in Spain. The behaviour of new viewers and the organization of their fanbases have been analyzed. Research data reveals that Spanish Hallyu followers are a creative audience. This group, mostly women and young people, not only consume Korean audio-visual media but they also carry out an important task of cultural activism in favour of Hallyu.

Key words

Hallyu; Fanbase; K-pop; Audience; Korean Cinema; TV Series; drama.

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HALLYU (한류) EN ESPAÑA: ESPECTADORES, FANBASES Y NUEVAS FORMAS DE CONSUMIR EL AUDIOVISUAL

Resumen

En este artículo se recogen los resultados de una investigación sobre la influencia del Hallyu, nueva ola coreana, en España. Se ha estudiado el comportamiento de los nuevos espectadores y cómo estos se organizan en fanbases. Los datos de la investigación revelan que los seguidores españoles del Hallyu configuran una audiencia creativa. Este público, mayoritariamente compuesto por mujeres y jóvenes, no solo consumen audiovisual coreano, sino que realizan una importante tarea de activismo cultural a favor del Hallyu.

Palabras clave

Hallyu; Fanbase; K-pop; Audiencia; Cine coreano; Serie; *Dorama*.

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SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN: GRANADA AS A LUDIC WORLD IN THE SERIES *MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA*

JUAN RUBIO DE OLAZABAL

INTRODUCTION¹

The increasing prevalence of studies about Asian pop culture (Kim, 2013) is a reflection of the exponential growth of the audiovisual industries of China, Japan and South Korea in the last decade. Online VOD (video on demand) platforms and digital networks have played a decisive role in the distribution of Asian audiovisual production to the rest of the world (Lobato, 2018). This is especially true in the case of South Korea. “Korean dramas have become, within just a decade, one of the types of broadcasting content most in demand in many Asian countries” (Jeon, 2005). Although this cultural and industrial phenomenon, known as the Korean Wave (Ju, 2014: 47), encompasses a wide range of content, from K-pop (music) to literature (Chōng, 2012), television series are a highly representative element of the phenomenon.

In the case of Spain, the impact of Asian audiovisual content is also evident in the prolifer-

ation of productions filmed in our country (¿Por qué los asiáticos...?, 2019) and even stories set in the country. An example of this is the retro-futurist animation series *Sound of the Sky* (So-Ra-No-Wo-To, Hiroyuki Yoshino, TV Tokyo: 2010), with a setting in a town named Seize, inspired by the Spanish city of Cuenca, which has given rise to a fan tourism phenomenon in the city (Mendoza, 2015). Another is the more recent *Magi: The Ten-sho Boys' Embassy* (MAGI Tensho Keno Shonen Shisetsu, Hiromi Kusaka, Toshio Kamata, Amazon Prime Video: 2018-2019), about the first Japanese diplomatic mission to Spain, filmed in Valladolid, Puerto de Santa María and Salamanca (Estreno mundial..., 2019). In the case of *Sound of the Sky*, the connection to Spain operates on a creative level only, since the real Cuenca is not represented: “In Seize, things happen that never happen in Cuenca [...] but [...] they make reference to Spanish fiestas. The Tomatina, the *Guerra del Agua* and flamenco are some cultural elements that are de-

picted in the series”² (Mendoza, 2015). The series only took inspiration from the city: “the producer Syuko Yokoyama and part of the production team came to Castilla-La Mancha to take pictures and gather ideas to enrich the architecture of *Seize*” (Mendoza, 2015). As mentioned above, the similarity between the two cities—the fictional and the real—has resulted in a significant boom in Japanese tourism (Mendoza, 2015). On the other hand, *Magi: The Tensho Boys’ Embassy* found inspiration not only in Spanish aesthetics but in a real event related to Spain: the pioneering visit of four Japanese seminar-ians to the court of Phillip II (Amazon Prime estrena..., 2019). Thus, the Spanish connection is not merely

aesthetic but also related to production: the mini-series was filmed with a Spanish film crew and received institutional support from the Salamanca Film Commission and the Valladolid Film Office (Estreno mundial..., 2019). It is worth noting that in addition to its international distribution through Amazon Prime Video, *Magi: The Tensho Boys’ Embassy* also has a significant metanarrative element: its audiovisual production has required a recreation of the very cultural encounter it depicts. The industrial expansion of Asian audiovisual content is therefore fostering a cultural encounter between two worlds: Asian production and a Spanish cultural and geographical context.

This is also reflected in the South Korean series *Memories of the Alhambra* (Alhambra Goongjeonui Chooeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), about an audiovisual technology developer who discovers an augmented reality game in the city of Granada. Produced by the South Korean TV network for Netflix, “it was simultaneously released on the Netflix platform and on cable television in South Korea” (Fariñas and Fernández Larrechi, 2018). Thus, the distribution strategy of

Memories of the Alhambra can be considered international from its conception. Its Spanish setting was also part of the project from the very beginning: “The production [...] couldn’t be filmed in any other city because the screenwriter, Song Jae-Jung, was inspired by places in Granada like the Alhambra” (Vargas, 2018). In fact, the creator of the series wrote the first draft of the script while staying in a hostel in Granada (Vargas,

2018). While *Memories of the Alhambra* is the latest in an ongoing trend of Asian series set in a Spanish context, here the relationship with Spain is different from that of *Sound of the Sky* and *Magi*, as it is not limited to mere aesthetic inspiration (Granada is the model for

the fictional city), although it does not subordinate the action to a series of historical events either. Taking an approach between these two extremes, this South Korean melodrama with elements of suspense and echoes of the parallel universe subgenre *isekai* (“other world” in Japanese), which has enjoyed notable success in South Korea according to ratings data from Nielsen Korea and Talk Walker (Fariñas and Fernández Larrechi, 2018), does not explore a Spanish cultural context but rather plays on its exoticism as a specific narrative device.

The aesthetic and narrative use of the imaginary of a Spanish city in a South Korean audiovisual production offers an interesting case study.³ The intrinsically playful way the series appropriates Granada, its reinterpretation of a theme as markedly Spanish as the notion of “illusion”, and the different types of worlds underlying the story are the three basic ideas explored in this analysis. Additionally, building on studies by Miguel Sicart (2014) on the concept of the ludic and on Víctor Navarro Remesal’s (2019) notions of cinema and play, this article takes the idea of other possible

THE AESTHETIC AND NARRATIVE USE OF THE IMAGINARY OF A SPANISH CITY IN A SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION OFFERS AN INTERESTING CASE STUDY



Protagonists with the Alhambra in the background

worlds as a theoretical framework. These offer a fruitful methodology for exploring not only the ludic but especially fictional stories set in cyber-virtual environments. According to Lavocat (2019: 272-273), “[t]he notion of world is so central in cyberculture that some scholars suggest that terms like ‘world’ and ‘universe’, which in their opinion are beginning to be used metaphorically and abusively in literary theory, should be reserved for digital artifacts” (Caïra, 2011). The tradition of other possible worlds, beginning with the philosophy of Leibniz and consolidated in analytic philosophy and by authors such as Saul Kripke and Marie-Laure Ryan, among others (Planells, 2015: 9), presents the narrative as something spherical rather than linear. Specifically, this tradition studies the narrative beyond the strict confines of the story itself, the action in its most classical sense, to encompass those elements surrounding it and sustaining the structure within which it develops (Planells, 2015: 52). The notion of world, in addition to the virtual, is also closely linked to the ludic: “Play creates worlds, represents our world, and what’s more, can transform it directly. [...] Play

superimposes realities on top of others, mixing and contaminating them, contrasting rules and logics in a single space” (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 19). This explains the increasing number of studies on ludic-fictional worlds, referred to by Planells for the case of videogames (2015: 10), and that can be applied to cinema as Navarro Remesal does in the broadest sense (games in general) and, in this case, to television series. The ludic-logical perspective provides an understanding not only of the cultural encounter between two worlds

(Korea and Spain) that *Memories of the Alhambra* represents, but also of the encounter between the physical and the virtual. After all, it is “through play that we are in the world. Play is like a language—a way of being in the world, of making sense of it” (Sicart, 2014: 18).

LUDIC GRANADA: THE APPROPRIATION OF A WORLD

A clear example of the close link between urban imaginary and audiovisual narrative (Cubero, 2013) can be found in the connection between Granada and *Memories of the Alhambra* (Valle and Ruiz, 2010). The plot of the series is based on the idea of Granada as the setting for an augmented reality game inspired by the Reconquista: in every corner, laneway and public square, Nasrid warriors or Castilian soldiers appear, ready to fight; objects and weapons can be found, and perilous missions are undertaken. The story revolves around the transformation of the urban space into a stage for ludic possibilities, similar to the games developed by the company Niantic (2019).

But here, rather than using a mobile phone, players wear an optical device that allows them to interact with the characters and virtual objects in an extremely realistic way (in this sense the series is quasi-futuristic). Thus, a process unfolds that is highly characteristic of the ludic: "Play is appropriative, in that it takes over the context in which it exists and cannot be totally predetermined by such context" (Sicart, 2014: 11-12). In Episode 1 (#1x01: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the first time Yoo Jin-woo, the developer of the optical devices, travels to Spain in search of the mysterious creator of the game and interacts with augmented reality, he encounters a Nasrid soldier who emerges from a statue that has come to life. This illustrates the appropriative character of play: "play will always force us to contextualize the meaning of the things involved in playing. Play appropriates the objects it uses to come into existence" (Sicart, 2014: 14). Like a monumental theme park, the city becomes an open network which Sicart defines as "play", as opposed to a "game" (2014: 51), because *play* (the ludic) permits the player to appropriate the meaning and the dynamic of the activity while a *game* is presented as a closed, one-way system (Sicart, 2014: 51). Thus, the Granada *play space* emulates a chil-

dren's playground which deploys on the existing urban structure a series of ludic possibilities that "signal paths, activities, challenges, [...] in ways that the space suggests but does not determine. The dramatic flare of these playgrounds also indicates ways in which they could be appropriated" (Sicart, 2014: 52).

In parallel to this ludic appropriation as the basis for the series, *Memories of the Alhambra* appropriates visual aspects and cultural references universally associated with Spanish and particularly Andalusian folklore. Beyond a historical analysis of the depiction of Granada in the series (García, 2019), this appropriation of the city's imaginary can be traced throughout the series as a manifestation of the ludic character of the series itself. Jung Hee-joo, the sister of the game's inventor (who, it turns out, has disappeared), runs a hostel catering especially to Korean tourists, where she will provide lodging to Yoo Jin-woo, the developer of the optical devices for augmented reality who wants to buy the game. Hee-joo has integrated fully into Spanish society and thus becomes the vehicle for the cultural appropriation in the series: she is a skilled guitarist and a conservatory graduate (#1x02: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018);

she works as an apprentice in a guitar-maker's workshop (#1x02, #1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) and as a tourist guide at the Alhambra (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Additionally, an NPC (Non-Player Character) in the game inspired by her (and designed by her brother, obviously) wears a veil and plays the song by the composer Francisco Tárrega which gives the series its name (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

Yoo Jin-woo discovers the augmented reality game





Jung Hee-joo's Spanish guitar workshop

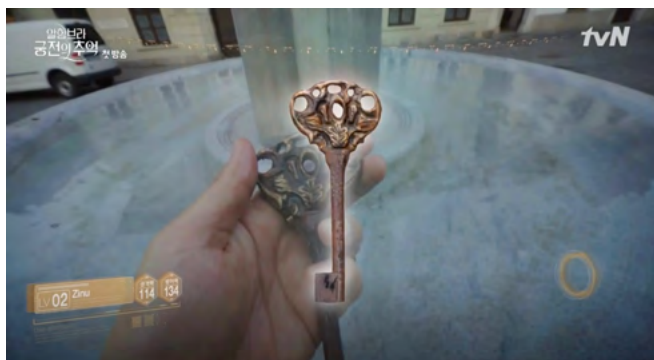
Here we see how cultural appropriation is placed at the service of the game itself, as it adopts the romantic forms of the Andalusian imaginary, attributing them to NPCs, ornamental characters that are interactive but not controlled by a real-life player. Other details reflecting the appropriation of the Granada and Spanish imaginary are the recurrent panoramic shots of the Alhambra at the beginning of the first episodes (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the lush wares of the flower seller (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the shop selling medieval antiques (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the café at the Alcazaba (an invented historical detail, actually filmed in the historic centre of Ljubljana, Slovenia) where characters eat *churros* with chocolate (#1x03, #1x10: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) and the recurring

Spanish guitar leitmotif with the street musician playing *Memories of the Alhambra* (#1x04: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

The most iconic case of cultural appropriation takes place at the end of the first season (only a

Jung Hee-joo's NPC with a veil





The key to the dungeon

single season has been released thus far) with the Alhambra's Gate of Justice, associated with the legend of the hand of Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, holding the keys to Paradise. On reaching level 100, the protagonist unlocks a key that is given to him by the NPC inspired by the game creator's sister, which will allow him to find the missing inventor: the key will free him from his virtual prison (he had become trapped in his own game) in the very dungeons of the Alhambra itself (#1x13: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Cultural appropriation again serves as the basis of the ludic, with the Nasrid palace being reinterpreted as an architectural puzzle at the service of the series. Granada ultimately turns into the model for a universal play-city when in Episode 7 (#1x07: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) the game is exported to Seoul while reproducing the same dynamics (Korean soldiers, King Sejong Square, etc).

"Play is appropriation, expression, and a personal affair. Together with computation, they bring us an expanded world with which we can play, that we can make ours as we delegate to and appropriate machines" (Sicart, 2014: 100). This is what we have seen here in the strategy of ludic-cultural appropriation of Granada in *Memories of the Alhambra*. It is a process extended by the idea of illusion, which the Korean series adopts as its own, placing it at the centre of its narrative.

THE ILLUSORY: APPROPRIATION OF SPANISH IDENTITY

"Many come to Granada to see the Alhambra. But I have come to see something else. Something more marvellous than the Alhambra. [...] I have come to see magic. One day Granada will be famous for being a magical city," affirms the protagonist upon his arrival in Spain (#1x01: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The impossible and the supernatural are present in the series from the very beginning; of course, augmented reality is based on a mechanism of illusion. And in the case of this cutting-edge game, optical and physical sensations (cold, heat, blows and cuts to the body, etc) seem exceptionally real. In other words, the illusion is taken to the maximum. Furthermore, the illusory character of the game harkens back to the very origins of play and forms a part of its essence since it relates to the player's willingness to suspend disbelief. "This attitude toward play has been mentioned by Huizinga, Caillois, and Sutton-Smith, but it is Suits (2005) who named it 'the lusory attitude'" (Sicart, 2014: note 30) in reference to the acceptance of the rules of the game, which, while not identical to the suspension of disbelief, is very closely related to it. Planells also speaks of illusion as "playful, shared pretending" (2015: 43), a fundamental condition for the game to be sustained.

By locating the series in a Spanish city, the screenwriter and creator of *Memories of the Alhambra*, Song Jae-Jeong, perhaps unwittingly chose the ideal cultural context for her story, since illusion can be considered a characteristically Spanish theme. Indeed, in his *Tales of the Alhambra* (Irving, 1999), Washington Irving noted the taste of the Spanish people for "fantasy", suggesting that they "have an Oriental passion for story-telling, and are fond of the marvellous" (1875: 77). "They will gather round the doors of their cottages in summer evenings," continues the American author, "or in the great cavernous chimney corners

of the ventas in the winter, and listen with insatiable delight to miraculous legends of saints [...]” (1875: 77). In his landmark text *Orientalism* (1978), the Orientalist Edward Said suggests that “Islam and Spanish culture cohabit rather than confront each other belligerently” (Said, 1978: 9-10)⁴. *Leyendas* (2013), by the Andalusian romantic writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, also testifies to the notable Spanish taste for the fantastic and supernatural. But it was the philosopher Julián Marías in his *Breve tratado de la ilusión* [Short Treatise on Illusion] (1990) who attributed a special, exclusive relationship between the Spanish language and the word “illusion” in its positive sense (1990: 3). This word, which originates from the Latin *illusio*, from *ludere* (to play), takes on a sense of deceit due to its association with demonic appearances in the Vulgate, a meaning that persists in all European languages (Marías, 1990: 5). However, in Spanish dictionaries since the 19th century (Marías, 1990: 9), in addition to this widespread pejorative meaning, the term *ilusión* has also acquired a positive connotation (1990: 10), as demonstrated by its common and colloquial use when referring to something exhilarating or that causes excitement. Marías identifies the turning point in the meaning of the word as *La vida es sueño* (Life is a Dream) by 17th century playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca: “For Calderón, the dream is a form of temporality that corresponds precisely to human life. And in this way, behind the supposed unreality, he reveals the reality of the dream as life itself” (1990: 20). This reflection is, of course, framed in the interpretation the philosopher gives of the play: it is not a play about the fraudulent nature of reality but about its oneiric or dreamlike forms. And in the Romanticism of the 19th century, following in the spirit of Calderón, would be poets such as Espronceda and Zorrilla, who reinforced the hopeful and optimistic sense

THE SCRIPTWRITER JAE-JEONG SONG CHOSE THE IDEAL CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR A STORY ABOUT ILLUSION

of the term (Marías, 1990: 11-16, 16-18), and thus its literary use would give rise to the current colloquial use of the word “*ilusión*” (Marías, 1990: 10). It is important to note how central this idea is to *Memories of the Alhambra* in order to appreciate how the series, by means of this appropriation, adopts the Spanish tradition of *ilusoria-ilusionante* (in both of its senses).

In addition to its use of augmented reality as an illusory device, in Episode 3 the series begins to introduce a doubt about the mental health of the protagonist and the limits of the game itself. In Granada, Yoo Jin-woo encounters his business rival and former friend and partner, Cha

Hyun Suk, who has also discovered the game and is searching for its creator in the hope of buying the licence. Their hatred is mutual, and in a duel that they thought was only virtual Jin-woo kills Hyun

Suk (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The following morning his corpse appears at the place of the duel and from then on an NPC (Non-Player Character, and therefore with no independent will/intelligence) resembling his deceased enemy will constantly appear and attempt to kill Jin-woo in revenge. This virtual ghost (so to speak) is always conjured up by the sound of the song “Memories of the Alhambra”, even when Jin-woo is not wearing the lenses necessary to access the game world; moreover, only Jin-woo can see him. The protagonist’s sanity is cast into doubt for the other characters and, along with his mission to find the game’s creator and deactivate the error that is killing the other players, he must also survive these continuous attacks. “It hurt for real. The knife really hurt. It’s not like the other NPCs” (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Madness now appears explicitly as one of the central themes of the series: “What if it’s the game that’s crazy, not me?” (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); “The

sound of the guitar. You hear it? [...] Am I the only one who hears it? I am going crazy" (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); "Some things can only be understood if you go crazy" (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). This last phrase foreshadows one of the final twists in mid-season (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), when his personal assistant creates a profile in the game and establishes an alliance: in alliance mode, he can see the apparitions of the vengeful NPC who is trying to kill his boss, and thus shares his madness, or rather, confirms his sanity and reveals that a fatal (and somehow supernatural or at least inexplicable) error is affecting the game. At this point, there are immediate parallels with *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Cervantes, 2015), the ultimate Spanish masterpiece dealing directly with the concept of illusion. If we consider the protagonist of *Memories of the Alhambra* as a Quixote figure and his secretary as Sancho, the Marías' argument takes on special relevance: "Sancho slips, so to speak, into the life of Don Quixote [...] takes on his point of view [...]. And while Sancho becomes more quixotic, Don Quixote [...] never loses contact with the so-called real world" (Marías, 1990: 71). The fragility of the human mind and the problematic consistency of reality (or objective reality) appear in the series, as they do in Cervantes' masterpiece, as themes associated with illusion, which may be understood as the delusions Don Quixote suffers but also as the chivalric ideal that Sancho comes to share, which in a way is reproduced in the series with the demonstration of Jun-woo's sanity when his assistant becomes his ally in the augmented reality game.

The characteristically Spanish ambiguity of the concept is thus appropriated by *Memories of the Alhambra*, and reproduced as well in other sub-plots, such as the love story between Jin-woo and Jung Hee-joo, the owner of Bonita Hostel and sister of the game's creator. Hee-joo naively believes the tech executive to be an honest man (unaware he is trying to cheat her by buying the

hostel, whose ownership is tied to the game licence, for much less than it will be worth when the game becomes a worldwide hit). This is not only an illusion but also demonstrates Hee-joo's capacity to see redeeming features in Jin-woo's personality (#1x09: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). When she refuses to abandon him despite his lies and his apparent insanity, Jin-woo is surprised and questions her motives (#1x09: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018):

- You still believe I'm crazy?
- Yes. But I believe you.
- Why do you trust me? I'm a fraud.
- Why is it so difficult for me to hate you?

Hee-joo is unable to give him up, not because she is blinded by his illusory Prince Charming façade, but because she remains in thrall to Jin-woo's real virtues. And this sustains her love for him. "Falling in love means the person I am in love with becomes my project. I don't project myself onto her but with her, as an ingredient of my project" (Marías, 1990: 84). The ludic premise of the series, the apparent insanity of the Don Quixotesque Jin-woo and Hee-joo's love reveal that illusion, so characteristic of the Spanish cultural context in which it is set, constitutes one of the central themes of *Memories of the Alhambra*. According to the different degrees of ludic illusion and the relationship with the play-world of Granada, as many as three distinct worlds can be discerned within the series.

SUPERIMPOSITION OF WORLDS AND DARK PLAY

Planells distinguishes two characteristics of possible worlds: structure and consistency (2015: 19): "possible worlds are constituted by means of two fundamental attributes: the completeness of their structure [...] and their consistent or coherent nature." On this basis, *Memories of the Alhambra* contains up to three different worlds, depending on

the degree to which the augmented reality game defines the characteristics of structure and consistency.

The first of these is the original and primary Granada, with the structure and consistency of a real old city, which could be associated with Hee-joo, not only because of her cultural integration but also because she is unaware of the existence of the game (at least for a large part of the season). The second is the augmented Granada, enriched, *ludified*, associated with the NPCs (especially the vengeful Cha Hyun Suk), who exist only within this virtual world. And the third is the frontier between these two worlds: the place of superimposition, the view through the player's lenses, fundamentally associated with the protagonist Jin-woo, inventor of this technology and always with one foot on either side. In the first world, the real Granada, the degree of illusion is zero; in the second, it is the virtual illusion that gives it consistency and the technology that gives it structure; and the third world maintains the illusory without losing the link to the structure of the real. Thus, by varying the characteristics of structure and consistency according to the degree of digital illusion, the world becomes a question of perspective. And not only of perspective, but of life itself. The character of Hee-joo in particular acts as an anchor to reality for Jin-woo, keeping him from falling completely into the ludic-fictional world of the augmented reality game. She does this fundamentally in one way: by helping him to survive. Initially this occurs unconsciously but decisively: after the first attack by the vengeful NPC of his deceased enemy (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), Jin-woo

is hospitalised and again receives a visit from his relentless pursuer. Weakened, the protagonist flees the hospital room but is caught. Just when the virtual double of his rival is about to kill him, Hee-joo, who has come to visit him, appears and, moved by his (apparent) state of paranoid dementia, crouches down next to him and embraces him (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The augmented reality game detects the obstacle that Hee-joo poses for the NCP and the duel is postponed, and thus Jin-woo is saved. She is still unaware of the existence of the game, but her intervention, motivated by compassion, is decisive in saving him from becoming a mindless NPC wandering around in the game, which is the fate of those who die while playing (like Jin-woo's rival). Hee-joo again acts as a saviour when, after days under sedation in order to avoid the NPC, Jin-woo awakens to see her at his bedside (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); and again when he is about to be killed in the dungeons of the Alhambra while trying to rescue the game creator, and she calls from Seoul to notify the security guards at the monument and sending them to rescue him (once again imposing an obstacle

Jung Hee-joo saves Yoo Jin-woo without realising



that postpones the duel and prevents his death) (#1x11: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

It should be noted that just as there is a proportional relation between each world and the degree of illusion, there is also one between each character who represents that world and the degree of morality. Hee-joo's innocence corresponds to the purely physical, primary Granada; the moral ambiguity of Jin-woo (who wants to find the game's creator, Hee-joo brother, but also tries to deceive her) corresponds to his position on the frontier between reality and the virtual world of the augmented Granada; and finally there is the vengeful NPC resembling Cha Hyun Suk, a computer creation devoid of conscience and, therefore, of morality.

This disassociation of realities or superimposition of different worlds has consequences that go beyond the ludic or even contradict it: the unintentional death of Cha Hyun Suk at the hands of Jin-woo, obviously, and of all the eliminated players in the augmented reality. This constitutes a perfect example of what is known as *dark play*. Navarro Remesal, citing films such as *Midnight Madness* (Michael Nankin, David Wechter, 1980) (2019: 23), *Jumanji* (Joe Johnston, 1995) (2019: 95) or *The Game* (David Fincher, 1997) (2019: 111), draws on a classical source to clarify the concept: "The shadowy underside [...] is dark play, well explained by the philosopher Bion of Borysthenes (cited by Plutarch): Although children throw stones at frogs in sport, the frogs don't die in sport but in earnest" (2019: 25-26). In other words that very clearly illustrate the uncertain frontier between the primary and the ludic worlds: "If we are forced to play then it's not a game, although for other players it may be" (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 26). Dark play occurs when the dynamic of the game itself becomes anti-ludic, taking control of the activity, denying the player's freedom (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 95) and betraying its original premise. This is precisely what happens in the series. For example, when Jin-woo locks himself

in a shower stall to ensure there is always an obstacle between him and the NPC seeking to kill him, it is impossible for the virtual double of Cha Hyun Suk to appear in such a small space. This image reflects the paradox presented by *Memories of the Alhambra*: the augmented reality game ends up shrinking the player's world. Here the series offers a dystopian vision of technology: the ludic world is composed of several superimposed worlds and the blurred boundaries that separate them can turn it into a dark world.

CONCLUSION

In this study we have seen the impact of the Granada imaginary in the aesthetics and narrative of a South Korean series: the ludic-cultural appropriation of the city, the thematic and narrative appropriation of illusion and the ludic world of Granada as a superimposition of worlds potentially leading to a *dark world*. In general terms, it could be affirmed that *Memories of the Alhambra* itself constitutes a ludic act of appropriation and reinterpretation of a space with the objective of transforming it into the vehicle of meaning for a number of themes. An encounter or dialogue between two cultures as play.

Among other themes, and for consideration for future studies, is the problematic relationship between time and corporeality in digital worlds and particularly in virtual ludic worlds. This same series offers sufficient material for a hypothetical research project into repetition as a temporal structure characteristic of videogames applied to television series: the plot of *Memories of the Alhambra* could be summarised (in an extremely reductionist way) as an attempt by a virtual entity such as an NPC to end the life of a real player. As Navarro Remesal explains, in *cinema-ludens* (and, by extension, *series-ludens*) "we are presented with a time based on repetition, on turning back. Videogame time. Tarkovsky said that while cinema is the sculpting of time, the videogame is moulding

MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA CONSTITUTES A LUDIC ACT OF APPROPRIATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF A SPACE

it over and over again like clay. The game does not advance in a straight line but in loops" (2019: 187). The temporality of the player is also interesting in this sense: "My life takes place in the time between play. This is perhaps the reason I believe that play articulates time" (Sicart, 2014: 6).

The question of time is also associated with the question of death, a complex question if we consider the problem of corporeality in virtual worlds. "It is evidently the absence of body and of physical matter that explains this dissymmetry between the enlargement of the domain of the possible and the reduction of that of morality" (Lavocat, 2019: 288); *Memories of the Alhambra*, as can easily be deduced from this small study, also explores the ethical consequences of the disappearance (or dissolution) of the physical in digital game environments. McLuhan reflected on this same issue when he highlighted the way that the virtual would affect the notion of identity (Horrocks, 2004: 79-81). This is another question that could be considered for future studies.

In short, as explained by García-Noblejas, a thinker who has explored the question of possible worlds, these "are small worlds, miniature universes, prepared to cooperate in the configuration of personal identity, and in providing a landscape for the orientation of our decisions in our everyday world" (1996: 17). This is what I have attempted to show with this analysis of the ludic world of Granada in *Memories of the Alhambra* and what, in future studies, may lead to the development of a theory of the series-*ludens*, understood as a collection of ludic series, for their ludic content, theme, plot, or form of play, or for the way they encourage a playful attitude in the spectator (but

not taken as a sub-genre or new taxonomy). Indeed, *Memories of the Alhambra* may be taken as a paradigmatic example of the series-*ludens*. This theory would not (or not only) encompass the series/episodic videogame as already studied by Navarro Remesal (2017a; 2017b) but ludic-centred audiovisual series in general. ■

NOTES

- 1 This research was conducted within the framework of the Imagination and Possible Worlds Research Group of the Faculty of Communication Sciences at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria.
- 2 Translations from Spanish sources are by the translators of Universidad Francisco de Vitoria's Vice-rectorate for Research.
- 3 This article does not intend to address the narrative solvency of the series. Although the plot development does occasionally exhibit a certain incoherence and the outcome practically contradicts the premise (#1x16: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), these questions are not within the purview of the present study. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight and explain the relevance of the series as a representative case of an Asian audiovisual production that ludic-logically appropriates the Spanish context.
- 4 In his introduction to the Spanish translation of *Orientalism* (Goytisolo, 2015: 11-13), Juan Goytisolo explains that "with implacable rigor, Said sets out the mechanisms for the fabrication of the Other which, since the Middle Ages, articulate the orientalist project" (2015: 12). In a certain way, it could be argued that the series *Memories of the Alhambra* constitutes a reverse process to that of orientalism, in that the appropriation of the Spanish imaginary on the part of an "oriental" country is a type of, so to speak, *Occidentalism* (of course, without the connotations and implications of political domination included in Said's analysis).

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SOUTH KOREAN AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN: GRANADA AS A LUDIC-WORLD IN THE SERIES *MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA*

Abstract

Asian audiovisual production has become so international that some of its content, such as television series, are set in foreign countries. *Memories of the Alhambra* (Alhambra Goongjeonui Choeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), for instance, deals with an alternative reality game set in the city of Granada. Drawing on Miguel Sicart's (2014) play studies, Victor Navarro Remesal's (2019) research on movies and games, and the theoretical framework of Antonio J. Planells' ludic-fictional worlds (2015), this paper analyses the aesthetic and narratological approach of a Korean television series to the imaginary of a Spanish city. The intrinsically ludic way in which the series appropriates Granada, its reinterpretation of a theme as markedly Spanish as illusion and the different kinds of underlying worlds are the three main aspects of this analysis.

Key words

Korea; audiovisual; Spain; Granada; game; world; series; Alhambra.

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EL AUDIOVISUAL SURCOREANO EN ESPAÑA: GRANADA COMO LUDO-MUNDO EN LA SERIE *RECUERDOS DE LA ALHAMBRA*

Resumen

La expansión de la producción audiovisual asiática ha alcanzado una dimensión internacional tan alta que ahora sus ficciones televisivas también se desarrollan en países extranjeros. Es el caso de la serie *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (Alhambra Goongjeonui Choeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), que trata de un juego de realidad aumentada en la ciudad de Granada. Apoyándonos en los estudios de Miguel Sicart (2014) sobre lo lúdico, en los de Victor Navarro Remesal (2019) sobre cine y juego y tomando como marco teórico las nociones ludo-ficcionales de Antonio J. Planells (2015), esta investigación analiza la aproximación estética y narrativa de una ficción audiovisual coreana al imaginario de una ciudad española. El modo intrínsecamente lúdico en que la serie se apropia del espacio granadino, su reinterpretación de un tema de marcado carácter hispánico como lo ilusorio y los diferentes tipos de mundo subyacentes al argumento son los tres aspectos fundamentales del análisis.

Palabras clave

Corea, audiovisual; España; Granada; juego; mundo; serie; Alhambra.

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BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CINEMA AND THE BLOCKBUSTER IN SOUTH KOREA: YEON SANG-HO'S FILMS AND THEIR RECEPTION IN SPAIN

SONIA DUEÑAS MOHEDAS

INTRODUCTION

"*Train to Busan* opens tomorrow in Spain after beating box office records in South Korea, seducing in Cannes, thrilling in Sitges and guaranteeing a Hollywood remake. And all thanks to a train full of undead" (Domínguez, 2017). In this way, Spanish film critics reflected the excitement and expectation generated by the release of *Train to Busan* (Busanhaeng, 2016), one of the most successful South Korean films of recent years. The most popular work of South Korean filmmaker Yeon Sang-ho was viewed as a vital lifeline that could reignite the pleasure produced by entertainment films. This is how the influential film critic Jordi Costa understood it in his review for the newspaper *El País*: "South Korea has saved independent cinema and, with it, the sacred flame of a truly unabashed Dionysian cinephilia" (Costa, 2017).

There are hardly any studies of the work of Yeon Sang-ho¹ other than narrative and aesthetic

analysis, notable among which is the contextualization and review of South Korean animated cinema by Gómez Gurpegui (2015). Nonetheless, Yeon has become one of the most important directors of South Korean animation, attracting considerable popular attention to the industry of a country that has always been relegated to working in the shadows of the American and Japanese productions on which both local and international audiences have been raised. Yeon is a paradigmatic case of a filmmaker whose career has always been associated with animated productions who has successfully made the leap into commercial cinema with a blockbuster like *Train to Busan*, which clearly has all the elements to become a cult film.

It is precisely this success in straddling both worlds of South Korea's film industry that makes the beginning of a professional career in a context as marginal as the 2D animation of *manhwa*² so remarkable. This genre, which has never received much attention locally, was relegated to providing

The Isle (Kim Ki-duk, 2000)



services to Western producers due to its low cost (Danta, 2017: 123) compared to the great international prominence enjoyed for decades by Japanese anime. Only with the success of *The King of Pigs* (Dae-gie-ui wang, 2011) was the genre able to emerge from the shadows and gain recognition for the first time as a genuine contribution to the country's culture. With its screening in Spain, this South Korean animated feature has sparked enough interest with audiences and critics in the country to warrant its recent release on DVD by Mediatres Estudio. If this interest continues, no doubt other titles from South Korea's vibrant catalogue of animated films will emerge in this format.

THE RECEPTION OF SOUTH KOREAN CINEMA IN SPAIN

South Korean cinema struggled to rise above the Asian competition in Spain during the 1990s. It entered the Spanish market via two main ave-

nues: theatrical runs, and (especially) film festivals. Notable among the latter was the San Sebastian Film Festival, which screened its first South Korean film, *Our Twisted Hero* (Urideurui ilgeureojin yeongung, Park Jong-won, 1992), in 1993; the Sitges Film Festival, which in 1998 premiered *The Quiet Family* (Choyonghan Kajok, Kim Jee-woon, 1998); and since 1999, the Barcelona Asian Film Festival. On the other hand, only two South Korean titles had theatrical runs during those years: *Eunuch* (Naeshi, Lee Doo-yong, 1986), a film with an historical dimension that was seen by only 254 people and earned a mere €692 when it was released in May 1990 (ICAA, 2019);³ and *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (Dharmaga tongjoguro kan kkadalgun, Bae Yong-kyun, 1991), which, despite winning two awards at the Locarno Film Festival, sold only 923 tickets, with box office takings of just €1,300 in August 1992. After these two, nine years would have to pass before another South Korean film would be released in

Spanish theatres, in 2001: *Lies* (Gojital, Jang Sun-woo, 1999), an erotic drama that offered a glimpse of the changes taking place in South Korean cinema, but still receiving minimal interest from Spanish audiences. However, the release of Kim Ki-duk's emblematic work, *The Isle* (Seom, 2000), described concisely by Rodríguez Marchante as "hard to forget once you see it" (Rodríguez Marchante, 2000: 81), indisputably earned greater media attention. This film, another example of the captivating genre of Asian extreme cinema, captured the attention of audiences once again for its exoticism and distinctness and opened up the festival circuit for the filmmaker. By this historic moment, New South Korean Cinema had already gained international recognition, especially thanks to this director. Taking advantage of its release, the Spanish press decried the absence from Spanish theatres of these new trends in Asian cinema in general. As Weinrichter put it, "Eastern cinema continues to reach us in a trickle despite the torrent that has been shaking all the major festivals for more than a decade" (Weinrichter, 2001: 12). Since then, Kim Ki-duk has become the filmmaker with the biggest number of productions released in Spain to date through his presence at the San Sebastian Film Festival, and the most successful South Korean film to date is his picture *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring* (Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul gyeoul geurigo bom, 2003), released in Spanish theatres in August 2004. Its box office earnings of €860,309.24 was outdone only by *The Host* (Gwoemul, Bong Joon-ho, 2006), which took €985,441.00 and earned Bong national recognition as one of South Korea's most important directors, receiving acclaim even from Spanish filmmakers.⁴

Since 2003, South Korean auteur films have lost ground to big blockbusters like *Memories of Murder* (Salinui chueok, Bong Joon-ho, 2003);

Oldboy (Oldeuboi, Park Chan-wook, 2003) or *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (Chinjeolhan geumjassi, Park Chan-wook, 2005), which became examples serving to demonstrate the enthusiastic reaction that South Korean cinema was receiving from the media, which, as in the case of *Oldboy* (Oldeuboi, 2003), "sums up in its innovative approach why Korean cinema is turning into an unstoppable force on all international markets" (Torreiro, 2005). The arrival of genre films from South Korea, most of them understood as auteur cinema, was well received by film critics attracted to *the Other*, to their exoticism, to that ever-present "kimono effect", although few were aware that these filmmakers were already internationally recognised as part of the generation of directors who in the late 1990s called themselves *Young Sang Sidae* (the Visual Generation) (Yecies and Shim, 2011: 4) and who would later end up being referred to as the "3-8-6 generation" (filmmakers who were around thirty years old, who attended university during the 1980s and who were born in the 1960s) (Robinson, 2005; Lee, 2016: 260). The approach to these filmmakers by Spanish critics was erroneously based precisely on this exoticism, on the novelty offered by the possibility of enjoying the production of a national film industry practically unknown until then. This led to an evaluation of these films from a point of view that

Oldboy (Park Chan-wook, 2003)



was distanced and superficial, and that involved constant comparisons with Western cinema.

Since 2010, there has been a larger number of South Korean feature films released in Spain, with a balance between commercial and auteur films. Joining the filmmakers mentioned above have been other established directors such as Hong Sang-soo, Lee Chang-dong, Ryoo Seung-wan, Im Sang-soo and Youn JK, along with new filmmakers like Shim Sung-bo, Lee Su-jin and July Jung. Thrillers and dramas are the most prominent genres, although since 2014, a wider variety can be observed, with the appearance of comedy, horror, action, fantasy and animation.

The first South Korean animated film to reach Spanish theatres during this sea-change was *RUN=DIM* (Reondim: Naeseoseu-ui Banran, Megan Han, 2002), a futuristic sci-fi adventure with an apocalyptic plot related to the protection of nature in an age of nuclear weapons and military advances. Its release in Spain in July 2004 was a risky venture by the distributor Compañía Premium de Vídeo y Tv, and it took in only €5,402.18. Ten years would have to pass before the arrival of another animated feature, this time in the context of the international South Korean film trend: *The Fake* (Saibi, Yeon Sang-ho, 2013). Mediatrix Estudio acquired the rights to this film and released it in May 2014, although it ultimately only took €1,737.58 at the box office. Four months later, the children's animated feature *Leafie, A Hen Into The Wild* (Madangeul Naon Amtak, Oh Seong-yoon, 2011) would be shown for the first time, followed a year later by *The Satellite Girl and Milk Cow* (Woori-byul Il-ho-wa Ul-ruk-so, Jang Hyung-yun, 2014), after it took the award for Best Animated Film at the Sitges Film Festival and was also featured at the 13th "Muestra Syfy" festival in Madrid. Despite this exposure and a style recognisable for

the clear influence of Studio Ghibli and the work of the popular Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki, both of which have a large number of followers,

this film took only €290 at the box office. The last South Korean animation shown in Spain was Yeon's *Seoul Station* (Seoulyeok, 2016) and the children's film *Almost Heroes 3D* (Bling, Lee Kyung-Ho and Lee Won-Jae, 2016) in February and April 2017, respectively. In contrast to

the earlier animated films and contrary to expectations, the latter achieved comparative success with box office earnings of €27,343.84.

YEON SANG-HO

The career of South Korean filmmaker Yeon Sang-ho sets him apart from other recognised auteurs due to his association with South Korea's independent market⁵ from its earliest days with the little-known short film *Megalomania of D* (1997). The date of 3 November 2011 saw the release of his first animated feature, *The King of Pigs* (2011), a drama that explores school bullying, class conflict, capitalism and authoritarianism in the 1980s through the memories of its protagonists. This film, distributed on the Indiestory Inc. label, was released in only 25 cinemas in South Korea, attracting a total audience of 19,918. With a budget of \$150,000, the film took only \$126,812 in box office receipts, but its greatest achievement was its recognition at the Busan Film Festival, where it won three awards, along with various nominations at international festivals such as Sydney, Edinburgh and Cannes, where it became the first South Korean animated feature to be selected for the program of the Directors' Fortnight. This international exposure led to a new project for the filmmaker: the French Canadian animated series *Redakai: Conquer the Kairu* (Redakai: Cucerest Kairu, Vincent Chalvon-Demersay and David Mi-



The King of Pigs (Yeon Sang-ho, 2011)
The Fake (Yeon Sang-ho, 2013)

chel, Canal J: 2011-2012), broadcast by Clan RTVE in Spain. Yeon directed 39 of the 52 episodes between 2011 and 2013, telling the story of a fifteen-year-old boy who sets out on a quest in search of an alien source of energy.

After completing this project, Yeon would release a new feature film, *The Fake*, released in 75 South Korean cinemas on 28 November 2013 through Contents Panda, a division of Next Entertainment World. In contrast with the humble releases of his previous films, *The Fake* made its world premiere in the Vanguard section of the Toronto International Film Festival on 7 September 2013. Despite a budget that was more than

double that of its predecessors (\$360,000), its domestic box office figures were not much better, earning \$147,632 with a total of 22,526 tickets sold. However, Yeon's international profile was consolidated with this new production, an animated thriller for adults that reveals the auteur's radical style in its portrayal of deception in a small rural town. The film would receive several awards at international niche festivals like Fantasporto, Sitges and Gijón, where it was clearly suited to the programming and, therefore, to the tastes of the audience.

Three years later, Yeon would release two more films only a month apart. *Train to Busan* was released on 20 July 2016 in 1,788 theatres, promoted as one of the big blockbusters of the year, while on 17 August, *Seoul Station* was distributed to 440 cinemas, a big release for an independent film; it would end up selling 147,031 tickets, taking in \$1,022,852 in revenue. The film, whose story begins

at Seoul's central railway station where a beggar shows the first signs of a strange virus, had been screened at various festivals but failed to pick up a single award. However, it found greater popularity after the success of the live-action *Train to Busan*, being promoted as an animated prequel to it during its first few days in theatres, although in narrative terms this was not strictly accurate since its story is set at a different time and features a large number of characters that do not appear in the other film. The main plot of *Train to Busan* focuses on the spread of the virus as the characters begin a train journey to Busan, in the south of the country. Both films present the figure of the zom-

Seoul Station (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016)



bie as a critique of South Korean society, whose members are portrayed as sheep with no will of their own, manipulated by the powerful as yet another consequence of capitalism. However, as on a narrative level they only share the same background and certain contextual elements, any real connection between the two is lost, undermining the idea that the second is really a prequel as such.

Train to Busan took in \$81,992,815 with 11,567,218 tickets sold in South Korea alone, making it the country's biggest film of the year. With the support of Contents Panda the filmmaker toured the international festival circuit, this time winning 32 awards in contests such as Sitges and Toronto After Dark. However, the film's most notable achievement was to break the filmmaker into various markets in the region: in Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Singapore it became the biggest blockbuster of the year and the most successful South Korean feature film ever in these

markets. "The South Korean film *Train to Busan* is as resilient as the zombies it portrays: it has pushed its way to the top of the local box office and has also become Singapore's highest grossing Korean film ever" (Yee, 2016).

The New South Korean Cinema enriched the country's traditional film genres like melodrama, while the thriller⁶ gained international prominence, coming to symbolise the creation of a "quality brand"⁷ that works as a lure for Western audiences. However, South Korean studios had not delved into the zombie horror genre until *Train to Busan*.⁸ Its market value has resulted in an increased visibility for plots of this kind, with the effects observable even now in new productions like *Rampant* (Chang-gwol, Kim Sung-hoon, 2018), also distributed by Contents Panda, which fared much more poorly. After its release on 25 October 2018, the film earned only \$11,681,278 at the local box office. On the other hand, the Netflix

series *Kingdom* (Kingdeom, Kim Seong-hoon, Netflix: 2019) generated greater excitement by winning over film critics and international audiences in just six episodes, as reflected in media reports on the series. “*Kingdom* (Netflix), the *Game of Thrones* with zombies that is sweeping the world” (Lorente, 2019) exemplifies the old habit among Spanish film critics of using comparisons to Western models to discuss a product of Eastern origin, which at the same time is exploited for its exotic appeal: “Netflix, zombies and Koreans: we need to see the series *Kingdom*” (Lamb, 2018). It should be noted that the series also caught the attention

certain film critics—and therefore certain audiences—who had not yet taken an interest in minority fiction productions that already had viewers in Spain. “*Kingdom*, the zombie series that has made us watch Asian fiction series” is a headline complemented by different clichés that expose an ignorance of Asian cinema: “In the Eastern audiovisual industry they don’t just make animation series, and the latest Netflix production from South Korea proves it” (Garrán, 2019).

The phenomenon generated by *Train to Busan* gave Yeon the chance to release his next feature film, *Psychokinesis* (Yeomryuk, Yeom-lyeok,

2018) on Netflix on 31 January 2018. Distancing himself from the zombie film, the director offered one of the few superhero films ever produced in his country. Indeed, South Korean studios continue to avoid this genre, viewed as its Achilles heel, as superhero films are the only Hollywood blockbusters capable of challenging local productions at the box office. There are examples of this every year, as was the case in 2018, when *Avengers: Infinity War* (Anthony and Joe Russo, 2018), *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (Peyton Reed, 2018) and *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018) were all among the top ten grossing films in South Korea.

Months later, Yeon would also announce a sequel to *Train to Busan* that would continue from where the story left off, when the virus that began to infect the population has already spread throughout the peninsula. However,



Train to Busan (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016)

Kingdom (Kim Seong-hoon, 2019)



as in *Seoul Station*, the director had already decided to work on a script with different characters. “Yeon said he would not call the new film *Train to Busan 2*. ‘It’s an extension of *Train to Busan*, after the virus has spread all over Korea, but the characters are not the same. It shares the same cosmovision and is a zombie action film that deals with the consequences on the peninsula of what happened in *Train to Busan*’ (Noh, 2018). The fact that it is a universal narrative easily adaptable to the expectations of Western audiences resulted in a bidding war that lasted for two years for the rights to the new film, involving various international studios including Universal, Paramount, Lionsgate, Screen Gems, Gaumont and New Line. Finally, it was announced in September 2018 (Kit, 2018) that, although Gaumont had initially insisted on exclusivity, it would collaborate with New Line to make a remake in English under the direction of Malaysian-born Australian filmmaker, producer and scriptwriter James Wan.

THE CIRCULATION AND RECEPTION OF YEON SANG-HO’S FILMS IN SPAIN

Most of Yeon Sang-ho’s filmography has been available to the Spanish public through its presence in cinemas, at film festivals and on VOD platfor-

ms. His first film, *The King of Pigs*, was only shown at the Sitges Film Festival, but did not have a theatrical run. The media hardly mentioned its screening at the event; film bloggers were the ones who paid it the most attention, with one remarking that “it looks like one of the most attractive offerings of the festival in the form of adult-oriented, violent animation” (Collazos, 2012). Spectators at this festival were also able to watch *The Fake*, featured as well at the Gijón Film Festival, where it won the award

for best film. *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* also had festival screenings. Finally, despite this trajectory, his feature film *Psychokinesis* (2018) was launched directly on the Netflix platform. Thanks to these screenings, *The Fake* was the first of his films to captivate Spanish critics and audiences. The film critic Javier Ocaña (2014) expressed one of the main reasons its positive reception in *El País*: “releases of exclusively adult-oriented animated films are so unusual in our cinemas that the arrival of the Korean thriller *The Fake*, a wild dramatic thriller, must be greeted with the joy of the unexpected.” The journalist Rubén Romero (2014) suggested that “*The Fake*, his second feature, confirms what was hinted at with *The King of Pigs*, that this is an auteur of consequence.” Nevertheless, after Mediatres Estudio took charge of its distribution *The Fake* was only viewed by 260 spectators, grossing a mere €1,737.58.

Train to Busan, Yeon’s next film to be shown in Spain, would receive considerable media attention, and enjoy a larger audience than the films mentioned above, with a total of 29,835 viewers. After its international release and its appearance at the Sitges Film Festival, the media reacted with excitement to the announcement of its arrival in Spanish theatres, even describing it as “an instant cult movie” (Martínez, 2017). Pablo G. Taboada

(2016) concludes his report on the Gijón Film Festival with a statement that sums up his experience for film buffs: “*Train to Busan* is a top quality production. It could be better, but as it is, there are things it can be forgiven for. More films like this one, please.” The excitement the film generated was conveyed on social networks like Twitter, where it became one of the big audience favourites for that year’s festival. A Contracorriente secured the distribution rights in Spain and it was released on 4 January 2017. National box office takings amounted to €179,390.39,⁹ and in 2018 an article in the newspaper *El Mundo* identified it not only as one of the best zombie films of all time, but also, in an apparent moment of euphoria, as “one of the best Korean films that have ever reached the West” (Luchini, 2018).

Sharing the program at Sitges with *Train to Busan* was its prequel, *Seoul Station*, which would enter Spanish theatres a month later, on 14 February 2017. A Contracorriente handled the distribution again, although with very different results: only 267 tickets sold and total takings of €1,771. Overshadowed by its highly publicised sequel, considerable emphasis was placed on its more brutal and mordant tone compared to the spectacular quality of the live-action film: “crude, savage and highly emotional in intent, it is an animated film that effectively confirms the filmmaker as one of the most important names in Asian cinema” (Taboada, 2016). Yeon Sang-ho became a recognised figure in the Spanish media after the release of his most important feature films, a fact that became especially clear with the release of *Seoul Station*: “the message in no way prevents the director, Yeon Sang-ho, from demonstrating that even when he tells a story using animation he is a master playing with the conventions of the genre and creating an atmosphere of oppressive tension” (Salvà, 2017). The critics thus stressed the high quality of his work both in animation and live-action. At the same time there was a surprised recognition that the quality of the animated films was on a par

with other commercial films received from South Korea. “*The King of Pigs* (2011) and *The Fake* (2013) demonstrated that the murkiness inherent in a certain kind of Korean live-action cinema was a frontier that could also be crossed by the expressive registers of animated film” (Costa, 2017).

Although most critics coincided in highlighting the source of these films as the first sign of quality,¹⁰ applied generally to hit films at the South Korean box office and on the international festival circuit, there are also questions more specific to each film, such as the visual spectacle of the depiction of violence employed by Yeon, the social critiques that underlie each main plot, or the filmmaker’s notable exploitation of the absence of animated films targeting adult audiences, which tends to cause surprise among critics more accustomed to Japanese animation. Similarly, the analysis of South Korean productions is notably more meticulous, as over the years Spanish film critics have become increasingly interested in exploring the narrative development, aesthetic treatment and symbolism underlying these films. However, the unnecessary, conformist tendencies to summarise premises, describe scenes or compare cultures have yet to be left behind.

FANDOM AND STAR SYSTEM

Yeon Sang-ho’s first live-action film, *Train to Busan*, follows the usual pattern of the South Korean blockbuster in its use of a locally and regionally recognisable star system. In South Korea, these types of productions usually (although not always) follow the Hollywood genre film model while offering elements of Korean identity, thus building a hybrid product that has come to be considered a *seal of quality* of the South Korean film industry. The South Korean blockbuster could therefore be defined as a high-budget commercial product with a universal narrative fusing elements of national identity (many of them related to the country’s historical memory), a recognisable star system and

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special effects that offer the viewer an audiovisual spectacle. These are films that are exhibited widely in domestic theatres as part of an elaborate marketing strategy and that generally turn into hits at the South Korean box office, thereby increasing their chances of being released internationally.

The director thus had some of the most popular faces in the country for his first live-action film. The actor Gong Yoo, who plays the main character, had risen to fame quickly through his role in the television series *Coffee Prince* (Keopi peurin-seu 1-hojeom, Lee Yoon-jung, MBC: 2007), which earned him a niche in the genre of romantic comedy. His co-star Ma Dong-seok has appeared in numerous films that have achieved local success and have been exported to the West. In Spain, the Sitges Film Festival has screened some of his most biggest films, such as *The Good, the Bad and the Weird* (Joheunnom nabbeunnom isanghannom, Kim Jee-woon, 2008), *Nameless Gangster* (Bumchoiwaui junjaeng, Yun Jong-bin, 2012), *New World* (Sins-egye, Park Hoon-jung, 2013), *Doomsday Book* (In-lyu myeol-mang bo-go-seo, Kim Jee-woon and Yim Pil-sung, 2012), *Azooma* (Gongjeongsahoe, Lee Ji-seung, 2012), *The Outlaws* (Beom-joi-do-si, Kang Yoon-seong, 2017), *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* (Singwa Hamkke, Kim Yong-hwa, 2017) and *Along with the Gods: The Last 49 Days* (Singwa hamkke: Ingwa yeon, Kim Yong-hwa, 2018). These films made Ma Dong-seok a familiar face both to the spectators at this festival and to film lovers in general, and thus he and Gong Yoo were two of the film's main drawcards.

Starring in *Train to Busan* has strongly marked the careers of both actors. For Ma Dong-seok, it has meant renewed interest from Hollywood. Af-

ter rejecting several projects a few years ago, the actor has now agreed to join the cast of *The Eternals* (Chloé Zhao, 2020), a new blockbuster set in the Marvel universe that is currently in the early stages of production (MacDonald, 2019). He will also star in the US remake of the South Korean film *The Gangster, the Cop, the Devil* (Akinjeon, Lee Won-tae, 2019), an action thriller that was featured at Cannes in 2019. Balboa Productions, Sylvester Stallone's company, has obtained the rights to shoot the film after completing *Rambo: Last Blood* (Adrian Grunberg, 2019) (Lee, 2019). This greater international visibility for Ma Dong-Seok has taken him away from television to focus on cinema, where he has increased his activity to between four and five films per year. His obvious success contrasts with that of Gong Yoo, who, although he has not been able to make a similar leap onto the international scene, has worked on two of South Korea's most popular projects of 2016: the television series *Goblin* (Dokkaebi, Lee Eung-bok, TVN: 2016-2017) and the blockbuster *The Age of Shadows* (Mil-jeong, Kim Jee-woon, 2016), which premiered in Spain on 27 January 2017 and achieved very modest box office earnings of €2,014.55.

Both *Train to Busan* and *Seoul Station* attracted the attention not only of film lovers who consider South Korean cinema to be a symbolic *quality brand*, but also of those with a special interest in the horror genre and the zombie movie, with *Train to Busan* turning into the latest "cinematic phenomenon from South Korea" (El cine coreano..., 2018) for audiences and the media in Spain. However, the Spanish fascination with South Korean cinema was not merely a reaction to these recent successes; rather, it is a phenomenon that has been growing since 2000 among audiences at the most prestigious film festivals in the country. This *quality brand* implies a higher level of social impact and prestige associated with identifying as a film lover set apart and even in opposition to the conventional discourse by virtue of their interest in film movements outside the mainstream.



Gong Yoo (left) and Ma Dong-seok (right) in *Train to Busan* (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016)

On the other hand, South Korea's animated productions do not appear to have produced a fandom as such, and certainly nothing comparable to what Japanese anime has enjoyed for decades. Although it is true that Yeon has brought greater visibility to the genre internationally, in Spain the director is better known for *Train to Busan*, his first live-action film. However, the attention that this film has attracted has led Spanish viewers to take more of an interest in his other work, with social networks such as Twitter being the medium chosen to express their opinions after watching his films, thereby effectively promoting his filmography by word of mouth. Curiously, viewing a film from South Korea tends to be expressed by followers as a radical experience, and as a result, if a South Korean production meets this expectation the viewer will usually seek out other titles to repeat the same sensations; conversely, if the experience of a South Korean film is not sufficiently radical, the viewer will dismiss South Korean cinema altogether.

CONCLUSIONS

Two decades after the recognition of New South Korean Cinema and its first generation of filmmakers, Spanish cinephiles¹¹ continue to express excitement over the latest films from South Korea. The Spanish box office welcomed Kim Ki-duk's arthouse cinema and Park Chan-wook's blockbuster amidst a tiny trickle of films that failed to reveal the full diversity of South Korean cinema. It was only in the last decade that Spain began to receive a second generation of filmmakers with a more transnational vision than their predecessors. Since then, film genres such as the thriller have underscored the quality of South Korean cinema, greater value has been accorded to auteur cinema, and Spanish audiences have had more access to traditionally independent genres.

However, South Korean animation remains a step behind, despite the fact that South Koreans have been involved in the production of highly popular animated films. The quest to cut costs

in the production of animated films has led some Western countries to resort to outsourcing and co-production of new projects in the genre; many studios have thus turned to South Korea, whose animation industry is more accessible than China's or Japan's. Examples of this include the children's films *The Outback* (Lee Kyung-ho, 2012), a co-production involving the US-based Animation Picture Company and the South Korean companies Digiart Productions and Lotte Entertainment; and *Jungle Shuffle* (Taedong Park and Mauricio de la Orta, 2014), again involving the Animation Picture Company, this time in collaboration with Mexico's Avikoo Studios and South Korea's WonderWorld Studios. Yet despite these achievements, only a few animated productions from South Korea have reached Spain, and in most cases they have been children's pictures with very modest box office takings.

The value of the reception of South Korean cinema in Spain does not lie in its massive scale, but in the activity it inspires, as consumers of South Korean cinema often communicate their experiences briefly on social networks,¹² producing a word-of-mouth effect that promotes new films to other spectators, who in turn repeat the same pattern. Although this is a slow process and tends to produce excessively polarised expectations after initial viewings, the loyalty it generates is undeniable, as it cultivates a cinephilia in constant search of far more new South Korean films than the tiny trickle actually released in Spanish theatres, an aspect that film critics have also expressed on occasions.

South Korean cinema has itself turned into a quality brand. Most film critics highlight the or-

igin of South Korean films as a positive quality that reinforces the cinephilia that enhances the film's appeal. However, although the development of this trend in recent years reflects the assimilation of films from countries that are culturally distant from the West, comparisons with Western products in assessments of the value of South Korean films are still commonplace. Similarly, critics continue to commit errors of generalising, extending the success or failure of a given product to all Asian films as if they all formed part of a single model or pattern. This is an ongoing problem that critics in the West must try to overcome when dealing with the great diversity that exists in world cinema.

NOTES

- 1 Compared to the limited number of international studies on Yeon Sang-ho, South Korean academics have dedicated numerous studies to his filmography in fields apart from film studies, such as fine arts and literature.
- 2 The data included in this article on the box office takings and audience numbers for South Korean films in Spain have been taken from the database of the Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA).
- 3 In recent years, thanks to the popularity that director Yeon Sang-ho has brought to South Korea's animation industry, there have been efforts to distance the South Korean graphic novel, or *manhwa*, from the historical influences exerted by Japanese manga in the interests of creating a distinctive brand. Authors such as Chie claim that *manhwa* can be considered "a manifestation of the diversity of manga" (Chie, 2014: 85).
- 4 Ten films directed by Kim Ki-duk have been released in Spain: *Bad Guy* (Nabbeun namja, 2001); *Address Unknown* (Suchwiin bulmyeong, 2001); *The Isle*; *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring*; *3-Iron* (Bin-jip, 2004); *Samaritan Girl* (Samaria, 2004); *The*

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- Bow* (Hwal, 2005); *Time* (Shigan, 2006); *Breath* (Soom, 2007); and *Dream* (Bi-mong, 2008).
- 5 In South Korea, the independent film industry has little weight at the local box office. Auteur cinema, animation and documentaries have traditionally been relegated to the national festival circuit (Elena, 2004), with very few exceptions.
 - 6 South Korean cinema proposes a reconfiguration of the genre through the kind of hybridisation characteristic of postmodern cinema. Corral (2015), in the book *Cine coreano contemporáneo (1990-2015): Entre lo excesivo y lo sublime*, explores the trend in the South Korean thriller towards a reconfiguration of the traditional models repeatedly interpreted by film genres through exclusive narrative elements that generally reflect aspects of national identity and the influences of film traditions of nearby countries, such as China, Japan or Hong Kong, giving rise to the revival of historical memory and the nostalgic gaze of the South Korean spectator.
 - 7 Leading online magazines like *CineAsia* have stressed the importance of the thriller as an identifying mark of South Korean cinema: “[thrillers] have been a real economic wake-up call for Korean distributors who have seen their international sales increase as a result of their participation at international festivals, and not just niche festivals [...]” (CineAsia, 2011). The South Korean thriller thus constitutes a transnational *quality brand* representative of this new wave in South Korean cinema which, since the appearance of *Shiri* (Swiri, Kang Je-gyu) in 1999, has given it an innovative edge in terms of its recognition at festivals and distribution compared to other film genres like melodrama, which already had a long history both in South Korean cinema and on the festival circuit.
 - 8 *Ignition* (Kim, 2017: 282), released in 1980, was South Korea’s first zombie film. However, zombie narratives were largely forgotten until the last decade, with the genre gaining prominence thanks to titles such as *The Neighbor Zombie* (Yieutjib jombie, Hong Young-guen, Jang Youn-jung, Oh Young-doo and Ryoo Hoon, 2010), *Doomsday Book* (In-lyu myeol-mang bo-go-seo, Kim Jee-woon and Yim Pil-sung, 2012), *Mad Sad Bad* (Sin-chon-jom-bi-ma-hwa, Kim Tae-Yong, Ryoo Seung-Wan and Han Ji-Seung, 2014) *Train to Busan, Seoul Station, Rampant* and the upcoming film *The Odd Family: Zombie on Sale* (Lee Min-jae, 2019).
 - 9 This figure falls far short of the viewing numbers for other South Korean films, such as *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring*, which was viewed by 172,640 spectators, making it the second biggest South Korean film in Spanish film theatre history. However, its results are above the average for South Korean cinema at the Spanish box office, with examples such as *The Handmaiden* (Ah-ga-ssi, Park Chan-wook, 2016) or *Memories of Murder* (Bong Joon-ho, 2003), with 26,820 and 30,916 viewers respectively.
 - 10 In *El País* on 26 May 2019, Boyero explained his disagreement with the position of most film critics with respect to South Korean cinema: “I remember seeing other offerings by Bong Joon-ho, like *The Host*, which was about a monster, and *Mother*, but in contrast with the love for these films professed by others in my profession, they did not make a lasting impression on me. I guess I’m odd.” (Boyero, 2019). However, this tendency to highlight the origin of these films is not unique to Spain. In the magazine *El Guardián* on 13 December 2012, the Argentine journalist and researcher Daniela Kozak quoted Marcelo Alderete, the programmer of the Mar de Plata Film Festival: “Korean cinema is a commercial cinema of quality. Maybe this is partly from our Western perspective, but their films are much more innovative than the American blockbusters, in everything from the acting to the cinematographic form. And the Americans realise that Korean directors have an edge, something that they themselves have lost” (Kozak, 2012).
 - 11 According to Pujol, cinephiles are characterised by their “obsession with the ritual of going to the cinema, the erudition that comes with reading and being familiar with film industry magazines, the knowledge shared only with other cinephiles, excluding the rest of the fans and turning into a clan” (Pujol, 2011: 99). However, Pujol adds, cinephiles possess a secrecy and an enigmatic quality as they share their hobby with a select few. With the intervention of social networks, this is no

longer the case, since cinephiles now regularly express their opinions online, either to attract other cinephiles or to increase their number of followers, which can turn them into intellectual guides. At the same time, today's Spanish cinephile no longer attaches so much importance to keeping up to date with what is showing in Spanish theatres, but rather pays greater attention to new film movements that enhance their erudition in an ever-expanding community of cinephiles.

- 12 This is demonstrated very clearly on the social network Twitter, where the film buffs behind influential accounts such as *Cinema Korea Blog* (@cinemakoreablog), *Oriental Paradiso* (@Orient_Paradiso) or *Cine Made in Asia* (@cinemadeinasia), among others, are constantly sharing their South Korean film viewing experiences. In this way, accounts like these engage with other film lovers, creating a community of regular consumers of such films.

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BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CINEMA AND BLOCKBUSTER IN SOUTH KOREA: YEON SANG-HO'S FILMS AND THEIR RECEPTION IN SPAIN

Abstract

Filmmaker Yeon Sang-ho is a paradigmatic case in contemporary South Korean cinema. His professional career, linked from the beginning to the independent animation industry, changed radically with the leap to commercial cinema thanks to his first live-action, *Train to Busan* (Busanhaeng, 2016). From that moment on, Yeon became one of South Korea's most famous directors, winning over critics and international audiences. In this respect, this article investigates how the films of Yeon Sang-ho have collaborated in the creation and strengthening of a *quality brand* implicit in South Korean cinema, which, in turn, is assimilated by both critics and Spanish cinephiles. For this reason, we can observe the evolution of the reception of South Korean cinema through the generalist and specialised press over the last three decades. It also analyses the global vision that it has emitted on its filmography to extract the general trends between critics and the Spanish public as part of the reception of South Korean cinema in Spain.

Key words

Yeon Sang-ho; South Korean cinema; Animation; Zombies; Reception; Spain; South Korea.

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ENTRE EL CINE INDEPENDIENTE Y EL BLOCKBUSTER EN COREA DEL SUR: LAS OBRAS DE YEON SANG-HO Y SU RECEPCIÓN EN ESPAÑA

Resumen

El cineasta Yeon Sang-Ho supone un caso paradigmático en el cine surcoreano contemporáneo. Su trayectoria profesional, ligada desde el inicio a la industria independiente a través de la animación, cambió radicalmente con el salto al cine comercial gracias a su primer *live-action*, *Tren a Busan* (Busanhaeng, 2016). Desde ese momento, Yeon se convirtió en uno de los directores más afamados de Corea del Sur, conquistando, a su vez, a la crítica y al público internacional. Al respecto, este artículo investiga cómo las obras de Yeon Sang-Ho han colaborado en la creación y afianzamiento de una *marca de calidad* implícita en el cine surcoreano, que, a su vez, es asimilada tanto por la crítica como por el cinéfilo español. Por ello, se pretende observar la evolución de la recepción del cine surcoreano a través de la prensa generalista y especializada a largo de estas tres últimas décadas. Asimismo, se analiza la visión global que ésta ha emitido sobre su filmografía para extraer las tendencias generales entre la crítica y el público español como parte de la recepción del cine surcoreano.

Palabras clave

Yeon Sang-Ho; Cine surcoreano; Animación; Zombis; Recepción; España; Corea del Sur.

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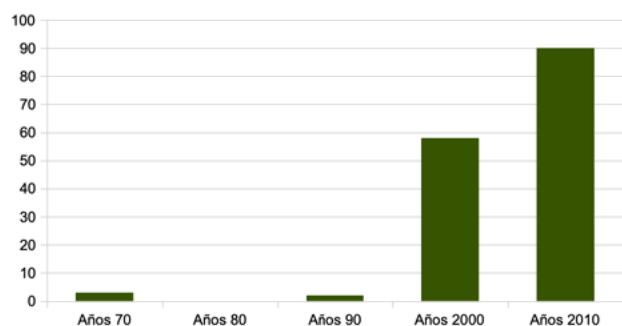
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MADE FOR SITGES? THE RECEPTION OF THE SOUTH KOREAN THRILLER IN SPAIN THROUGH A CASE STUDY OF THE SITGES FILM FESTIVAL

VIOLETA KOVACSICS
ALAN SALVADÓ

Prior to the year 2000, a total of five Korean films had been screened at the Sitges International Fantasy Film Festival of Catalonia. Since that year, counting up to the most recent edition of the festival in 2018, 148 Korean films have been featured.¹ The exponential growth revealed in these figures on its own constitutes evidence that the boom in New Korean Cinema (Kim, 2011: 24)—defined as that generation of young filmmakers who emerged from the crisis in the South Korean film

Number of South Korean films screened at the Sitges Festival by decade



industry of the 1990s and began at the end of that decade to make highly successful films that blended the unique qualities of Korean culture with a global visual culture—had a direct impact on the programming of the various sections of the festival. The pictures defined by theorists like Darcy Paquet (2009: 71) and festival programmers like Sitges deputy director Mike Hostench² as the manifesto-films of the movement, *Shiri* (Swiri, Kang Je-gyu, 1999) and *Joint Security Area* (Gong-dong gyeongbi guyeok JSA, Park Chan-wook, 2000), were released in commercial theatres in Spain and gave international visibility to a national film industry that had been overlooked in the West in general and at the Sitges Festival (among many other venues) in particular, as the figures cited above confirm.

A brief chronology reveals the transformation that took place in the context of the festival at the time these two films were released, and in the years immediately thereafter. In the last years

of the 1990s, two Korean films were featured in the Festival's Official Section: in 1998, *The Quiet Family* (Choyonghan kajok, Kim Jee-woon, 1998), and in 1999, *The Soul Guardians* (Toemarok, Park Kwang-chun, 1998). In the year 2001, Sitges hosted its first retrospective ever of a South Korean filmmaker: Kim Ki-duk, taking advantage of the success of *The Isle* (Seom, Kim Ki-duk, 2000) the year before. In 2003, *A Tale of Two Sisters* (Janghwa, Hongryeon, Kim Jee-woon, 2003) was featured in the festival's Official Section and *Memories of Murder* (Salinui chueok, Bong Joon-ho, 2003) in the Orient Express section. A year later, in 2004, Park Chan-wook won the Best Film award for *Old Boy* (Oldeuboi, Park Chan-wook, 2003) and received the honorary Màquina del Temps award five years later, in 2009. Since these early key dates, South Korean cinema at the Sitges Festival has progressed in a very short period of time from visibility to hypervisibility, as reflected by some indisputable figures: in its 2014 edition a total of 16 South Korean films were featured in different sections of the festival (although none of them were included in the Official Section), while in several other editions (2005, 2008, 2012 and 2016) anywhere between 3 and 5 South Korean films competed in the Official Section.

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, SOUTH KOREAN CINEMA AT THE SITGES FESTIVAL HAS PROGRESSED IN A VERY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME FROM VISIBILITY TO HYPERVISIBILITY

These figures clearly confirm the South Korean boom that concerns us here and also reflect the discovery and subsequent familiarisation in the West with a number of peripheral film industries (Elena, 1999: 13). At the turn of the new millennium, these new Asian cinema movements,

representing lesser known film industries such as those of Hong Kong, Taiwan or the Republic of Korea itself (Margirier & Gimenez, 2012: 36), burst onto the film festival circuit first, and then into commercial theatres in many Western countries, the DVD market and, more recently, Video on Demand (VOD) platforms. The impact of South Korean cinema on the Sitges Festival thus needs to be considered in the context of a broader development. In this sense, we should not be surprised that the Korean film boom coincided with the creation in 2001 of a new section in the Sitges Festival's program, Orient Express, featuring productions not only from the Republic of Korea but from the whole Asian continent, although it was established when New Korean Cinema in particular was taking the world by storm. Spanish critics acknowledged this transformation in their coverage of Sitges in the years immediately after so-called "Asian cinema" had made its presence felt at the festival. For example, in an article for the newspaper *La Vanguardia* in 2003, Marino Rodríguez suggested that "Eastern cinema will dominate the next Sitges Festival" (Rodríguez, 2003), while Quim Casas, writing for the film journal *Dirigido Por...* in 2005, argued that "Eastern cinema continues to gain ground at Sitges. *A Bittersweet Life* (Dalkomhan insaeng, Kim Jee-woon, 2005) is another concentrated exercise in violence and sadism in the *yakuza* world" (Casas, 2005: 7).

As noted above, New Korean Cinema was received at Sitges in the conceptual context of *Asian* and/or *Eastern* cinema. In other words, it appeared initially as part of a global transcultural phenomenon (Kuwahara, 2014: 27; Hye & Diffrient, 2015: 44) characteristic of the contemporary context and of post-modern creative processes. This is why, for example, most theoretical approaches to South Korean cinema in Spain have focused mainly, on the one hand, on the question of film genres (Cueto & Palacios, 2007; Cagiga, 2015), and on the other, on what could be described as a more auteurial dimension, based on the aesthetic

connections between some of the poetics of South Korean cinema and certain aesthetic patterns of modernity (Font, 2012: 231). However, to accept of this theory we must: a) disregard certain contexts and paratexts (Genette, 1987) in both the production and reception of the films; and b) ignore the imaginaries of each country (both South Korea and Spain), eliding nuances and encouraging a homogenisation of all imagery of Asian origin. This problem raises the first question for our study: beyond market dynamics and distribution based on geopolitical strategies (Acciari & Menarini, 2014: 12), are there any thematic and aesthetic patterns of New Korean Cinema which, leaving aside the global conceptualisation of “Asia”, might explain the presence and positive reception of Korean films at the Sitges Festival? Or to put it another way: can the idiosyncratic or paratextual characteristics of a film festival like Sitges contribute to the acceptance in Spain of films from a country like South Korea?

To answer these questions, we need to analyse South Korean imagery in order to reflect on the effect that the paratextual system of a film festival like Sitges may have had on the reception and interpretation of New Korean Cinema. There have been various studies conducted in different countries of the generic role that film festivals have played as “industry nodes” (Iordanova, 2015: 9) and of the impact they have had on cinema historiography (Di Chiara & Re, 2011: 131). In Spain, some scholars (Codó, 2008: 171) have studied how Spanish critics have received and interpreted the imagery of Korean cinema. However, there has not been any detailed analysis to date on the role that Spanish film festivals, exhibitions and public cultural institutions have played in promoting South Korean films with Spanish audiences as well as critics and the indus-

try. The analysis of these transcultural dynamics from a local perspective brings to light a number of nuances that expose the ways in which certain films have been received, as well as the sometimes unexpected convergences between different cultural traditions and imaginaries.

Taking the above considerations into account, the main objective of this article is to use the Sitges Festival as a case study to analyse one of the most important gateways to Spanish film screens for South Korean cinema.³ Our hypothesis is that the festival has certain identifying characteristics—structural and audience-based—that have enabled it to act as a vast container to position, catalogue and promote a series of South Korean films whose mark of identity has very often been their *unclassifiable* nature. Based on Gérard Genette’s notion of “paratext” (“the paratext is for us the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers” [Gen-

ette, 1987: 7]), we will attempt to explain the role that the Sitges Festival has played as a place of transition and transaction—between films and spectators—that has ultimately influenced the process of reception of New Korean Cinema. In

CAN THE IDIOSYNCRATIC OR PARATEXTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A FILM FESTIVAL LIKE SITGES CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACCEPTANCE IN SPAIN OF FILMS FROM A COUNTRY LIKE SOUTH KOREA?

this way, the paratextual system that frames the Sitges Festival’s cultural proposal to the film industry has facilitated the classification of certain films which, without their association with the festival, either would have been assimilated and homogenised into the concept of “Asian cinema” or would have had very limited commercial theatre runs. Since 2006 nearly 50% of the South Korean films that have been released commercially in Spain were screened previously at the festival,⁴ effectively confirming the idea posited by Thomas Elsaesser regarding festivals as gateways to distribution: “considered as a global network, the

festival circuit constitutes the exhibition dates of most independent films in the first-run venues of the world market, where they can gather the cultural capital and critical prowess necessary to subsequently enter the national or local exhibition markets on the strength of their accumulated festival successes" (Elsaesser, 2005: 87).

With the aim of focusing our argument as clearly as possible, we have decided to concentrate our analysis on the reception of the film genre that has been featured most prominently at the Sitges Festival since 2001: the South Korean thriller. To this end, we will first explore the evolution of the festival since the emergence of New Korean Cinema; then, taking as our corpus the most important South Korean thrillers that have been included in the festival's programming, we will identify and describe their key thematic and aesthetic elements; and finally, we will compare our findings with both the reception of the films by critics and the tropes that have served to consolidate the faithful community of fans identified by the Sitges Festival (Sitges, 2017: 12).

THE SITGES "PARATEXT" AS A STARTING POINT

A wide range of interesting studies have applied the theories of Gérard Genette on literary paratext to the realm of cinema. Some of these have become landmark works, such as Robert Stam's *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (1985), or Nicole Janin-Foucher's *Du générique au mot FIN: Le paratexte dans les œuvres de F. Truffaut et de J.-L. Godard* (1989). Other more recent studies have offered new analytical perspectives on films based on filmic (sub) products like movie trailers (Georg Stanitzek, 2005: 35; Hediger, 2006: 102) or DVD bonus features (Atkinson, 2014: 19) and the influence they can have on the final interpretation of the larger text. For our case study, we take Genette's concept to shed light on the identifying features of the Sit-

ges Festival that have determined how New Korean Cinema has been received. It is our contention, based both on interviews and on an analysis of the festival's film catalogues, that the paratextual system that determines the reception of the Korean thriller is founded on factors that fall under four different categories: programming, structure, aesthetics and themes.

To understand the first two categories—programming and structure—it is necessary to return again to 2001, the year when Ángel Sala took over as the festival's director. "When I presented the project I proposed two things above all: that Sitges was to be essentially a fantasy film festival, and that a significant part of it was to be dedicated to Asian cinema,"⁵ notes Sala. This intention to give a bigger presence to Asian films was made a reality with the aforementioned creation in 2001 of the Orient Express section, which would change its name over the years that followed (in some editions it was called Casa Àsia or Focus Àsia). Orient Express is one of the first examples of how New Korean Cinema would contribute to the modification of the programming structure of the Sitges Festival in the first decades of the twenty-first century. In the introduction to the new Orient Express section in the festival catalogue for that year, Sala remarks that one of the reasons for the creation of the section was "to present and enjoy new creators from Korea, with Kim Ki-duk leading the pack" (Sala, 2001). The South Korean cinema boom in the context of the festival would thus be marked by big names and by the notion of *auteurism*, an idea that ties in with the portrait that Darcy Paquet offers of the South Korean films made at the turn of the millennium, when he speaks of a new generation of directors, particularly Bong Joon-ho, Park Chan-wook, Kim Ki-duk and Kim Jee-woon (Heredero, 2014: 31).

There is one last factor that can explain these structural changes to the festival, as described by Sala himself. There was at that time a very interesting state of affairs in the marketplace, with a

number of Spanish distributors purchasing large quantities of Asian films. In the case of South Korea we can see how the financial renaissance of its film industry after the crisis of the 1990s, underpinned by the progressive internationalisation of the first Korean blockbusters (Paquet, 2009: 61), had an impact on the Spanish market, and more specifically on the Sitges Festival.

The Orient Express section as such disappeared in 2015, as it was turned into an award covering multiple sections. A year earlier, in 2014, coinciding with the last edition of Focus Àsia, a new section dedicated exclusively to the thriller was created, named Órbita. The thriller genre has always been prominent at the festival, but it never had a section of its own before and its presence in a fantasy film festival had always been controversial.⁶ South Korean cinema has had a privileged place in the new section (as many as fourteen films from the country have been exhibited in just four editions), which, of course, is dedicated to one of the predominant genres of New Korean Cinema (Cueto & Palacios, 2007: 173).

The above clearly shows, on the one hand, that the question of *auteurship* is one of the defining criteria for the presentation of South Korean films at the Sitges Festival. The transversal nature of the Orient Express in its original conception had the figure of the auteur as its unifying theme, allowing festival audiences to group together a set of poetics which, although many of them are conceived from the perspective of film genre (thriller, horror, fantasy), are still largely defined by their particular aesthetic features. However, the progressive transformations to the structure of the festival reflect the evolution of the audience's attitude towards these images; with the increased familiarity with and normalisation of Korean cinema—along with other Asian films—the decision was made to give a central role to the thriller. Thus, in little more than a decade, South Korean cinema went from being introduced to Sitges in the context of a more auteurial perspective to be-

ing viewed through a more specialised, genre-focused lens. In a festival dedicated to fantasy cinema, it was decided to launch the Órbita section to make room, as Sala himself suggests, “for films that would otherwise not have had a place at Sitges.” Moreover, of equal importance to the purpose of our analysis, the Festival's move towards embracing the thriller coincided with the rise of the contemporary Spanish thriller or, as it has been called in some studies, the Spanish quality thriller (Camporesi & Fernández, 2018: 198). In our view, this coincidence not only explains the familiarity with (and positive attitude towards) the thriller among Sitges audiences during this period, but also hints at some shared influences between South Korean and Spanish cinema, as will be discussed below.

THE TONE: VENGEANCE AND LITURGIES OF VIOLENCE

In his definition and exploration of the notion of “paratext”, Gerard Genette (1987) establishes two categories: “peritext” and “epitext”. The latter, which refers to texts included immediately before or after a work that are used by an author to talk about the main text, can serve to explain how the South Korean thriller has been effectively tailor-made for the Sitges Festival. In the last few decades, through its programming Sitges has consolidated a series of ideas that its audiences have internalised completely as identifying features of the festival: depictions of violence, and self-conscious distancing from such depictions. Sitges' audiences know that at the festival they will encounter images that push against moral boundaries, and they also know that much of the violence depicted will be experienced in a detached way: laughter, applause, and booing are some of the audience reactions to many of the violent images. For example, an article on a Spanish website dedicated to the horror genre, *Aullidos.com*, makes reference to “screams, applause and whistling

provoked by the splattering of blood on screen.” This is a trend that began in the 1980s and turned into a tradition that the illustrator Guillem Dols portrayed in a comic strip for the festival journal (Dols, 2017), which depicted how from the opening credits audiences at Sitges applaud even the most violent scenes. In relation to this phenomenon, Thomas Elsaesser makes a distinction between the notions of festivals as a carnival and of festivals as a ceremony: “The audience is more active if one thinks of film festivals as a carnival, more passive when one compares them to ceremonies. [...] Some film festivals include fans and encourage the presence of the public” (Elsaesser, 2005: 13). This “film festival as carnival” classification, a key feature of the “paratext” of Sitges, is what acts as a “threshold” (Genette, 1997: 11) between the images belonging to a very distinct culture and imaginary on the one hand and the regular festival participant on the other.

For the new edition of the Blu-ray of *Memoires of Murder*, the critic Quim Casas wrote that “perhaps one of the things that fascinate us most about certain films from South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Thailand or Japan is the distance we are faced with when we watch them; a distance that is cultural, linguistic, semantic, and emotional” (Casas, 2019). In the case of South Korean films of the early twenty-first century, we are similarly faced with this sense of unfamiliarity provoked by cultural distance (Hye & Diffrient, 2015: 18; Stringer & Shin, 2005: 52). The key to the strangeness of the films of the great Korean auteurs who were featured at the festival at the beginning of the twenty-first century is their dissonance in tone, underpinned by two focal points of interest: the way that the violence is depicted, and the indiscriminate mixture of black humour, ordinary cultural customs, drama and intrigue.

For the first of these, the depiction of violence, Kim Ki-duk’s *The Isle* offers some good material for our study. The film was screened at Sitges in

the year 2000, after appearing at the Venice Film Festival, where the fainting of a spectator in reaction to one of the film’s scenes created quite a stir among audiences and critics about the exhibition of the Korean filmmaker’s work. Two key images in the film are quite literally excruciating: a baited fishhook tied to a fishing rod which the male protagonist inserts into his mouth, and the same baited hook tied with fishing line to a boat which the female protagonist inserts into her vagina. In a setting tinged with fantasy—the floating houses where the protagonists live (and hide) produce a dreamlike effect throughout the film—the deepest drives of the subconscious are expressed: sex and suicide, pain and pleasure, are presented to us as two sides of the same coin. As a result, in the context and rhythm of bucolic harmony, the images of self-harm presented by Kim Ki-duk elicit a profound emotional shock; the dialectic between images of beauty and images that are unbearable to watch was a source of fascination for audiences and critics. The Sitges Festival—with its sections like Midnight X-Treme, where extreme violence is depicted in a detached and often parodic manner in early morning screenings—found in *The Isle* a film which, despite certain references to the work of Nagisa Oshima, for example, seemed to push the boundaries of violent depiction even further. Yet it is also a depiction which, as Roberto Cueto suggests, seems to be fully “rooted in South Korean society (or at least the imaginary that much Korean cinema is importing to the rest of the world)” (Cueto, 2007: 73).

“I want to create a world that exists outside the boundaries of morality and common sense” (qtd in Sánchez-Navarro, 2001: 33). With this assertion of Kim Ki-duk’s, Jordi Sánchez-Navarro opens his article for the festival catalogue published for the Sitges retrospective of the South Korean filmmaker’s work. The quote highlights one of the basic themes of New Korean Cinema: the question of morality. The South Korean films screened at different festivals at the beginning of the year

THE SOUTH KOREAN FILMS SCREENED AT DIFFERENT FESTIVALS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 2000 BEGAN TO ATTRACT ATTENTION FOR THEIR BLUNT DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE (AMONG OTHER THINGS), OFTEN CHALLENGING THE CRITICAL CONCEPTION OF MORALITY IN THEIR MISE-EN-SCENE

2000 began to attract attention for their blunt depictions of violence (among other things), often challenging the critical conception of morality in their mise-en-scene. This is why the exhibition of *The Isle* at Sitges opened a new possibility for the representation of violence that explores both its ambiguity and its meaning.

To cite another example, in his review for *Fotogramas*, Antonio Trashorras pointed precisely to the question of tone in relation to *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (Chinjeolhan geumjassi, Park Chan-wook, 2005): “at the very moment that the rhythm sinks to its lowest level, the film strikes us with all its borderline moral aridity; twenty minutes of a simply suicidal tonal (and ideological) risk, as thought-provoking as it is horrifying” (Trashorras, 2005: 181). Indeed, *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* contains a moment that proves as brutal as it is self-reflexive, when the protagonist brings together the families of the children murdered by the man she has just captured and plays them a series of videos that show their children crying and suffering at the moment of their deaths. After viewing them,

these devastated spectators will discuss the consequences of the images with patent indifference, before proceeding to torture the murderer.

The scene of the videos represents an attempt to depict the viewing of violence, an exercise that is not so different from that of the film’s spectators when they are faced with the images, often frontal and explicit, offered by Park. The filmmaker is clearly aware of the boundaries he is crossing: as we watch one of the videos, the camera moves slightly away from the girl who is about to be hanged to focus on the killer’s action of pulling the rope; in *Old Boy*, in one of the most brutal scenes in the film, there is a similar movement when one of the characters is about to cut his own tongue and the camera shifts slightly to focus on the handle of the scissors and the fingers squeezing it.

The video viewing scene centres precisely on the question of watching violence, but it does so by means of visual rhyming. The television

Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (Park Chan-wook, 2005)



screen shows the killer pulling at the rope tied to the foot of a chair on which the girl stands with a noose around her neck; he pulls the rope, the chair falls, and immediately we cut to a shot of another chair falling over, as one of the girl's relatives watching the video collapses to the floor in agony. In his review of the première of *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*, Javier Ocaña concluded that "Chan-wook is much more interested in aesthetics than ethics." Both Ocaña and Trashorras thus point to the intersection between beauty and atrocity—*gorgeous*, *elegant* and *beautiful* are some of the adjectives they use—and to the filmmaker's taste for stylisation, reflected in the abundance of music, the incisive use of the Steadicam, the extreme close-ups and the gaze to camera. In fact, the question of the coexistence of the beautiful and the cruel was already pointed out in an article written by Sánchez-Navarro in 2001 about Kim Ki-duk's work: "the boundary between the beautiful and the heinous, the acceptable and the unacceptable, is blurred in the pure space of passion."

The question of limits in the depiction of violence is one of the constants in the reviews and analyses written in those years on the films of the great Korean auteurs featured at the festival. In 2005, Trashorras described the film as "provocative beyond the limits marked by ethical prudence." The way the new South Korean filmmakers push the ethical boundaries of the depiction of violence is a point of recurrent discussion at a festival like Sitges, with its dedication to the thriller and horror genres. The shock with which these films were initially received would die down over time, while the filmmakers themselves gradually shifted away from the cruellest version of their poetics.

In the scene from *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* cited above of the family members viewing the videos of the murdered children, Park includes another gaze at a small screen: a girl looking through a camera monitor at a kitten playing with a rattle. This moment—between the tenderness and innocence of the tiny creature and the aggressiveness of the rest of the scene—is

Old Boy (Park Chan-wook, 2003)



an example of the listless quality that many critics refer to in relation to New Korean Cinema. This ties in with the second point of interest: the mixture of black humour and drama.

The opening scenes of another film featured at Sitges, *I Saw the Devil* (Ang-ma-reul bo-at-da, Kim Jee-woon, 2010), encapsulate the observations of the previous paragraph. The beginning of this film evokes the imaginary of the psycho-thriller when a woman—the protagonist's wife—is kidnapped and murdered by a psychopath who attacks her in the middle of the night on a snowy rural highway while she is waiting by the roadside for a tow-truck for her broken-down car. Some visual hints of the dismemberment of her body place the spectator in a state of tension, as this thriller moves into territory of the terror genre, bordering on a slasher film. However, the tone changes completely in the sequence that immediately follows this one, showing the search and discovery of the woman's body by police. This sequence begins with the film's first *Lynchian* allusion (the random discovery of an ear in the middle of nowhere by some children), and then presents us with one of the classical images of the genre: a crowd of police officers scouring the terrain in search of the body. At the same time, we see the murdered woman's father and husband arrive on the scene where the police are investi-

gating. Thriller and drama are thus intertwined. But it is at this moment that there is a total dislocation in the tone of the film, as the discovery of the woman's head turns into a veritable pantomime characteristic of slapstick comedy. The news of the head's discovery brings all the police officers to the area, as well as the media and curious locals; chaos takes over the scene, and while officers slip and slide in the water at the riverside, the head, initially placed in a box (in a clear allusion to the ending of *Seven* [David Fincher, 1995]), ends up falling on the ground and rolling along the riverbank until it stops right in front of the woman's father and husband, who will then plot their revenge. Kim Jee-woon's approach clearly hints at a criticism of the media (and of humankind in general) and its fascination with death, but at the same time, that which according to the principles of the genre should be the dramatic moment par excellence, the trigger for the protagonist's subsequent revenge and mental derangement, turns into a compendium of ridiculous and grotesque situations that from the outset give a darker hue to a film which, inevitably, explores the descent into hell of the human soul.

When discussing such scenes, so paradigmatic and characteristic of the Korean thriller, it is telling that many Spanish critics often use terms re-

lated to the Spanish literary style of *esperpento* to describe these changes of tone at the bleakest moments of the narrative. Some critics, as Jordi Costa suggests with reference to *Memories of Murder*, even went as far as identifying "features of Spanish developmentalist comedy" in the South Korean film. Costa notes: "There were some critics who invoked some perplexing references in order to position the film's incursions into humour-related



Memories of Murder (Bong Joon-ho, 2003)

territory: the elements of comedy in *Memories of Murder* are so intrinsic to the film's intentionally hyperrealist fabric that such allusions seem completely out of place" (Costa, 2005: 184). Costa's astute reflection reinforces the everyday realism that often characterises the contemporary South Korean thriller, while at the same time revealing that some Sitges viewers and critics—in reaction to the bewilderment provoked by the tone of certain scenes—resort to references drawn from the Spanish imaginary to describe them.

In one of the scenes in *Memories of Murder*, Bong Joon-hoo presents a frontal shot of two of the police officers who are investigating a series of killings, while they eat noodles and watch television smiling with a young man they have arrested at their side. The shot could be a perfectly mundane scene if it were not for the sideways pan made by the camera to reveal the other side of the room, and the interrogation table where the young man will be questioned. This shot exemplifies the dissonance proposed by Bong Joon-ho in a film that mixes everyday life, black humour and violence. The group of police officers, obsessed with closing a case which, as occurs in *Zodiac* (David Fincher, 2007), will remain unsolved, seem so completely disoriented as to be comic, while at the same time engaging in some appallingly violent methods. In an article on Korean film noir, Roberto Cueto notes that "the humorous treatment of the world of thuggery and street crime is common in Korean films, often combined with scenes of extreme violence" (Cueto, 2005: 76). Meanwhile, the critic José Enrique Monterde, in his review of Bong's film at the time of its release, refers to the films of its director in terms of their "particular sense of (black? Korean? Surreal?) humour"

and of "a comic quality that is not always easy to digest" (Monterde, 2004).

Bong adds one last element to his particular mix of tones and genres: a critical perspective on his country's recent history. *Memories of Murder* is set in 1986 and revolves around a series of unsolved crimes that were committed at a time when the country was in a state of upheaval, with demonstrations and protests against the dictatorship in power at that time, which would collapse only one year later. In other words, it takes place during a period of crisis, in a rugged rural setting: dry, wide open spaces with ochre and yellowish tones. This setting seems at first to be a mere narrative frame, but gradually it is revealed to be the axis on which much of the film's discourse turns. In one scene, the police cannot go out on patrol to prevent another killing because all the units are tied up with the political unrest; in another, government repression leads to one of the murders. Little by little the film thus paints a portrait of the darker side of South Korea under the dictatorship, revealing the terror in broad daylight, the horror in the everyday.

"When I saw *Memories of Murder* I said to myself: 'How cool is this? They aren't the least bit ashamed to be Korean, to make genre films by constructing plots related to their recent past.' I think it would be good to do something like this

Marshland (Alberto Rodríguez, 2014)



in Spain. Just now Alberto Rodríguez has done it with *Marshland* (*La isla mínima*, Alberto Rodríguez, 2014)” (Estrada & Yáñez, 2014). These are the words of Carlos Vermut, director of *Magical Girl* (2014) and a regular at the Sitges Festival, both as a filmmaker and a spectator. Vermut, one of the representatives of the so-called Other Spanish Cinema (Heredero, 2016), thus pointed out the influence of films like *Memories of Murder*. The connection between *Marshland* and Bong Joon-hoo’s film is clear and has even been noted by Alberto Rodríguez himself (Montoya, 2014). Both films take place in the 1980s, in a period of transition from dictatorship to democracy, set in a real historical moment that gradually becomes a central focus. Both feature a pair of police officers who air their differences, both offer an ending as open as the historical moment they portray, and both are set in a markedly dry and rugged landscape, which becomes as much a protagonist of the film as the characters themselves. This connection highlights another of the focal points of many South Korean thrillers featured at the Sitges Festival in the last two decades: their interest in delving into the most complex corners of their country’s history.

In short, the different examples of New Korean Cinema exhibited at Sitges have all depended on at least one of these three key elements. The first is the question of *auteurship*, clearly represented by filmmakers like Park Chan-wook, Kim Jee-woon, Kim Ki-duk, Bong Jon-hoo, and more recently, Na Hong-jin. The second, associated with our starting hypothesis, is the question of genres: essentially the thriller, the horror, and the fantasy film. These last two genres form part of the festival’s identity; in 2009, with Ángel Sala as its director, the word “*fantàstic*” was reintroduced to the festival’s name (having been removed in 1997), while the “horror” label (*terror* in Catalan) had been included in the name until 1982. Quite apart from the question of the festival’s name, these two have historically been the predominant genres at Sitges. The case of the thriller is thus rather more

unique, because, although it is not included in the official conception of the festival, it has been gaining prominence. Moreover, it is a genre that Spanish audiences have associated with Korean cinema (Cueto & Palacios, 2007: 174). At the same time, the Korean films exhibited at Sitges have been closely associated with the thriller genre, to such an extent that the festival has contributed to the creation of a particular image for Korean cinema. This leads us to some possible answers to two of the questions we posed at the beginning of this article: the recent shift towards the thriller genre in Korean cinema explains its presence at the festival and, above all, the mediation of Sitges, with its predisposition towards the genre, has led to the entry of Asian films into Spanish theatres, to the point of developing an image of New Korean Cinema that is intrinsically linked to thriller forms and storylines. The third element is the discourse on the state of the country itself, either through a portrait of society—*The Host* (Gwoemul, Bong Joon-ho, 2006), *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (Boksuneun naui geot, Park Chan-wook, 2002) or, more recently, *Train to Busan* (Busanhaeng, Yeon Sang-ho, 2016)—or its history, either through stories about the conflict with North Korea or, more recently, the Japanese occupation of Korea—*The Tiger: An Old Hunter’s Tale* (Daeho, Park Hoon-jung, 2015) *The Age of Shadows* (Mil-jeong, Kim Jee-woon, 2016), *The Battleship Island* (Gunham-do, Ryoo Seung-wan, 2017), *The Spy Gone North* (Gongjak, Yun Jong-bin, 2018), or *Assassination* (Amsal, Choi Dong-hoon, 2015). In this last case we can trace a line back to the two foundational films of New Korean Cinema, as both *Shiri* and *Joint Security Area* tell stories revolving around the conflict between the two Koreas.

CONCLUSIONS

In the process of reception of New Korean Cinema in Spain, the Sitges Festival has promoted a number of elements that have enabled Spanish audien-

ces to identify a common style in a group of films which, beyond auteurist and classical generic patterns, are difficult to classify. The depiction of violence, the use of black and surreal humour and the incorporation of the country's history into the Korean thriller are the elements that the paratextual system of the Sitges Festival has developed over the past two decades. On the one hand, the transformations to the structure of the festival, such as the creation of the Orient Express and Órbita sections, have given greater prominence to South Korean films in general, and more specifically to South Korean thrillers, turning the thriller into a genre that is practically inseparable from Korean cinema. On the other, the taste and fascination for films in which the depiction of violence plays a central role has reinforced the association of Korean films with a cinema of provocative images that have a huge visual impact. In a certain way, this overview of the most recent historiography of the festival has revealed that New Korean Cinema has contributed to shape—both directly and indirectly—the structure of the festival itself, just as the festival has played an essential role in adapting the taste of Spanish audiences to New Korean Cinema. ■

NOTES

- 1 These data are taken from the catalogues of the Sitges Festival since 1981. To quantify the South Korean films prior to this date (1967-1980), we relied on editions of the festival journal, its respective programs and the festival's online archives. In this calculation we haven't taken into account films screened in Brigadoon, created in 1986 as an independent section with its own programming. We believe it relevant to the purpose of our study to consider the quantitative aspects associated with a single programming criterion.
- 2 All the statements by Mike Hostench—deputy director of the Sitges Festival and specialist in South Korean cinema— cited in this article come from an interview conducted specifically for this research on 9 May 2019.
- 3 Also in Catalonia, specifically in Barcelona, the BAFF (Barcelona Asian Film Festival) was launched in 1998. Moreover, festivals like the San Sebastián Film Festival played a key role in the introduction of certain Korean filmmakers to Spanish film exhibition circuits: the most notable example is Bong Joon-ho, whose first films were screened there, beginning in 2000 with *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (Flandresui gae, Bong Joon-ho, 2000).
- 4 This percentage was determined by comparing the catalogues of the Sitges Festival with the database of films rated by the Ministry of Culture and Sport.
- 5 All the statements by Ángel Sala—director of the Sitges Festival since 2001— cited in this article come from an interview conducted by phone specifically for this research on 20 June 2019.
- 6 This is reflected, for example, in the book for the festival's 50th anniversary, when it discusses the reception of a violent thriller like *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer* (VV. AA., 2017: 141).

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MADE FOR SITGES? THE RECEPTION OF THE SOUTH KOREAN THRILLER IN SPAIN THROUGH THE CASE STUDY OF THE SITGES FILM FESTIVAL

Abstract

The New Korean Cinema has a direct translation into the programming and structure of the Sitges Film Festival since its emergence in the late nineties. The figures show how in a very short period of time Korean cinematography acquires a progressive visibility until reaching unsuspected levels. For its part, the Sitges Film Festival finds in Korean cinematography unclassifiable images that allow it to explore some of the tropes characteristic of its identity: the taste for cinematographic genre, the representation of violence from heterodox perspectives and, finally, the black humor as a distancing mechanism. Our starting hypothesis is that all these elements condition the reception process of the New Korean Cinema, building a certain paratext that will have a strong influence on the reception process of this cinematography. To make our argument, we first address what and how the evolution of the contest has been since the beginning of the movement; second, we take as a corpus of analysis the most relevant South Korean thrillers that have been part of the program of the contest in order to determine and define its thematic and aesthetic axes; and in the third and last place, we compare these results with the reception of the films both by the critics and with those tropes from which the identity that defines the Sitges Film Festival has been sedimented.

Key words

New Korean Cinema; Sitges Film Festival; Thriller, Violence; Paratext.

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¿MADE FOR SITGES? LA RECEPCIÓN DEL THRILLER SURCOREANO EN ESPAÑA A TRAVÉS DEL ESTUDIO DE CASO DEL FESTIVAL DE SITGES

Resumen

El Nuevo Cine Coreano tiene una traslación directa en la programación y estructura del Festival de Sitges desde su eclosión a finales de los años noventa. Las cifras ponen en evidencia cómo en un período muy breve de tiempo la cinematografía coreana adquiere una progresiva visibilidad hasta llegar a cotas insospechadas. Por su parte, el Festival de Sitges encuentra en la cinematografía coreana unas imágenes inclasificables que le permiten explorar algunos de los tropos característicos de su identidad: el gusto por el género, la representación de la violencia desde perspectivas heterodoxas y, finalmente, el humor negro como mecanismo de distanciamiento. Nuestra hipótesis de partida es que todos estos elementos condicionan el proceso de recepción del Nuevo Cine Coreano, construyendo un determinado paratexto que tendrá una fuerte influencia en el proceso de recepción de esta cinematografía. Para realizar nuestra argumentación, abordamos, en primer lugar, cuál y cómo ha sido la evolución del certamen desde el inicio del movimiento; en segundo lugar, tomamos como corpus de análisis los *thrillers* surcoreanos más relevantes que han formado parte de la programación del certamen para así poder determinar y definir sus ejes temáticos y estéticos; y, en tercer y último lugar, cotejamos estos resultados con la recepción de los films tanto por parte de la crítica como con aquellos tropos a partir de los cuales se ha sedimentado la identidad que define el Festival de Sitges.

Palabras clave

Nuevo Cine Coreano; Festival de Sitges; *Thriller*; Violencia; Paratexto.

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REEDITING THE WAR IN ASIA: JAPANESE NEWSREELS IN SPAIN (1931-1945)*

MARCOS P. CENTENO MARTÍN

I. INTRODUCTION

The fifteen years of conflict in Asia (1931-1945) were characterized by an unprecedented prominence of images, fuelled by the appearance of a new type of modern newsreel based on immediacy and a closeness to reality. The iconography generated became not only a key element for media representations of current affairs, but also an essential tool for social mobilization. The big screen acquired an extraordinary semantic load, subject to all kinds of powerful ideological constraints, transgressions and manipulations.

Today, the international reach of the iconography produced during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is well known. However, the recep-

tion in Spain of images from abroad, and particularly those related to the war in Asia, has received little attention. The distribution of newsreels made by the Japanese Empire reached unprecedented dimensions, especially after 1937, when the focus of the international press turned from Spain to East Asia (Sánchez-Biosca, 2007: 76). Japan, which had the most powerful film industry in the world after Hollywood in the 1930s, mobilized its best operators and directors, providing them with the most advanced filming technology for newsreel production, and the transnational circulation of this material also included film screens in Spain.

The purpose of this article is to assess the presence of the Japanese newsreel industry in Spain

between 1931 and 1945, focusing on the distribution mechanisms of these films and the strategies for adapting them to the context in which they were exhibited. Where did these images come from and under what circumstances were they filmed? What aspects of the war in Asia did they portray? How did they get to Spain? What kinds of concurrent interests was their reception subject to? This study aims to shed some light on this little known aspect of the mobilization, distribution and reuse of images during this tumultuous historical period.

2. MANCHURIA ON SPANISH FILM SCREENS

2.1 Mantetsu and the imaginary of a promised land

The production of newsreels for cinema in Japan is as old as filmmaking itself. Japanese filmmakers had been producing “proto-newsreels”, called *jiji eiga* (current events films) covering conflicts as early as the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901), when Shibata Yoshitsune and Fukutani Komakichi travelled to Beijing alongside the Japanese troops, equipped with a Gaumont camera (Nornes, 2003: 3). However, it was the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) that gave a definitive boost to this film genre: the production of these *jiji eiga* increased from sixteen in 1903 to twenty-seven in 1905 (Tanaka, 1957: 105) and the travelling exhibitions begin to be replaced by permanent cinemas (Waka, 1997: 19). The war was filmed by Fujiwara Kōzaburō and Shimizu Kumejirō, for the company Yoshizawa Shōten, although some authors estimate that there were at least a dozen Japanese filmmakers, and the images of the conflict even reached Spain in various film formats (Almazán, 2004: 220- 239). By this point, it had already been demonstrated that cine-

ma could become an effective propaganda tool. At the same time, there were experiments with reality like dramatizations (*renstageki*), which had been done since the Spanish-American War (1898), combining re-enactments with actors and footage taken from the front. This ambiguity between the real and the fictionalised continued even after the appearance of the first real Japanese newsreel, *Tōkyō shinema gahō* (1914) (Komatsu, 1991: 310-311), and had become the subject of theoretical discussion by the 1930s (Murayama, 1932: 8). During this decade, newsreels were still associated more with the press than with cinema (Nornes, 2003: 48). Starting in 1934, the first newsreels were produced periodically by the main national newspapers: *Daimai Tōnichi News* by the newspaper *Mainichi*, *Asahi Sekai News* and *Yomiuri News*. Two more newsreels appeared in 1936: *Dōmei News* by the news agency of the same name, and *Tōhō Hassei* by the Tōhō film studio (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 45; Purdy, 2016: 354). At the same

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1930S, THERE WAS A PROLIFERATION OF NEWSREELS APPEARING MAINLY AS A RESULT OF THE EVENTS IN MANCHURIA, A TERRITORY OF GREAT INTEREST TO JAPAN

time, “news films” appeared (Hori, 2017: 125) and it was in these years that critics began to realize the importance of the newsreel and to recognize nonfiction films as a distinct genre (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 45 ; Nornes, 2003: 53). Foreign news was also screened weekly in the German UFA newsreels,

as well as Paramount News (High, 2003: 92), at least until 1941, when film imports from the U.S. were banned (Baskett, 2008: 11). Meanwhile, the importing of German newsreels was secured with the German-Japanese Cinematographic Exchange Agreement (1937), with the aim of creating a shared fascist ideology through cinema, as well as censoring unfavourable representations of fascism, mainly in newsreels (Baskett, 2008: 119).

At the beginning of the 1930s, there was a proliferation of newsreels appearing mainly as a

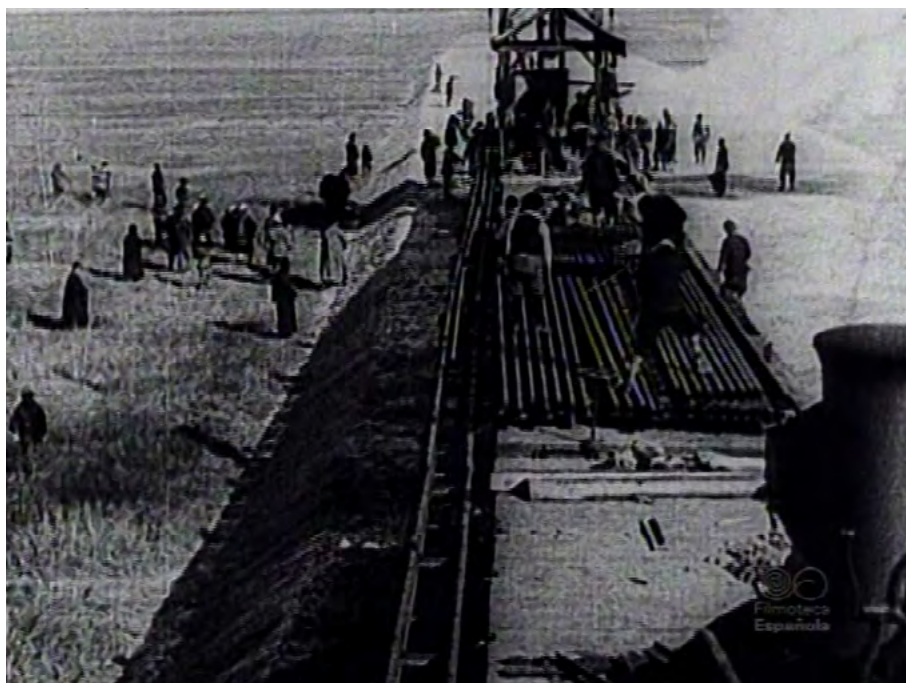
result of the events in Manchuria, a territory of great interest to Japan for its mining and heavy industry, which was being developed by Mantetsu (Southern Railway Company of Manchuria). This company was not only central to the colonial exploitation of this region but also played a crucial role in the construction of the imaginary surrounding the puppet state of Manchukuo, founded in 1932. Mantetsu had been at the epicentre of the Mukden incident, a staged attack on the railway orchestrated to justify the occupation of the Kwantung Army. The company was also responsible for the propaganda films made about the region, mainly through its subsidiary Man'ei, one of the largest film studios in Asia after 1934 (Yomota, 2019: 91-92), created with the clear intention of explaining the imperial expansion to an audience outside Japan (Baskett, 2008: 29-33). Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that the first newsreel about Asia shown in Spain was *New State of Manchukuo* (1932), which begins precisely with the building of the railway. Besides being an important element for the exploitation of

Manchuria, the railway became a symbol of modernity in other cinematic traditions, such as the Soviet Union's socialist realism of the time.¹

The first intertitle in *New State of Manchukuo* reads: "A new force is acting in Manchuria: the force of civilization." Modernization is portrayed in the urban development plans of the capital Hsinking and the city of Dalian. The railway company, which had almost a government role with dozens of development projects in urban areas, produced propaganda documentaries to attract new Japanese settlers and entrepreneurs, who would number more than one million by the 1940s. The report shows plans for several geisha houses in front of Dalian's colonial buildings, presented as an allegory for civilization under Japanese influence. The next intertitle reads: "Manchukuo responds to all the needs of the inhabitants. In 1929, refugees exceeded one million." The film uses a pan-Asian rhetoric that attempts to replace the idea of occupation with the idea of development amidst the chaos of Chinese division. The following sequence of Emperor Puyi

(1906-1967) receiving the title of chief executive is actually a scene staged by Tokyo to give the appearance of Manchurian independence. It was a dramatic ploy aimed at defusing international pressure in response to the serious crisis sparked by the military invasion. However, these images concealed Japan's superiority behind a supposed *harmony* with local ethnic groups and elided the forced labour of millions of Chinese workers. Despite this fact, this iconography probably had a significant impact in the Spanish Republic. The images appeared in a version of the French report *Le nouvel état de Manchukuo*.

New State of Manchukuo (1932)



During the Second Republic (1931-1936) there was an extraordinary boom in newsreels; non-fiction cinema increased from 3.5% of all films released in 1931 to 50.5% in 1936 (Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias, 2010: 743). In addition to British newsreels, those of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy's *Luce* newsreels, foreign news reached Spain from the United States (*Paramount News* and *Fox Movietone News*) and France (newsreels by the companies *Éclair*, *Pathé* and *Gaumont*). The images of Japanese actions in Manchuria divided public opinion along political lines. Condemnation by the Spanish right was ambiguous. In fact, as Rodao García (2002: 51) points out, the conservative press justified the need to deal with Chinese anarchy, referring to the occupation as "Japanese peace-keeping work in China."

2.2 Context after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937)

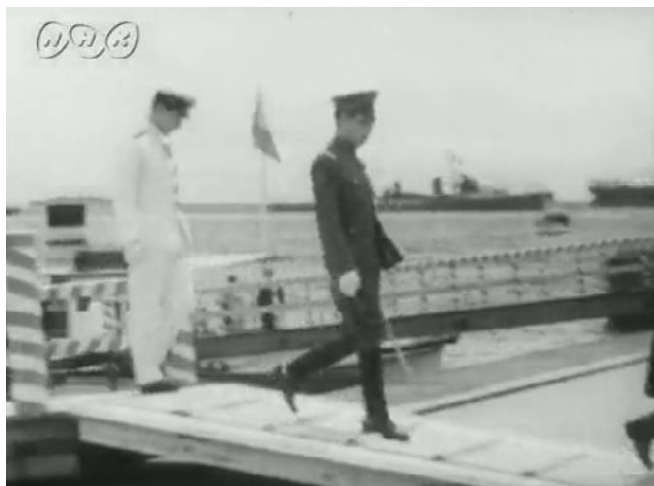
The events in mainland China continued to be a key factor in the development of the newsreel. In fact, the beginning of full-scale war with China in 1937 resulted in the "Golden Age" of Japanese non-fiction cinema. That year, newsreel cinemas grew from three to twenty-three in Tokyo and seventy-eight in the rest of the country (Hamasaki, 1999: 4). As several authors have noted (Nornes, 2003: 50; Shimizu, 1991: 23), their popularity had to do with a growing public interest in news from China, as the number of households with relatives at the front increased, and an increasing number of people received their information on the events of the war exclusively from newsreels (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 46). The teams of correspondents doubled in size and each of the four main news companies came to have about fifteen employees in China (Hamasaki, 1999: 34-35). The result was a vertiginous rise in production, which increased from 195 newsreels per week to 510 in 1937 (Satō, 1954: 183). The footage of these newsreels circulated around the world, and even came to be used by the Allies as a

counter-propaganda tool (Centeno Martín, 2019: 106-108).

However, when the Sino-Japanese War began, Spain's Civil War had already been raging for a year, during which no records have been found of the screening of newsreels about Asia. Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias (2010: 715) indicate that from the time of the Second Republic there was a Japanese newsreel called *Newsreel of the Far East*, distributed by the German company *Hispana Tobis*, but neither in the Spanish Film Library nor in the RTVE archives are any examples preserved. This does not mean that there were no shared feelings between the two contexts. Despite the geographic distance, the war in China against Japan and the Spanish Civil War were both seen as part of a borderless struggle against fascism (Tsou and Tsou, 2013: 11). And on the nationalist side of the Spanish Civil War, Japan may have been viewed as an alter-ego of the crusaders against communism (Rodao García, 1998: 435-454), although interest in Japan was not immediate but began to increase for political reasons in late 1937, almost parallel with Japan's recognition of the nationalist side in Spain in December 1937.

2.3 Iconography on a platform: *The Mikado Receives the Emperor of Manchukuo* (1940)

Although certain Francoist factions discussed the possibility of supporting the Kuomintang Chinese nationalist government, Franco's dictatorship quickly chose to support Japanese expansionism (Rodao García, 2002: 171). As soon as the Spanish Civil War was over, the puppet state of Manchukuo was recognized and a permanent legation was established in Madrid in April 1939 (Rodao García, 2002: 165). The press reported Foreign Minister Méndez de Vigo's meetings with Emperor Puyi, and the receptions of the Spanish government with the Japanese ambassador Suma Yakichiro between 1940 and 1941. In this context, Spanish cinemas screened the newsreel *The Mikado receives the Emperor of Manchukuo* (1940), cov-



The Mikado Receives the Emperor of Manchukuo (1940) (Nippon News, No. 3, 25 June 1940)

ering Emperor Puyi's Japanese visit to meet Hirohito in January 1940. As noted in *Sensō to Nihon eiga* (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 46), the newsreels tended to follow the same order: first, news related to the imperial house; then, news about the war and politics; and finally, social issues.

The event was recorded by the cameras of the company Nippon Eiga-sha (or Nichiei), which began monopolizing newsreel production by the mid-1940s, once production was merged under the *Eiga Hō* (Film Law).⁴ The first edition of its newsreel, *Nippon News* (Nippon Nyūsu), was released in June, and at the end of that same month, Puyi's visit was featured in newsreel number 3 (25 June 1940).⁵ The narrator explains that Puyi was attending the celebrations for the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese Empire. The newsreel is structured as a kind of travelogue, beginning with Puyi's departure from Hsinking station in the first story and ending with his arrival in Tokyo, including his landing at Yokohama, his visit to a naval detachment, and his arrival at Tokyo station where Emperor Hirohito and his entourage awaits him, and finally his transfer by car to Akasaka Palace.

The footage of Hirohito welcoming Puyi on the platform was distributed all over the world and consolidated an iconic image of Japanese in-

fluence in Asia. The scene was anything but improvised, repeating the mise-en-scène arranged for Puyi's first visit to Tokyo five years earlier, which also received large-scale international media coverage. A comparison of the 1940 scene with that of 1935 (included in the *British Movietone* newsreel No. 3637) reveals a repetition of practically the same camera movements, frames and composition. However, there were a couple of significant changes: first, certain mistakes in the original mise-en-scène were corrected, as while the cameraman's field of vision is clear this time, in 1935 members of the imperial entourage were standing right in front of the camera, blocking its view of the precise moment when the two emperors shook hands. Also, the previous European-style ceremonial costumes worn in 1935 are replaced by military uniforms in 1940, more appropriate in a context in which Japan has been at war in China for several years and is on the brink of launching the Pacific War against the Allies.

The footage of the 1940 meeting between the two emperors was circulated widely, as it was not only exhibited in Spanish cinemas under Franco's dictatorship, but also on the film screens of the Allies and the Axis powers. In fact, only four months later, the mise-en-scène was repeated in Franco's meeting with Hitler in Hendaye on 23



Puyi's first visit to Japan in 1935, where the entourage conceals the moment when the dignitaries shake hands (British Movietone, No. 3637)



October 1940, the footage for which circulated throughout Spain although it had been filmed by German UFA camera operators with the UFA for the *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreel. Meetings on a train platform, inspecting the troops in formation at the station, along with all the paraphernalia, including the arrival of a train—a symbol of power and industrialization—seemed to become a sort of typical mise-en-scène for the agreements between authoritarian leaders in the early days of World War II. Even the arrangement of roles in the scene was repeated: the leader of the expanding empire, in this case the Third Reich, waits on the platform for the arrival of the leader from the satellite regime or potential ally, Franco, who in June 1940 had abandoned his position of “neutrality” in favour of “non-belliger-

Meeting between Hitler and Franco in Hendaye (23 October 1940, *Deutsche Wochenschau* No. 530 reel 3)



ence”, moving Spain closer to entering the war on the Nazi side.

3. PACIFIC WAR AND RE-EDITIONS OF NIPPON NEWS

3.1 Expansion in Southeast Asia: *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (1942)

Although the idea of regulating screening in cinemas based on models from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had been a topic of discussion since the early 1930s (Baskett, 2008: 117-118; Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 3-4), state control of Japanese newsreels culminated with the merger of the existing newsreels into *Nippon News* in 1940, following the example of the fusion of German newsreel companies that same year. At the same time, the Film Law made it compulsory to screen at least 250 metres of short documentary films, referred to at the time as *bunka eiga* (culture films). As a result, non-fiction film production increased from 985 in 1939 to 4,460 in 1940 (Nornes, 2003: 63) and new theatres appeared that were dedicated exclusively to non-fiction films (Hori, 2017: 127). In addition, after the declaration of war against the Allies, the need for propaganda increased and Nichiei's budget rose from two million yen in 1941 to seven million in 1942. As the Japanese Empire expanded throughout Southeast Asia, the company created branches to produce local versions of *Nippon News* in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, French Indochina, Burma and the regions of China.

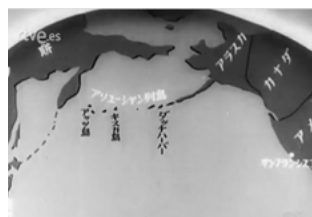
Footage taken by Japanese camera operators in Burma was seen in Spain in *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* [A Year of War in Greater East Asia] (1942), a 19-minute report summarizing the advance of the Japanese Empire since the start of the Pacific War (1941-1945): the capture of Singapore, the conquest of Rangoon in Burma, the paratroopers' assault on the island of Celebes in Indonesia, the Dutch capitulation in Java, and the landing on the Aleutian Islands.⁶ The

first sequence deals with Singapore, with footage from *Marei Senki* [Record of the War in Malaysia] (Iida Shimbi and Miki Shigeru, 1942), presenting the historic moment when Percival surrendered Singapore to General Yamashita. This scene was included in *Nippon News* No. 90, and used widely in Japanese propaganda to ridicule the British (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 76).⁷

Another sequence in *Un Año de Guerra*, taken from *Nippon News* No. 107 (22 June 1942), shows the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands. The story begins with a map showing the crucial nature of geographical location of the islands, not so much for their strategic value as for their symbolic value, as the only Japanese occupation of US territory. The film continues with shots taken from Japanese battleships as they advance. The next scene features the capture of American soldiers and ends with a salute to the Japanese flag. The invasion of the Aleutians was a big media event in Japan at the end of June 1942 and *Nippon News* presented another story on the topic in No. 108 (30 June 1942).⁸

The scene depicting the Japanese entry into British Burma in early 1942 contains footage from the documentary *Biruma Senki* [Record of the Burmese War] (1942), also produced by Nichiei and released in September. These events, however, had already been shown in Japan in *Nippon News*

Surrendering Singapore. *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (1942) (*Nippon News*, No. 90, 23 February 1942)



Capture of the Aleutian Islands. *Un Año de Guerra* (1942) (*Nippon News*, No. 107, 22 June 1942)

no. 94 (24th March 1942). In the Spanish cut, the narrator tries to make it clear that the Pacific War was an act of self-defence to which the Japanese Empire has been pushed as a result of the historical aggression of Anglo-American forces, a point underscored with phrases like: "The fortresses of Singapore and Hong Kong were the strongest forces against Japan!"

The last part of *Un Año de Guerra* shows footage of Japanese troops entering British Burma, taken in January 1942 (Thai forces also participated in the taking of Burma, but this is ignored in the film). A group of locals are shown raising their arms as the Japanese troops pass by. This is a less than successful attempt to show support for the Japanese soldiers from Burmese civilians, who look at the camera as if clumsily following the cameraman's instructions. However, the filmmakers improved their staging techniques as the war progressed; for example, in the subsequent scene of the capture of Java, the expressions of jubilation look more natural.

Leaving formal aspects aside, the lack of information the film offers is significant. Pearl Harbor is not explicitly mentioned, and the importance of the Burma Road, the main route for supplies for the Allied forces in China, is not sufficiently explained. On the other hand, the Japanese newsreels did offer detailed information on the bombing of the US fleet in Pearl Harbor, and the simultaneous attacks on British positions in Hong Kong and Borneo in *Nippon News* No. 82 (30 December 1941). Explanations of the strategic role of the Burma Road also appear in *Nippon News* No.



Taking Burma. *Un Año de Guerra* (1942)
(*Nippon News*, No. 107, 22 June 1942)

56 (1 July 1941) and are followed up on in No. 88 (9 February 1942), No. 91 (3 March 1942) and No. 103 (27 May 1942). The newsreels continuously highlight the local inhabitants' support for the Japanese advance, vesting the images with considerable symbolic power, fuelled by the idea of "The Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" (*Dai-tō-a Kyōeiken*), which became official policy since 1940.

During these first years of the Pacific War, the newsreels reedited in Spain constructed an intense and passionate account of the "New Order" being brought about by the fascist powers, based on the visually spectacular nature of the footage. The filmed events are used merely as an excuse to articulate a discourse characteristic of the agitprop spearheaded by the Spanish fascist party, the Falange. On the other hand, the news in Japan provided the viewer with much more information, even if it was misrepresented or censored.⁹ For example, maps were a common resource used by *Nippon News* to begin their newsreels. Similar to the narrative role of landscapes in Japanese newsreels described by Taylor-Jones

(2017: 42-53), maps also became metaphorical elements necessary for nationalist propaganda. Not only do they depict the physical occupation, but they also construct a figurative space that serves to negotiate the interactions between local inhabitants and Japanese ambitions. The space is politically redefined and shaped according to colonial fantasies. The graphic representation acquires a double function: linking the metropolis to its colonies and areas of influence, while at the same time marking the distance between colonizer and colonized, where Japan is at the centre of and at the same time outside Asia—or Asia is outside Japan, thereby conceptually perpetuating structures of power and domination.

News from Asia in this first stage of the Pacific War reached Spain through Nazi Germany, in versions of the *Auslandstonwoche* ("foreign weekly newsreel") produced by Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH, a company under the control of Joseph Goebbels, created after the fusion of German newsreel producers in June 1940 (Winkel 2004: 7-8). This newsreel in turn made use of footage from *Nippon News* with which it exchanged material. As the foreign version of *Deutsche Wochenschau*

Un Año de Guerra (1942) from the German report
Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien.



(which was exhibited in the Third Reich), *Auslandstonwoche* was designed as propaganda for audiences outside the occupied territories. Its editing techniques had a big influence on the Japanese newsreel (Winkel 2004: 13), although it ironically was more successful in terms of distribution in neutral countries than in the Axis powers—unlike Japan and Italy, *Auslandstonwoche* had a branch in Madrid until 1943 (Winkel 2004: 12). This explains why *A Year of War*, which is the version of the German report entitled *Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien*, presents some maps in German and others in Japanese. There is no data on the reception of this film in Spain, but the reception of the original footage in Japan was mixed. According to High (2003: 372-373), *Biruma Senki* was a box office failure due to the lack of spectacular images from the battlefield—unlike the aforementioned documentary about Malaysia, *Marei Senki*, which had been extraordinarily successful and had a huge social impact (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 47).

Another difference is that while *Marei Senki* contains images of the capture of British prisoners, *Biruma Senki* focuses on the quantity of material left behind by the British army: scenes of burnt trucks and destroyed oil barrels are followed by shots of a deck of cards and of a photo of Winston Churchill lying in the mud. The Japanese voice-over remarks: “Winston Churchill’s face looks reproachfully at the gutted and abandoned equipment.” While in the Spanish version, the narrator exclaimed in a more frenzied tone: “The game is lost, Mr. Churchill!”.

The reuse of Japanese footage in the German newsreel and then taken from there for the Spanish newsreel is an example that clearly illustrates the winding journeys made by these images of the Pacific War. In this process, the news was not exempt from distortions, deformations and reinterpretations. For Spanish audiences, there was no interest in explaining the aid that the Allies provided Chiang Kai-shek’s government in Chongqing, who was, after all, another authoritarian



Un Año de Guerra (1942), footage from *Biruma Senki*
[Record of the Burma War] (Nichiei, 1942)

conservative leader; but there certainly was an interest in highlighting the British defeat through the figure of Churchill, as this reference would serve to feed Falangist fantasies of the defeat of the British Empire and even the hypothetical capture of Gibraltar.

3.2 Japanese news via the Third Reich: *Flota Imperial Japonesa* (1942)

Other Japanese footage that reached Spain via the German newsreel can be found in *Flota Imperial Japonesa* [Japanese Imperial Fleet] (1942), a 14-minute version of the *Die Kaiserlich Japanische Kriegsflotte* report, re-edited in Spain by the Falangist organization SEU (Spanish University Union).¹⁰ The film is mainly composed of scenes of Japanese navy manoeuvres and contains texts in German, which are translated by a narrator into Spanish: “The tomb at the bottom of the sea. For the emperor and the fatherland we give our all.” Next, the voice-over praises the historic victories of the Japanese navy and leaves no doubts about the position taken on the conflict: “At the Washington Conference, Japan was forced to restrict the tonnage of its fleet to the following proportions: United States, five; Great Britain, five; Japan, three... From that moment there was just

a single watchword: prepare for a fight of three against ten!"

The display of the power of Japanese battle-ships constitutes a significant act of propaganda following the recent declaration of war by the Allies. The first part includes scenes of naval manoeuvres from *Nippon News* No. 50 (20 May 1941), released on the eve of the Pacific War. The second part is a montage with impressive sequences of counterattacks against British and American forces filmed from a battleship after Pearl Harbor, which were originally included in *Nippon News* No. 130 (1 December 1942). Although the date assigned to *Imperial Japanese Fleet* in the Spanish Film Library archives and the RTVE digital archives is 1941, an analysis of the footage used in the montage has revealed that it must have been edited at least one year later; moreover, the narration includes references to the Japanese occupation of Malaysia, Java, Midway, the Solomon Islands and the Aleutian Islands, events that occurred in the first half of 1942.

3.3 Versions of other newsreels: *Japón en Guerra* (1942)

Compared to the variety of newsreels that proliferated under the Spanish Republic, the number of newsreels produced by the nationalist side during the Spanish Civil War and in the early years of the Franco dictatorship was dramatically low. The newsreels distributed in Spain during this period were mainly the German UFA newsreels, the Italian *Luce* and the Anglo-American *Fox Movietone News*, although there were a few others with less of an impact. Of course, as of 1 July 1938 all these newsreels needed to have their footage approved by the military authorities and were censored or adapted as required. Alongside the international productions was the Spanish newsreel *El Noticiero Español*, created by the Falange, produced between 1938 and 1941, an unprecedented form of shock propaganda created with the support of the

Third Reich, edited and distributed by the German studio Tobis.

As a result, the German newsreels were not the only source of news from the Japanese Empire. For example, *Japón en Guerra* [Japan at War] (1942) was a version of the French film *Japon en Guerre. Reportages sur les hostilités entre le Japon et les puissances anglo-saxonnes*, made by the Éclair Journal newsreel. During the Civil War, Éclair Journal was edited in Bilbao by the company Producciones Hispánicas and exhibited in Spain under the title *Noticiero Universal*. The purpose of the 28-minute report was to explain the actions that had led to the Pacific War. The news story opens with a large meeting at which the Japanese PM, General Hideki Tōjō, announces that Japan has no option but to go war with the United States and Great Britain. This is followed by images of the air raids on Pearl Harbor, filmed from Japanese planes. The report continues with the capture of Singapore, and the completion of the Japanese advance with the entry into Burma and the arrival at Manila in the Philippines. The Spanish narration has only been preserved between minutes 14 and 20; the rest of the voice-over is in French. Actually, this sequence contains footage reused in *Flota Imperial Japonesa*. To justify the actions of the Japanese army, the narrator recalls the events of the Russo-Japanese War and the unfair international agreements imposed by the United States and Britain. The stance of the Spanish editors seems far less ambiguous than that of their counterparts in occupied France, as they use a much more enthusiastic tone than the French voice-over.

Japón en Guerra ends with two more historic events: the unconditional surrender of Hong Kong with images of British prisoners; and the occupation of Indonesia, which includes the famous assault on the Palembang oil refineries by Japanese paratroopers. Both were filmed for *Nippon News* No. 93 (17 March 1942), probably by the camera operator Abe Shirō.

This footage circulated around the world and became an icon of Japanese expansion in South-east Asia. As a matter of fact, it was reused in Spain for the ten-minute report *Paracaidistas nipónicos contra Palembang* [Japanese Paratroopers against Palembang] (1942). The editing of *Japón en Guerra* is particularly significant because it illustrates the extraordinary phenomenon of the migration of images from Japan, which were circulated constantly in German, French and Spanish newsreels.

The impact of the Palembang images lies in the immediacy and closeness of the cameramen, who travelled among the troops and worked with light cameras, mainly Eyemos. Their visual pow-



Taking Palembang Oil Refinery. *Japón en Guerra* from *Nippon News*, No. 93 (17 March 1942).

er undermined any informative function. The events are decontextualized in Spain and there is no mention of the fact that Palembang was a strategic source of petroleum for Japan following the embargo imposed by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In short, *Paracaidistas nipónicos contra Palembang* exemplifies how the images lose their referential character and omit specifics in the interests of expressing general ideas. As Sánchez-Biosca (2008; 2009) explains, in many images produced during the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship, the fleeting nature of current events is replaced by a transcendental quality, aimed at creating enduring messages. In other words, the images become

a symbol, or represent symbolic acts, whose objective in this case is to portray a New World Order, and to legitimize the actions of the Japanese Empire and, indirectly, of the Spanish dictatorship itself.

4. TWILIGHT OF THE JAPANESE EMPIRE IN THE NEW NO-DO NEWSREELS (1943-1945)

4.1 Narrative turn

From this point, the representation of the Japanese Empire begins a transformation in accordance with the changing needs of the Franco dictatorship. In February 1943, the Axis armies were already in clear retreat after the German defeat at Stalingrad and the expulsion of the Japanese from Guadalcanal. The Franco government needed to take a turn in its international policy in order to position itself more favourably in the face of an increasingly imminent Allied victory. Franco thus switched back from “non-belligerence” to “neutrality” in the war in April 1943 and dissolved the Blue Division, the Spanish unit sent to support the German Army on the Eastern Front.

How were these changes expressed on Spanish movie screens? Control of Francoist propaganda shifted from Ramón Serrano Suñer's pro-Nazi leanings to Gabriel Arias Salgado's pragmatic strategy, which adapted the representation of World War II in accordance with the course of events. All the newsreels that had been exhibited to that date, including the Falangist *Noticario Español*, disappeared and were replaced by the new NO-DO newsreels. This company began to operate with newsreel professionals from Fox, as well as equipment and logistical support from the German UFA. NO-DO adopted a tremendously contradictory strategy, maintaining its agreement with the UFA while simultaneously coordinating a gradual process of distancing itself from the Axis. It should be noted while NO-DO was the sole authorized voice of the only legal party in Francoist Spain (*FET y de las JONS*), rather than acting as

the mouthpiece of the official discourse of the dictatorship, it reflected the different factions of the regime that were active at any given moment.

In terms of reception, *NO-DO* enjoyed the exclusivity of being the only permitted newsreel, as well as being required screening in cinemas. The news it presented thus served to project a particular vision of the world and of Spain that the viewer had no other sources to compare with. The objective of this newsreel was absolute control of information. However, unlike the German and Japanese film newsreels, the aim of *NO-DO* was not the mobilization of the masses but the demobilization of the audience through a negative depiction of politics (Rodríguez Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca, 2005: XI; Sánchez-Biosca, 2009: 100). The characteristics of *NO-DO* need to be assessed in a context in which, in order to guarantee the survival of the Franco regime, it was necessary to replace pro-fascist discourses with a traditionalism and political Catholicism that would facilitate a contradictory strategy of rapprochement with the Allies. To this end, *NO-DO* articulated a unique portrait of World War II that fit in with the Francoist argument that there were three different wars: the first on the German-Soviet front, where Spain supported Nazi Germany; the second in the European Theatre, between the Allies and the Axis Powers, in which Spain was neutral; and the third, the Pacific War, in which Spain began supporting the Allies as of 1943 (Preston, 1998: 616; Rodao García, 2002: 404-406).

This background explains the gradual disappearance of the camaraderie with Japan on Spanish screens. The strategy was twofold: first, *NO-*



Eclipse in Japan (*NO-DO* No. 103B)

DO continued to rely on footage from the German newsreels to show images of the Japanese Empire, but between 1943 and 1944 only the least newsworthy stories were selected. For example, the news about Japan would focus on the training of naval candidates (*NO-DO* No. 60), tourism (No. 99B), the Diet or Japanese parliament, Himeji Castle, children's competitions and an eclipse (No. 103B). Among the news related to the military, only stories related to the least controversial aspects of the war was included. For example, *NO-DO* No. 46B, entitled *Desfile Hirohito* [Hirohito Parade], moves away from the front to cover the emperor inspecting the troops in the traditional New Year's military parade, edited with footage from *Nippon News* No. 136 (12 January 1943), filmed at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo on 8 January 1943.

Second, the editing began incorporating the Allies' point of view with an increasing number of images from the American *Fox Movietone Newsreels*. Not only did this change have political implications, but it also provided a powerful visual effect, as it presented the viewer with the devel-

opments of the war from both sides of the front-line. This does not mean that the Spanish public had more privileged access to world events; on the contrary, the representation of events was increasingly confusing, decontextualized and contradictory.

4.2 End of Nippon News footage in Spain

By the second half of 1943, the Japanese army's high command could no longer conceal the turning tide. The Aleutian Islands disaster between May and August 1943, where practically the entire Japanese detachment perished and of which there is no footage in either Spain or Japan, marked a change of mood in Japan (High, 2003: 489).¹¹ Images of the dramatic defeat at Saipan in June 1944, which precipitated the fall of Prime Minister Tōjō, were not shown in Japan either. However, *Nippon News* does refer to the event in No.216 (22 July 1944), with a sombre tone very different from that of previous newsreels. The news story contains no images of the battle, but includes a statement by the navy in which the defeat is acknowledged. This story even contains a dire warning about its consequences, as one scene shows a meeting of female workers being warned that from Saipan it is possible to bomb Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and even the islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū. On the other hand, *NO-DO* does include footage of the battle of Saipan, in No. 89B, entitled *Asalto a Saipán* [Assault on Saipan], but the story is much less informative. Footage filmed by American camera operators is used, seeking to amaze the audience with the exoticism of both the location and the American war machine. However, the informative function is side-lined: the importance of Saipan in the global context of the war is not explained and the presence of Japanese troops on the island is not even mentioned.

After the fall of Saipan and the air raids on Tokyo beginning in November 1944, the production of newsreels decreased dramatically. In addition



Nippon News (No. 216, 22 July 1944)

to the shortage of celluloid, many cinemas were closed, seized by the authorities or destroyed. Despite these circumstances, *Nippon News* kept operating until a month before the end of the war. However, in 1945 its footage was no longer reaching Spain (it should be remembered that this footage arrived via Nazi Germany, which would fall in April). As a result, coverage of the news about the Japanese retreat from the Philippines, Taiwan and Burma, as well as the subsequent defeats in Okinawa was provided exclusively by the Allies. *NO-DO* presented the Battle of Luzon in the Philippines in No.114B and No. 117B with point-of-view shots taken from American B-29 bombers. The liberation of Manila by General Douglas MacArthur appeared in No. 124A and No. 124B, showing the ruins of the city after the battle. Kamikaze attacks, which were beginning to be organized in the Philippines in October 1944, were shown in *Nippon News* No. 232 (9 November 1944), No. 234 (23 November 1944) and No. 235 (30 November 1944), and in the documentary *Rikugun Tokubetusu Kougekitai* [Army Special Attack Squad] (Nichiei, February 1945). *NO-DO* presented these attacks only using sequences filmed from American battleships, in No. 137B. Similarly, while the bombings over Taiwan appeared in *Nippon News* No. 249 (5 April 1945), with shots of B24 bombers taken from the ground, the same event is presented in *NO-DO* No.120 with shots taken from inside the American planes.

4.3 Final reports: from liberators to perpetrators

The representation of the Japanese Empire changed dramatically in the *NO-DO* newsreels screened during the last months of the Pacific War. With the fall of the Third Reich, the Franco dictatorship took advantage of the deaths of Spanish citizens in Manila to attempt a rapprochement with the Allies by breaking diplomatic relations with Japan on 12 April 1945, and even proposing to send volunteer divisions to the Philippines to fight on MacArthur's side (Rodao García, 2002: 479-510). In these circumstances, *NO-DO* articulated an urgent retrospective revision of the war, transforming the Japanese from honourable comrades to bloodthirsty criminals. *NO-DO* No. 138, entitled *Campaña de Birmania* [Burma Campaign] (1945), illustrates this process well: while the Japanese entering British Burma had been described as "liberators" in *Un Año de Guerra* (1942), now it is the British who are praised. The montage includes scenes of British paratroopers taking Rangoon, a very different view from that presented in *Nippon News* No. 245 (8 February 1945), which focuses on the destruction caused by American B-29s. In the same *NO-DO* newsreel, the story *Últimos episodios bélicos. La batalla de Okinawa* [Last War Episodes: The Battle of Okinawa] follows the Allies in the Battle of Okinawa, which was also shown in *Nippon News* No. 250 with scenes of Kamikaze pilots.

The latest Spanish newsreel about the war in Asia, *Victoria sobre Japón* [Victory over Japan] (*NO-DO* No. 142A), presents the most abrupt discursive change of all. Ironically, the exalted tone of Falangist propaganda is used now to denounce the atrocities of the Japanese Empire, to which end the narrator holds nothing back:

Japan, the first of the aggressors in this war, launched an international campaign of con-

quest and looting fourteen years ago [...] Japanese diplomats in the League of Nations tried to justify their crimes against peace and decency, then they left [...] while continuing the negotiations, their compatriots struck a savage blow unequalled for its infamy... Pearl Harbor!

The description of events in China is equally striking. Although the Franco government had been one of the few in the world to recognize the puppet state of Manchukuo, the *NO-DO* narration describes Japan's intervention in China as follows: "...China, looted and bled dry, was a scene of desolation and death." The rewriting of the Pacific War was not only discursive, but also on a visual: Pearl Harbor is given a central focus for the first time on Spanish screens, but rather than using images taken from Japanese airplanes (like those included in *Nippon News* No. 82), it shows *Fox Movietone* footage, shot from the American docks. Similarly, although the issue of Kamikaze attacks was addressed in Japan in several newsreels of *Nippon News* in 1944, *NO-DO* depicts them now as a corps of "suicide bombers" with images taken from an American battleship.

5. CONCLUSION

In a context of major political tensions and ideological mobilization, cinema became a modern propaganda tool that was distributed widely, even in times of war. Many of the images studied above were engraved in the collective memory and have played a key role in the socialization of history. Although there were not enough resources in Spain

ALTHOUGH THE FRANCO GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FEW IN THE WORLD TO RECOGNIZE THE PUPPET STATE OF MANCHUKUO, THE NO-DO NARRATION DESCRIBES JAPAN'S INTERVENTION IN CHINA AS FOLLOWS: "...CHINA, LOOTED AND BLED DRY, WAS A SCENE OF DESOLATION AND DEATH."



Kamikaze attacks from the American point of view,
Victoria sobre Japón [Victory over Japan] (NO-DO No. 142A)

to provide news coverage of the fifteen years of conflict in Asia, the newsreels projected on Spanish screens reveal a truly global flow of images. However, it is necessary to interrogate this continuous circulation critically in relation not only to production but also to reception. Although this footage was of distant origin, it produced an iconography of immediacy with the potential to make a local impact. The reproduction of the *mise-en-scène* featuring the Asian emperors on a platform in the meeting of European dictators in Hendaye is an example of these new global phenomena. Similarly, *Nippon News* footage portraying the Japanese expansion in Asia was used to feed the imperialist aspirations of the Franco dictatorship, and particularly of the Falange, which illustrates the local relevance of this transnational iconography.

Finally, the images of the Pacific War are characterised by advanced editing and filmmaking techniques beyond the means available in post-Civil War Spain. Nevertheless, they did not provide the Spanish viewer with a clearer insight

into the events unfolding in Asia. On the contrary, the Spanish newsreels were often contradictory and deliberately confusing. In the processes of migration and re-edition of footage, the news stories were adapted and revised in every context they were used, acquiring different nuances and becoming a kind of palimpsest of meanings. This explains why these images of the Japanese Empire actually seem to tell us more about the changing interests and sensibilities in Spain than about the events in Asia they are supposed to represent. ■

NOTES

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- 1 The Spanish newsreels found with news or reports on the war in Asia are kept in the archives of the Spanish Film Library in Madrid. There are eighteen news stories: seven in newsreels prior to 1943 and eleven in NO-DO newsreels, which monopolized the newsreel in Spain from that year on. Although it may seem so, this is not a small number given the circumstances. On the one hand, many of the newsreels made before and during the Spanish Civil War have not been preserved or could not be located, including the *Noticiero de Extremo Oriente* (Far East Newsreel) mentioned by Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias (2010: 715). After the Civil War, the number of newsreels screened in Spain was dramatically reduced. This is evident in the fact that *Noticario Español*, the precursor to NO-DO,

only managed to produce one newsreel in 1940 and 1941 (Sánchez-Biosca, 2007: 89). On the other hand, NO-DO constructed an imaginary that was practically indifferent to what was happening outside Spanish borders, so the existence of these news stories between 1943 and 1945 is qualitatively significant. Some of these examples have been recently digitized and are available online on the RTVE Historical Archive website (Radio Televisión Española, 2019).

- 2 Japan's recognition was officially announced a year later in the newspaper *Mainichi* on 1 December 1937.
- 3 The title of the copy preserved in the Spanish Film Library in Madrid is in Portuguese: *O Mikado recebe o imperador do Manchukuo*. It may therefore be the version of a newsreel that was first shown in Portugal.
- 4 Nichiei also signed agreements with Paramount and Pathé for the exchange of international news. These were screened under the title *Nichiei Foreign News*.
- 5 Nippon Eigasha newsreels produced until the dissolution of the company in 1951 can be found in the archives of the Japanese public television network NHK. In 2013, they were digitized together with the war-related news produced by *Asahi News* and NHK, as part of the *Sensō Shōgen Ākaibusu* (War Testimonies Archive) project and are available online (NHK, 2019).
- 6 It is possible that the footage in this report is the same footage that appears, at least in part, in the Japanese medium-length film *Dai tōa sensō isshūnen kinen eiga* (1940) described by Akira Yamamoto (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 69).
- 7 According to Yamamoto (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 76), the images appear in higher speed due to the effect produced by the Eyemo camera when filming with poor lighting, and this happened to reinforce the power of Yamashita's gestures.
- 8 This footage was reused in Spain for the news story *Desembarco japonés en las Islas Aleutianas* [Japanese landing in the Aleutian Islands], but it is possible that it was screened as a NO-DO newsreel in 1943, which would have only confused the viewer, because, by then, the United States was retaking the islands at great cost to the Japanese.

- 9 According to Satō (1986: 46), news stories of the war always carried the label *Rikugun-shō ken'etsu sumi* (Censored by the Ministry of War), showing that the footage had been reviewed to eliminate any military secrets or other sensitive information.
- 10 SEU edited newsreels until 1943.
- 11 However, the huge ceremony for the fallen is shown in *Nippon News* No. 174 (5 October 1943).

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Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental aka *Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien* (1942)

RE-EDITING THE WAR IN ASIA. JAPANESE NEWSREELS IN SPAIN (1931-1945)

Abstract

During the fifteen-year conflict in Asia (1931-1945), the Japanese industry of newsreels experienced an extraordinary growth, prompted by the incidents in China in the thirties and by the propaganda needs particularly from 1940, when all news films were fused in *Nippon News*. The images on Asia seen in Spanish cinemas had been originated in the Japanese newsreels, at least until the last stage of the Pacific War. To a great extent, they reached Spain as versions of Nazi Germany's newsreel *Auslandstonwoche*, but there were also other sources. This article seeks to cast light on the impact that the Japanese newsreel industry had on Spain, tracing how these images circulated and determine how they conditioned the local reception of the events in Asia.

Key words

Japanese Newsreels; Non-Fiction Film; *Nippon News*; Spanish Civil War; Franco; Pacific War; Manchukuo; Japanese Empire.

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REEDITANDO LA GUERRA EN ASIA. NOTICIARIOS JAPONESES EN ESPAÑA (1931-1945)

Resumen

Durante los quince años de conflicto en Asia (1931-1945), se experimentó un extraordinario auge de la industria del noticiario cinematográfico en Japón, impulsada por los incidentes en China en los años treinta y por las necesidades de propaganda, especialmente a partir de 1940, cuando todos los noticiarios se fusionaron en *Nippon News*. Las imágenes de Asia proyectadas en las salas de cine españolas tenían su origen en estos noticiarios japoneses, al menos hasta casi la fase final de la Guerra del Pacífico. En gran parte, llegaron a España como versiones del noticiario de la Alemania nazi *Auslandstonwoche*, pero hubo también otras fuentes. Este artículo busca arrojar luz sobre el impacto que tuvo la industria de noticiarios japonesa en España, rastrear aquella circulación de imágenes y determinar cómo condicionaron la recepción local de los acontecimientos en Asia.

Palabras clave

Noticiarios japoneses; Cine de no ficción; Nichiei; *Nippon News*; Guerra Civil española; Franco; Guerra del Pacífico; Manchukuo; Imperio japonés.

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DIALOGUE

ECHOES OF JAPANESE CINEMA

A dialogue with

CARLA SIMÓN
CELIA RICO

CARLA SIMÓN & CELIA RICO

ECHOES OF JAPANESE CINEMA

MANUEL GARIN AND FERRAN DE VARGAS

When we proposed the interview for this issue of *L'Atalante*, which considers the influence of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual cultures in the Spanish-speaking world, we could have chosen to explore a direct, axiomatic reference by interviewing a filmmaker whose connection with both countries is clear and obvious. There are plenty of examples of contemporary Spanish films where the imaginaries of Japan (such as Carlos Vermut's pictures) or Korea (such as the correspondence between *Marshland* [La isla mínima, Alberto Rodríguez, 2014] and *Memories of Murder* [Salinui chueok, Bong Joon-ho, 2003]) are explicitly reinvented, and with very interesting results. But it seemed to us that this type of direct or stylistic referencing—as interesting as it may be—is already explained well enough in the films themselves, without the need to explore it in an interview that could run the risk of redundancy, poring over an issue that was already clear before the first question was even asked. This is why when the GREGAL research group at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona suggested the idea of interviewing Carla Simón and Celia Rico, it really struck a chord. Suddenly, everything that for oth-

er directors would be an explicit quote or reference turned into something much more oblique and intriguing: not an interview whose answers were written before it began, but an unrehearsed, open dialogue on a possible (non-automatic) relationship with East Asian culture which, in two films like *Summer 1993* (Estiu 1993, Carla Simón, 2017) and *Journey to a Mother's Room* (Viaje al cuarto de una madre, Celia Rico, 2018), can be sensed behind the images rather than in front of them, resulting in a free and very different conversation with the filmmakers.

Taking advantage of the fact that Carla and Celia have known each other for years (even before the release of their first feature films), we asked them a series of questions about this oblique relationship with “Japan-ness” that emerges in radically different ways in their films. Although both filmmakers share a special affinity for the physical gesture, which the legendary critic Hasumi Shigehiko always considered the great expressive force of Japanese cinema (rather than the theme or the image), their ways of channelling it, of revealing and interweaving everyday relationships through gestures, are very different. And this is

precisely the most stimulating aspect of engaging in a dialogue about something as delicate and difficult to verbalise as cinematic influences: rather than moving in a single direction on automatic pilot, Celia's and Carla's answers point to a network of details and latent memories whose asymmetry is essentially a way of understanding the relationship between countries and cultures from a pluralistic perspective. If, as Linda Hutcheon suggested, style is a way of coming to terms with the past, these are two filmmakers whose relationship with Japanese audiovisual history is neither violent nor nostalgic, but free and profoundly familiar. ■

You both form part of a generation of filmmakers who, for the first time in Spain, have been exposed to Japanese audiovisual culture and more recently to South Korean film culture as naturally as we have always been exposed to the cinematic production of other countries like France, Italy or Germany. Thanks to editions on DVD, on-line archives, and festivals like the Barcelona Asian Film Festival (BAFF) or Sitges, since the early 2000s there has been a whole range of options for seeing films that were previously hardly ever released here. With this in mind, how did you come into contact with Asian—and particularly Japanese—cinema in those years?

Celia: Twenty years ago, when the BAFF began, I had only read about filmmakers like Ozu or Mizoguchi in the odd book. I discovered some of their films at university or at the video store, but contemporary Asian cinema was completely unknown to me. It was at the BAFF that I discovered all those films that were being screened at film festivals and that weren't always released in theatres or took a long time to get there. That is how I discovered Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Jia Zangke, Wang Bing, Naomi Kawase, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and Brillante Mendoza. What was interesting about the BAFF was that it gave us the chance not only to discover these film-

makers, but also to follow their careers, because at each edition they had a new film. And each film increased our awareness that in that "Asian" label there were as many different places as there were pictures. With its film cycles, the Casa Asia here in Barcelona also helped expand our horizons.

Carla: My first exposure to Japanese cinema was with a movie that I will remember for the rest of my life. In fact, just this week I gave it as a gift to my brother, who is much younger (he is twenty-three), and he watched it and sent me a message saying how beautiful he thought it was. It is Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* [To Live] (1952). My father recommended it to me when I was in my first year at university. My father doesn't work in cinema at all so I don't know why he knew about this film, because he does like cinema [laughs], and every now and then he makes these discoveries. I was able to find it because I was studying audiovisual communication at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), and there's a film archive there that is pretty good. Since I went to university with barely any knowledge of cinema, because I grew up in a house in the country with very little contact with TV culture and with cinema in general, that film library at UAB was really like my educator, in those four years I studied communication. At UAB there was also—and still is—a theatre on campus that was really cool, where they presented film cycles that were really great for the students. I think it was the first Japanese film I ever saw, at the age of eighteen, and I thought it was amazing. After that I saw more of Kurosawa's work... As for what you said about the BAFF, actually I didn't go that often because I was living at my grandparents' home in Badalona and studying at UAB, so my time in Barcelona was a little weird and I didn't get around the city much. It was later that I began enjoying the festivals there. It was through that film that I started to get interested, and then, because of my interest in family and in childhood basically, you could say that Ozu and Koreeda are

two filmmakers I've followed for a long time, but I discovered them later, after Kurosawa.

Beyond your conscious interest in Japanese cinema, having been born in the 1980s you both belong to a generation that grew up humming the songs of Arale Norimaki (the protagonist in *Doctor Slump* [M. Okazaki, Fuji TV: 1981-1986]) in the street and doing the *kamehameha* move in the schoolyard. We are also interested in that emotional, playful relationship with Japanese audiovisual production linked to childhood memories, made up of little details like a sticker, a melody, or the cut of a dress. We are not referring to the *otaku* culture or other intense forms of consumerism that came afterwards in subsequent generations, but to a freer and more unconscious contact with the popular imaginary, from cartoons to merchandising or games, apparently mundane things that reflect a perspective and a sensibility. How did you experience that Japanese boom? Did it get your attention?

Celia: I discovered Arale when I was already more than twenty, in a conversation with friends talking nostalgically about the cartoons of our childhood. Catalan television and possibly other regional TV networks bought the rights to the series, but not Canal Sur [the public broadcaster for the Andalusia region]. And of course, I was living in my hometown in Seville then, so I missed it. The big hit there was *Dragon Ball* (D. Nishio and M. Okazaki, Fuji TV: 1986-1989). I liked the character Bulma, because she had a little box of capsules that exploded when she threw them and transformed into all kinds of things. Who hasn't wished they had a box like that some time? In terms of things that reflect a perspective, I think that little box and something about that female character with a "scientific" attitude had a deeper effect on me than anything else in that series. Goku and Master Roshi also brought a series of images associated with a culture that was unknown then to a girl like me:

martial arts, the kimono... I would say the kimono was the first childhood image that revealed to me that the world was ancient and huge, because where could those women in kimonos that I saw fleetingly once in a movie on TV all be living? I didn't know what a geisha was then; I just fell in love with their outfits, the detail in the embroidery, the sashes, the fans—so typically Andalusian, at the same time. I recently travelled to the Jeonju Festival in South Korea to present my film; it was my first time in Asia. They were celebrating some regional festival at the time, so a lot of women were walking around in their *hanboks*, the traditional outfit, which look so much like the kimonos I first saw in my childhood. It was exciting. I was tempted to buy one and walk around with the women, but I didn't do it because there's nothing worse than feeling like a tourist.

Carla: As I mentioned before, in my house the TV was not something we looked at very often. We watched a few cartoons maybe one afternoon a week, and then the Disney movies and Buster Keaton pictures my father put on for us. As for the TV3 cartoons, now that Celia mentioned that she discovered Arale much later, I do remember Arale, but I had zero interest in *Dragon Ball*. I mean, I never watched it; it wasn't part of my imaginary at all, because when I saw people fighting it didn't interest me. It was something that obviously formed part of my culture because all my friends at school talked about it and watched it and everyone loved those cartoons, but I couldn't tell you the names of the characters in that series. But I did see Arale, and then *Doraemon* (Tsutomu Shibayama, TV Asahi: 1979-2005). *Doraemon* is a series I do remember a lot about. In fact, when *Summer 1993* was released I had two dream trips that I hoped to do for a festival: one was Argentina and the other was obviously Japan. They invited us to present the film there with the distributor, and of course it was a big experience touching down there and sensing what you've come to know about that culture without

having ever been in the country. And I remember the moment we bought pancakes, one of the *Doraemon* pancakes [laughs], which I had always thought were made of chocolate, and it turns out that it's something called *anko*, which isn't chocolate, it's a sweet paste, it's something else [laughs]. So, the *Doraemon* pancakes did mark my childhood, my wish, because of course, they didn't exist here and the first time I tried them was only recently in Japan. But anyway, the sensation was of arriving there and knowing a lot about the culture through the cartoons, and then especially through the movies. Tokyo is a city that has been portrayed so many times by so many different filmmakers that when you get there it's as if you know it already.

Without falling into the trap of exoticism and national stereotypes, one of the most productive aspects of cinema is the way it spreads gestures, characters, and lifestyles to different countries, without depending much on the language or particular cultural codes. To be clear, there is a lot of American cinema in the films of a Japanese filmmaker like Ozu (a big fan of slapstick), and a lot of Japanese cinema in the work of a Finnish director like Aki Kaurismäki. In different but related ways, your films have that capacity to convey something through gestures and gazes that reaches across different cultures, countries, and sensibilities. How has your exposure to Japanese cinema influenced your way of relating spaces and bodies? This isn't so much a question about specific filmmakers or films but about more general questions of mise-en-scene, from pacing to framing or the use of gestures. How the characters walk or sit, the presence of doors and windows in a shot, whether the table is a high table or a *kotatsu* that warms up the legs, the distance at which a song is playing...

Celia: This idea of spreading you mentioned is very interesting, imagining cinema as a constant dialogue between films and filmmakers, as if they

were constellations of gestures and gazes. Often when I hear someone talk about why a film made here (in a town in Catalonia or Andalusia, like Carla's or my hometown) works in other countries with such different sensibilities, the arguments are always the same: that they contain universal themes, that everyone has a mother or has lost one, and so they can identify with these situations wherever they live. However, I don't think it's the "themes" but the gestures that truly cross cultural and national boundaries. Gestures contain emotions, not themes. And in that, Ozu is the master; I don't think anybody else has been able to express so much with a gesture as trivial and everyday as peeling an apple. With the minimum means possible and with ellipsis, he manages to get to the very heart of things. Now that you mention Kaurismäki in relation to Ozu, you've reminded me of something he said about him: that he never needed to resort to murder or violence to show the essence of human life. To try to answer your question, I would say yes, my exposure to Japanese cinema, specifically to Ozu's films, has influenced the way I relate spaces and bodies, but above all I would say that more than an influence he has been a kind of compass to keep me from getting lost. Every time someone would read the script for my film and ask me why the characters spent so much time at home, around a table, without doing anything big, I would repeat to myself, like a mantra, something I read that Pedro Costa said in an interview, when he confessed how much he owed to Ozu and his belief that a film can be made with a lamp, a sofa and a vase of flowers.

Carla: This is kind of a hard question, because I don't have a very strong awareness of how Japanese cinema has influenced me, but it is certainly true that, talking about Ozu, there is something, especially in his children, that fascinates me. Because they're children who use gestures and a... I don't know if the word would be naturalness, but their gestures are so, so genuine, that when I

directed Laia and Paula in *Summer 1993*, my first film, but in general when I direct actors, I think that is what I need to look for. Those gestures, those things that somehow convey a sense of the everyday, almost as if there was no camera in front of those kids. For me this is something which, looking at those films, I thought “I want to get that out of my girls”, and then if only it could be transferred to the adults, but I think that’s a little harder [laughs]. With children I think there is something, in their authentic gestures—not realising they are acting—that is easier to get out of them. It seems to me that Ozu’s children have that, and many of Koreeda’s I think also have those genuine gestures I’m talking about.

And then there’s the question of camera placement, that obviously there’s something in Japanese culture where it makes sense to place the camera close to the ground. For me, seeing all those films also influenced me when I made *Summer 1993* in the placement of the camera to show the girls from their perspective; I mean, if the girls are short then the camera needs to adapt to them. For me that says a lot about the respect you have for the characters you’re portraying, in this case children. I can’t imagine Ozu’s films without the camera positioned low to portray those characters in their spaces, with that respect. And in a way that was also conveyed by trying to portray the girls from that respectful position, at their height, on an equal footing, you could say, which for me is the only way of understanding cinema: treating your characters with respect. I don’t know if I’ve answered the question [laughs] but I would say that these are the two things that have influenced me most.

And then, now that I think about it, there is something about tenderness that I would like to highlight about Ozu’s films, especially because there is something in the gestures between characters, the relationships between them and the family relationships, that for me reveals a lot of tenderness. I think it’s something that, hell, that isn’t obvious at all: for me they are the most mem-

orable gestures in his films and in cinema in general. I think he is a filmmaker who achieves this a lot and for me that is also very important. It was there in *Summer 1993*, trying to capture those gestures between characters, and I hope that it is in my films in general. I think when you see filmmakers that manage to capture that tenderness, for me that is key, and it’s really inspiring.

When defining classical Japanese cinema in relation to the classical Western cinema exemplified by Hollywood, the tendency is to highlight modularity, plot reduction and minimal expression as characteristic features. In *Journey to a Mother’s Room* and *Summer 1993* this stripped-down quality is recognisable, both in the reduction of narrative time (there is no typical introduction, climax or denouement, nor any plot to be resolved), and in aspects like the importance of objects, daily routines or ellipses. In *Journey to a Mother’s Room* there is also a striking similarity to Ozu’s films in that nearly the whole film takes place inside the house, and that the empty spaces and silences take on a life of their own. In *Summer 1993* the presence of nature carries more weight in the depiction of everyday relationships, as is the case in Kawase’s films, and the children’s prominence and spontaneity are explored in depth, as in various films by Shimizu or Koreeda. Do you think your way of filming connects in any way with this tradition? What filmmakers or films have affected you or interest you in particular?

Celia: I remember that after one screening of *Journey to a Mother’s Room*, someone told me that it seemed like a Japanese film. The person who said this wasn’t thinking of any specific influence; they weren’t a cinephile, and no specific Japanese film title occurred to them. It was just a sensation, a consequence of the calm tone and the silences because the characters spoke very little when in reality, they said, we Andalusians never stop talking. Beyond that cliché about Andalusians, this com-

ment made me think about how much of the reality around me there is in a film constructed out of what I know and how much there is of aesthetic positioning, echoes of the films I love. And at the same time, I think now that discovering these films I love, like *Tokyo Story* (Tōkyō Monogatari, Yasujirō Ozu, 1953), has simply brought me closer to my own reality, to the heart of things that matter to me, that it is a way of filtering the gaze, of finding my own minimalism, a minimalism for here. I think, like you said before, that the gestures in the way of sitting at a *kotatsu* have a lot in common with sitting at a traditional Spanish brazier table. In terms of the attention to daily routines or objects, I'd say there is something about the representation of the passage of time, connected to the stillness of nature, which has always interested me, but now that more than a year has passed since my film's release and I can look at it from a bit of a distance, I realise that this discourse doesn't belong to me, that it's an intellectual appropriation and, in my case, the representation of routines and objects is really related to something else that interests me more: caring, the intimate gestures that relate us to the other and which for me are a form of resistance. In this sense, if I had to say which filmmakers have marked me, I would bring Ozu into a dialogue with some of Chantal Akerman's films.

Carla: Of course, I always say that my cinematic culture is kind of random, because I never really studied cinema properly and I take my influences from all over the place... When I did audiovisual communication I had only one course in film history, and then I studied in London, where there



Anna Castillo and Lola Dueñas in Rico's *Journey to a Mother's Room*



Chieko Higashiyama and Setsuko Hara in Ozu's *Tokyo Story*

wasn't a single theory course, so you could say that my influences are things I've learned along the way. Well, I suppose that happens to a lot of people. But in any case, one film that really did seem important to me, returning to the topic of children, was *Nobody Knows* (Dare mo Shiranai,

2004) by Koreeda, above all because I am really interested in children playing and how to film children. That film is basically that, a bunch of children alone at home, and there is something quite beautiful there. And it was also something that made me think a lot about how to film *Summer 1993*, because [*Nobody Knows*] is a film that gives the children a lot of freedom and it has a lot of close-up shots, and based on that it is constructed in the editing, based on those details. And it was through that very film that I realised I wanted to try somehow not to do that [laughs], not because I didn't like it, I love it, but because with *Summer 1993* I wanted to try to give that sensation of filming a video, a home movie. We wanted to try filming in very long shots. In that sense, it obviously doesn't draw from that type of film, but yes, seeing various Japanese films with children that have a lot of that, close-up shots, the children's hands and gestures and their faces, and everything done with a lot of editing (referring to Koreeda now), I realised that I wanted to try going in the opposite direction. But anyway, I mention this because sometimes studying certain films that seem inspiring to you for one reason, as is the case there for the question of how to direct children at the performative level, sometimes it makes you realise suddenly how you want to shoot your film, and what camera style you want or don't want. For me that film was important for that.

And then, well, other films so as to be clear... I don't know, *Good Morning* (Ohayō, Yasujiro Ozu, 1959), I also remember sort of going over it a lot when I was developing *Summer 1993*. I can't recall exactly at what point I saw Kawase's *Shara* (Sharasōju, 2003), but it also has something in relation to the very pretty landscape. But anyway, the thing is too that sometimes it's hard to know exactly what inspired you, and in the case of *Summer 1993*, there are filmmakers that I know for sure were inspirations, and for Japanese films I think they're the ones I've mentioned more or less.



Paula Robles and Laia Artigas in Simón's *Summer 1993*



Yuya Yagira in Koreeda's *Nobody Knows*

Although you have two such different styles, your films share a special sensitivity for filming family life, like Ozu. But what is fascinating is that while *Summer 1993* especially brings to mind silent comedies, where the children (nearly always siblings) experiment, play and hurt each other, treading that fine line between tenderness and cruelty, *Journey to a Mother's Room* recalls the post-war films about adult life and the breakdowns that the passage of time causes between generations, when parents age or die and daughters falter. Does this reflect your way of approaching the theme of family



Anna Castillo in Rico's *Journey to a Mother's Room*

in Ozu? Do you feel the echo of certain films over others?

Celia: I find it rather curious that you would associate our two very different films with specific pictures by the same filmmaker. This makes me think that although some might say that Ozu always made the same film over and over again, his work as a whole covers a vast territory in relation to the family. Of all that territory, what interests me a lot are the regions where children worry about being unable to live up to their parents' expectations and parents worry that their children's lives won't be what they had hoped. And so, children worried about their parents and parents worried about their children are all trapped in the same way without fitting in anywhere. As you suggest, I suppose in my characters there is more of an echo of those films where the characters are ageing and the daughters are faltering, like *Late Spring* (Banshun, Yasujirō Ozu, 1949), *Late Autumn* (Akibiyori, Yasujirō Ozu, 1960), *Tokyo Story* or *The Only Son* (Hitori musuko, Yasujirō Ozu, 1936), his first sound film, which I discovered quite recently and which moved me to tears. What I like most about his films is that the events don't matter as much as the feelings they provoke.

Carla: Well, the truth is I haven't seen all of Ozu's films [laughs]. But if I had to name a few, well... I



Mariko Okada in Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon*

Was Born, But... (Otona no miru ehon - Umarete wa mita keredo, Yasujirō Ozu, 1932), which I saw a long time ago, but clearly in the children there is that thing of the gestures I mentioned before; also, there are amazing scenes between children and all of them have those gestures I love, so natural. How they walk, how they move, how they eat [laughs], I don't know... And then, what I mentioned about *Good Morning*, which I also studied for *Summer 1993*, for the relationship between siblings; there is something quite beautiful between the two brothers which is funny, tender, and sometimes cruel all at once. Yes, I think I would say those ones, but as I said I haven't seen all of Ozu's films; I'm not a real expert. I think in that sense Celia has been more inspired than me and it comes out in her work, I think.

Focusing on the transformation of the traditional family model, Japanese cinema found a unique way to portray the consequences of "Western" imperialism and consumerism in a society that was struggling to keep up the pace of life that it was imposing on itself. As Agamben said, in cinema, a society that has lost its forms of expression tries to re-appropriate what it has lost and at the same time documents that loss. Your films connect with this attempt to document the changes to family life as a reflection of crisis and particular historic moments



Paula Robles and Laia Artigas in Simon's *Summer 1993*



Masahiko Shimazu and Kōji Shitara in Ozu's *Good Morning*

(HIV, the current employment instability), but without dogmas or strident pronouncements, revealing those problems through small details. This is something we also see in several Koreeda films, where what is hardest to say emerges little by little in the family routines, without being explicit. Do your visions of the present connect with this way of interweaving the familial with the social and the political in Japanese cinema?

Celia: The truth is I have never thought consciously about Koreeda during my filmmaking process, but I think he is a brilliant example for thinking about how to interweave these very sensitive issues. You only need to look at how he handles small details in *Nobody Knows*, for example, so that watching children play becomes so heart-rending. As Carla has suggested, I think there is a lot of this very fine and sensitive work in *Summer 1993*. Perhaps for both of us, the social and the political is not so much in the discourse as right in the heart of the project, in the decision, in my case, for example, to stay at home with a mother that nothing happens to, but that everything happens to: when you are dedicated exclusively to caregiving, you stop thinking about yourself, and become the support for the other. I like to think of what Agnes Vardà said, that she has never made political films, but has simply always stood on the side of workers and women. Yes, there is something I wanted to place the focus on more explicitly, but trying to bring it out through the little details. I'm referring to the economic question. I wasn't interested so much in reflecting the current employment instability or the disillusionment of a young generation that is leaving Spain, but I wanted to put the concern about the household economy at the centre of life.

It's something that I always miss in films; the question of money appears when the characters belong to a clearly impoverished context, or conversely, when they have huge fortunes, but what about those forty extra euros a week for English classes that someone can or cannot afford? That reality is discussed less in cinema because forty euros doesn't give rise to big plot twists. I've recently discovered Mikio Naruse's films and they're making me think a lot about this whole question of the economic, the

political and the narrative. Their protagonists are nearly always women, sometimes widows, worrying about making it to the end of the month, about being able to receive a pension or having to depend economically—as society demands—on a husband.

Carla: Well, the truth is I'd never thought about it, I mean, connecting it with Japanese cinema, but obviously there is a connection. For me there's no point in exploring anything social and political if it isn't through a specific story, which in my case always ends up being about a family. Through the family we can explore issues that affect us. I was always clear with *Summer 1993* that HIV was only the context; the film was about family relationships, and about childhood, and about childhood grief and about adoption. But all these themes... we knew that HIV for me was just context. And now with the new film it's kind of the same thing, because it's about a family of farmers who grow peaches in Lleida, and it's sort of about that world and that rural family model that is disappearing in a way. But we don't focus on the political, although it serves as a background, but purely on family relationships. And it's true that in that sense it has another strong link to Koreeda's and Ozu's films. I mean, yes, I hadn't thought of it that way, but it does connect, of course.

Along with these family (im)balances, there are two themes very central to Japanese cinema that appear quite powerfully in your films: the tensions between the rural and the urban (the country and the city, small-town life), and the initiative of women in an unquestionably patriarchal society. These are two key aspects that are not only central to your films—even in shorts like *Those Little Things* (Las pequeñas cosas, Carla Simón, 2015) or *Luisa Is Not Home* (Luisa no está en casa, Celia Rico, 2012)—but also issues shared between Japanese and Spanish societies, where the rural/urban tension and misogyny are both deeply rooted. It's almost a cliché to ask about the work

of Mizoguchi and Kinuyo Tanaka, or Kawase for a contemporary example... But beyond the names, do you see a connection with these two themes?

Celia: It's true that this tension is present in our films. Carla's character Frida travels from the city to a rural environment. My character Leonor travels from the country to the big city. And in that journey, gaps open up. In the case of *Journey to a Mother's Room*, that gap has to do with role models. Leonor doesn't see an example to follow in her mother (or in the country). However, I tried to have the film create a bridge between generations and places: when the two women separate for the first time we discover that in reality there aren't so many differences between them, or between life in London and in the country. In the end, the two have to confront an uncertain life where, despite everything, they have each other for mutual support in their endeavours. In the case of *Luisa Is Not Home*, the gap that opens up between the characters (husband and wife) is clearly a gender gap, but also a lack of role models: another older woman, one who is never home, is the model that Luisa takes to dare to go out every day in a society that is still misogynist. The town or the rural, in my case, is central, but contained in the dynamics, in the gestures, in the characters and lifestyles that surround the protagonists, although I don't explore it visually, as I hardly film in outdoor spaces. In this, maybe Carla and her way of relating characters with natural environments, with the sensations of *Summer 1993*, connects much more with Kawase and the importance of atmospheres and nature in his films.

Carla: In terms of the rural and the urban, definitely. For me, *Summer 1993* is about a girl who goes from the city to the country partly because one of the things I remember most about that change in my life was just that. To go from living in a city where as a child you are absolutely controlled and protected, always living in fear that you might get



Rico's Luisa no está en casa

run over basically, to the freedom of a rural environment where you can move around without any kind of restriction, or with less. And then, also for me it was a connection with the rural that wasn't just happy, I mean, it wasn't only happy in the sense of being positive; for me as well it was an atmosphere that would sometimes suddenly frighten me. I saw it as a threat, "yes, everything is lovely", but I didn't like the grass, or being dirty... or the animals scared me, the dogs near the house where I lived. I don't know, finding ants all over me [laughs]. I remember all that as something fascinating but at the same time disturbing at first. Then I got used to it and I turned into a real country girl, without any problems, and that has stayed with me. But it's true that this change, on a personal level, was one of the things I remembered most and that I felt it was very important to include in the film because it really bothered me and changed something in me: the fact of starting a life in the country. So, yes, in that sense... with *Summer 1993* there is something about the family atmosphere; you could say that Frida's parents—like my parents—have something of what we call, to simplify it, neo-rural; people who come from the city and have made the decision to go

live in the country because they think the lifestyle is, I don't know, healthier, a better quality of living. Because they like it, basically. And that type of rurality is a little like what Celia says, but the reverse of her character, who goes from the country to the city even though we don't see what happens there. They are characters who decide to go to the country although they aren't country people, and it's a life choice, in a way. Although it probably doesn't connect so much with these Japanese films we were talking about because it's a move from country to city. But in the case of the girl, yes, it's a case of discovering the country.

And as for the theme of women, of course, with *Summer 1993* I would say there isn't so much, that theme isn't there. There is the theme of the roles of father and mother, who are still a little, well, like my parents' generation, basically, where the mother has much more responsibility than the father. This is something that is depicted I think; she takes responsibility for the children (for the girls in this case). But it's not so much... And in *Those Little Things*, I don't know if it's there, as that short seems so distant to me now. My intention was basically to portray a mother-daughter relationship, and it's inspired by my aunt and my



Carmen Sansa and Ana Prada in Simón's *Those Little Things*

grandmother, who didn't live in the country (they lived their whole lives in the city), but I felt that desire to film in the country because it seemed to give it more depth and also solitude in a way, in those characters... I don't know if it was solitude exactly because you could also be alone in the city, but there was something about transporting that relationship to a rural environment that really appealed to me. Also because we shot a lot of it in a house that belonged to my grandmother, who went for her summer holidays there since she was little, and her family had lived there many generations ago. So, in a way, it really was connected to my family. But it's true that the relationship depicted didn't really occur in the country; that was a decision I made based on my desire to isolate these two women, who are waiting for a brother and a son who never arrives.

Yes, that question of misogyny... I think in *Those Little Things* that theme is not addressed and not really in *Summer 1993* either. Now, with the new film, yes, a little more, although it isn't exactly a central focus either, but like *Alcarràs*, in Lleida, which is the town where my mother was raised, and there are people there who work on the land basically, and who live according to some rather conservative values, so yes, the role of the woman and the man... You could say that I'm doing a study on that, because I would like to do a kind of portrait, but without judging, and what

I see sometimes is that there is still a lot of misogyny, from the men and from the women, who continue to adopt roles that are now suddenly capturing our attention. But well, that's the next film.

Having asked you both about the tensions between family and society, the rural and the urban, and female protagonists, it seems inevitable to mention one of the Japanese studios that have explored this issues the most—critically—over the years: Studio Ghibli. In several of

Carla's films a unique way of linking childhood and death reappears, with a naturalness that has a certain danger and fascination, reminiscent in a way of Miyazaki's films—the sisters, the forest and the sick mother in *My Neighbour Totoro* (Tonari no Totoro, 1988), for example. And the secret life of objects that so interests Celia, whether it's a sewing machine, a telephone, or a shoebox, is one of the most revealing and expressive constants of Ghibli films, where the specks of dust almost say more than the dialogue. Perhaps you have never thought of it this way, but we would like to know whether they are films you feel close to or not.

Celia: They are films I would have liked to have seen as a child, but that unfortunately I only found out about as an adult, like *Arale*. I would have liked to put myself in the skin of their characters, those independent, daring girls, so opposite to a certain female Disney characters that have done us so much harm. This summer I watched *My Neighbour Totoro* again with my nephew. It was the first time I watched a Studio Ghibli film through the eyes of a child. I became more aware of the complexity of its characters, of the issues it so fearlessly tackles, leaving room for us to fill in the gaps; that is, treating children like adults. I hadn't thought about the connection between *Totoro* and Carla's film, but now that you say it, the mother's illness, the two sisters, that whole part about going into the for-

est, like Frida when she takes offerings to the Virgin Mary or decides to leave, although she comes right back (that's one of my favourite scenes). In fact, it would be very interesting to program the two films together. What I like most about the Ghibli films is that the story, the plot is the least important thing, because above all they are films with visual emotions. As for your question about the objects, you've made me think about children when they play, and how, using any object they find around the house, their imagination travels at lightning speed. I have a few home movies on Super 8 from when I was a girl, where I'm playing with a telephone. I recently saw those films and thought about the images of Lola Dueñas clinging to the telephone in my film; the idea came to my mind that the imagination you develop in a script (like a telephone that connects three characters, that turns into an umbilical cord, that makes you travel to London without getting off your couch...) has a lot to do with those children's games. And the Ghibli films, in a way, connect me with that desire to imagine.

Carla: Well, the truth is I can't, I mean, I can't talk about it because I haven't seen *My Neighbour Totoro*, as strange as it may seem. But now after what Celia said I'm going to watch it [laughs]. But I can't talk about it because I've never seen it, so I don't know... But it does seem to me a really interesting type of animation, and when you've been raised on Disney, to think that children today have these alternatives is pretty awesome.

Would you highlight any other type of Japanese cultural expression that has marked you particularly? As Roland Barthes said, the method of making tempura is just as important as poetry or the ukiyo-e engravings for getting a sense of the Japanese sensibility, so this question is intended in the broadest sense: any detail that has been engraved in your memory and you remember with special intensity or affection, beyond cinema.

Celia: Unfortunately, I have never visited the country, and apart from the images that cinema has offered, my knowledge of Japanese culture is quite limited. I have a very powerful memory of reading Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* (1949). Hokusai's *Great Wave*, despite being a picture so widely published and reproduced, always moves me. And the butoh dance, I think there's something very profound in the reflection on the body that I would like to explore one day. Then there's the food; the first time you try sushi, a green tea mochi or a *dorayaki* with *azuki*. I remember those first Japanese restaurants that opened in Seville's city centre and how I was dying of curiosity to try everything, fumbling with the chopsticks and refusing to ask for a fork. I also remember a friend who had lived in London who was a total expert. So, being able to use chopsticks properly meant you were *a person of the world*. I had very long hair and I started putting it up with chopsticks from restaurants. I loved to do my hair like that, and I started collecting chopsticks of all types and colours. Although it sounds like a trivial comment, I've always loved Japanese hair. When I was little, I even fantasised about being Japanese. There's something about the fascination with Japanese culture that I always found very funny about Segundo de Chomón's film with those very "Japanese" acrobats.

Carla: Of course, it is curious because when I went to Japan I thought: how can it be that such a small country has had such a big influence on the rest of the world? The reason for that. I think that after the United States, Japan is one of the countries that when you visit you get the strongest impression of having been there already. I had the same feeling in the United States, when I went to study there for a year, and I had the feeling of having visited these places because of the cinema, because I'd seen them on the screen. And with Japan you get kind of the same feeling, whether because of the cartoons or the films or all the things that reach us in the form of merchandising when you're a child, the toys

and such, or the food when you're older, because we've all tried Japanese food without being in Japan. So, for me the food is something that, obviously, is very much a part of my life because I like it a lot [laughs]. I remember perfectly—it's a strong memory—the first time I ate sushi: it was with my uncle, my father's brother whom I had met very shortly before (my biological father's brother), who took me to a Japanese restaurant... With my family I had [never] gone to a Japanese restaurant in my life, and I remember, just that, learning how to use chopsticks like Celia said. And then, when you go to Japan and try the sushi there, the food there, the way it changes your perception of the restaurants here is very strong, because there it really is like it's another world. So, I think that the food is something that affects us, or me at least because I like it. And as for the prints, it's curious because with Japanese prints—I don't have any hanging in my house [laughs]—there's something I remember really well, about when I was studying art history at the institute: we didn't study it in detail, but there was always that thing of Gauguin or of other painters who took inspiration from Japanese prints, and for me it was a bit like: "what are Japanese prints?" So I researched it on my own to understand that inspiration of so many artists that we were studying in art history, although we didn't study the Japanese prints themselves... Then I did discover that they were fascinating, and I have gone to the odd exhibition and such, and I think there is something very powerful there too that has influenced Western culture a lot. And no doubt there are other things that don't occur to me right now.

Summer 1993 was released in Japan, and you, Celia, have worked on Japanese productions here in Spain. What were those experiences like? Do you have any stories of cultural misunderstandings which, like in Jarmusch's and Claire Denis' films, might help us to grasp (or laugh about) the differences and points in common between two such apparently distinct cultures?

Celia: I worked on the production team for a Japanese action and suspense film that was shot in Barcelona, Andorra, and Seville. It was a big production for the Fuji network and they were looking for typical settings, from the human towers in Barcelona to the flamenco bars in Seville. I suppose that in every country they make films to sell popcorn; not everything is Ozu. And the translation of the script was filled with misunderstandings and nobody ever clarified to me whether the police officer in sequence 25 was the same one in sequence 80, for example. I prayed that the descriptions I had of minor characters and extras would make sense; I was responsible for hiring actors and extras. I remember a casting call I did in Seville. There were so many helpers and interpreters around the director that the instructions I received were like playing broken telephone and then the local actors asked me: "But who's the director?" I also have an especially fond memory of one time in a sound studio when we recorded the song that would be used in the flamenco scene. I was the intermediary between a large group of silent and attentive Japanese people and a group of very lively gypsies who might break into song and dance at any moment, until we started recording. Although it sounds like a stereotypical image, that's how it was. I remember with great fondness the seriousness and curiosity of the looks that the two groups exchanged at first, and the familiar smiles they were exchanging by the end.

Carla: Yes, *Summer 1993* had a premiere in Japan, and I went there for ten days in June of last year; no, of the year before [2018]. And the truth is it was a very powerful experience, apart from seeing Japan and being able to visit a few places, for the contact with the distributor. Because they are people... they looked after the premiere so carefully, it was something... So attentive, I mean, like they want to do a really good job, and then I realised that everything is very slow because they want to do it very well [laughs]. And then, of course, I was

stuck for three days—no exaggeration—for hours each day basically [laughs], in a room giving interviews; I did a lot of interviews for the première in Japan, which was in one theatre, or I don't know, two or three, but in any case, it was a very small release. I think it was one theatre actually, a theatre there in Tokyo, where they're bold enough to put on more independent films. And of course, these interviews were all with a translator; I think two different translators came, one who spoke English and he translated from English [to Japanese], and the other who spoke Spanish and translated from Spanish. And so, it was really slow, because when they have to translate everything you say the conversation doesn't really flow, and everything goes in slow motion. It's like you say something that might be funny and the other person translates it and then the other person laughs [laughs]. It was something... It was very exhausting, but it was a lot of fun.

As for misunderstandings I don't remember much... I came home with a lot of presents, because they gave us heaps of gifts: little cups, samples, tea, cookies. The people from the distributor, it was something... They looked after us really well. And also, it was a curious trip because it was like there were two sides to it. On one side was the distributor, and there's another thing I remember very well, which was the final dinner we had with them and the people from the theatre where they screened the film. We drank quite a bit, and I remember they do something that I find fascinating, which is they take kind of a short nap... When they had drunk a lot, there were two who slept for a bit and after a while they woke up and went on with the party [laughs]. That's something that we would never do and I didn't know they did it there, but I believe it's quite normal to take a nap at a table for a bit [laughs], like ten minutes. And that, that experience with them was really lovely. Then there was the other side of that trip to Japan, which was because Carlos Vermut was there. Well, of course, Carlos has loads of Japanese in-

fluences, even to the point that for inspiration he goes to live in Japan... or not to live, but he spends months in Japan, in Tokyo. He doesn't go to the countryside to get inspiration to write; he goes to Tokyo. At that time he was with his partner there, and we got together several times and he took us to places he knew, but with that perspective more of an outsider to the city, and he took us to restaurants and bars and that whole nocturnal side of Tokyo... and the karaoke bars [laughs]. It was like a totally different side and a different point of view, to see the city through the eyes of someone who loves it and knows it but isn't from there.

To conclude this question, yes, it is true that there's something, after you've travelled, that things don't impress you in the same way. I remember travelling when I was seventeen or eighteen, when you saw a country and everything impressed you, everything was new. Then a time comes when you've travelled enough that things don't impress you in the same way. Less, for me, places like Japan, and certainly Africa. Because I've travelled very little in Africa and when I go then I'll tell you [laughs], but Japan has that aspect, that however well you know it or you think you know things from the country, however much you've travelled (in Asia I've been to Korea, Taiwan, then India, Nepal, and Thailand), however much you've travelled around Asia, Japan is something different; that feeling of culture clash is always there, and it's very powerful, and it's wonderful that it's there, to feel that the codes are so different, that it's obviously hard to understand. And there's also the thing with the language, the difficulty of being able to find people who speak English. Yes, I don't know; it's lovely that it's like that, that there are still parts of the world so different even though we're so close. ■

CARLA SIMÓN AND CELIA RICO: ECHOES OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Abstract

Dialogue with the filmmakers Carla Simón and Celia Rico about the influence of Japanese cinema on their award-winning first feature films *Summer 1993* (Estiu 1993, 2017) and *Journey to a Mother's Room* (Viaje al cuarto de una madre, 2018) and on the rest of their filmography.

Key words

Carla Simón; Celia Rico; Spanish cinema; Japanese cinema; Hirokazu Koreeda; Yasujiro Ozu.

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CARLA SIMÓN Y CELIA RICO: ECOS DEL CINE JAPONÉS

Resumen

Diálogo con las cineastas Carla Simón y Celia Rico en torno a la influencia del cine japonés en sus premiadas óperas primas *Verano 1993* (Estiu 1993, 2017) y *Viaje al cuarto de una madre* (2018) y en el resto de su filmografía.

Palabras clave

Carla Simón; Celia Rico; cine español; cine japonés; Hirokazu Koreeda; Yasujiro Ozu.

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ve to That of National Cinema”, *Arts*; and “Tira los libros, sal a la calle: el concepto de taishû de Yoshimoto Takaaki y la concepción del cine de Terayam Shûji”, *Estudios de Asia y África*. Contact: ferranidus@gmail.com.

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(DIS)AGREEMENTS

**BEYOND THE SPORADIC
SUCCESSES OF ASIAN FILMS:
THE CIRCULATION
OF KOREAN AND JAPANESE
CINEMA IN SPAIN**

introduction

Antonio Loriguillo-López

discussion

Quim Crusellas

Menene Gras

Domingo López

José Luis Rebordinos

Ángel Sala

conclusion

Guillermo Martínez-Taberner

| introduction

ANTONIO LORIGUILLO-LÓPEZ

Greeted by audiences and cultural critics alike as the successors to traditional mass media as providers of audiovisual experiences, digital streaming platforms constitute a compelling object of interest. Their emergence as heirs to the home audiovisual market has also been studied as a key to understanding the manifest tension between the “global” and the “local” in an increasingly digitalised media context. The use of the internet by the audiovisual industry as a distribution platform has resulted in a complex relationship between infrastructures and services that allow film and television distributors and consumers to cast a much wider net in both temporal and geographical terms. On the one hand, this situation of quasi-simultaneity in the consumption of content may resemble a utopian media scenario stripped of all barriers to access, with none of the inhe-

rent boundaries or restrictions of space and time thanks to universal access to content anywhere and anytime (Iordanova, 2012). However, the logistical obstacles that can affect any region (from bandwidth speed and coverage to content access restrictions arising from licensing conflicts) pose issues that remind us that this supposed ubiquity is always dependent on contextual factors (Evans, Coughlan & Coughlan, 2017).

The promises of access anytime from anywhere that underpin the rhetoric of its promoters and defenders thus need to be contrasted against the irrefutable reality of what is actually available to viewers and how they interact with it. In this way, digital distribution of audiovisual content invites us not only to reconsider the “global/local” binary but also to analyse the significance of the conditions for access and consumption that form part

of popular culture today (Tryon, 2013). This is the case of processes like the participatory environments of so-called media convergence (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), new forms of consumption like binge watching (Mikos, 2016) or recommendations based on algorithms (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016). These are all contemporary examples of how inseparable the audiovisual experience has become for millennials and other demographic segments that are increasingly considered important as media targets.

The growing prominence on these platforms of hugely popular genres like K-drama, Japanese *doramas* and anime (Hernández Hernández & Hirai, 2015; Wada Marciano, 2010) should not be allowed to obscure the sustained importance that Japanese and South Korean films have enjoyed for some time now on the international festival circuit—both at festivals specialising in the horror and fantasy genres (Brown, 2018; Tezuka, 2012) and in arthouse films (Ahn, 2012; Chung & Diffrient, 2015). What is the role of film festivals in this changing context? Academic research on this question has focused mainly on the dissemination, reproduction and consumption of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual production in English-speaking and Intra-Asian contexts (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Iwabuchi 2004; Kim 2008, 2013, 2019), while their reception and impact in the Spanish-speaking world has been largely overlooked. In an effort to shed some light on these questions, in this edition of *(Dis)Agreements* we turn to the festival directors, whose role we believe to be decisive for the circulation of Japanese and South Korean films in Spain. As obvious authorities on the historical performance of these films in our country, the participants—Quim Crusellas and Domingo López (director and programmer, respectively, of the Asian Summer Film Festival in Vic, Catalonia), Menene Gras (director of the Asian Film Festival in Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director of the San Sebastián International Film Festival in Donostia, Basque Country)

and Ángel Sala (director of the Sitges Film Festival)—share their experiences on the ins and outs of Japanese and South Korean film distribution, from the evolution (and multiplication) of their audiences to the emergence of subscription video-on-demand platforms, among other issues. ■

discussion

I. Are there any predominant aesthetic, narrative and representative features in the contemporary Japanese and/or South Korean audiovisual productions screened at festivals (in the Spanish-speaking world)? If so, to what extent do these features favour the transnational consumption of this content? Or conversely, to what extent have these characteristics traditionally hindered their consumption in other geo-cultural contexts?

Quim Crusellas

I think that there are certain “patterns” or models in the Asian films imported by festivals, cycles and exhibitions. The massive range of Japanese and Korean film production has a logical thematic and stylistic diversity, often conditioned by its platforms and channels of distribution. We thus have everything from big-budget commercial productions, with very Hollywood-esque intentions and box office returns, to video products with very small budgets but with considerable creative and ideological freedom. But the best-known and most recognised directors set the agenda for the festivals when they plan their programming, so there are high-quality films that conform to patterns that are totally acceptable to Western audiences, and even the most radical and innovative directors, like Takashi Miike or Sion Sono, in the case of Japan, or Kim Ki-duk, in the case of South Korea, are obviously accessible. At festivals with an auteur label they do seek out more inaccessible, more minimalist and ground-breaking titles, but you find these on the general festival circuit or in catalogues presented in film markets. This means that a lot of the most interesting audiovisual production gets relegated to local consumption in the country of origin, where it already has specific and generally very restricted distribution channels. Everything is globalised and everything is distributed by clearly identified groups, so that we can find films ranging from the “Koreeda style” to the Korean thriller—uncompromising, dynamic, and violent, with extreme, very well-drawn characters and an effective and masterful mise-en-scène—or “upscale” anime films that can

make it into the top festivals, and everyday Korean dramas that remind us of more intimate European cinema.

Menene Gras

Yes, formally you can identify typical aesthetic and narrative features that are dominant in the audiovisual productions that reach us from Japan or Korea, just as there are in the films coming from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Iran, for example, is a particular case that meets very specific expectations: Iranian films, especially those of the younger generations who only began working on feature films after making various shorts with a visible, solid background, have a recognisable narrative structure, plotline and script. However, despite the numerous analogies that could be made between the audiovisual productions of Korea and Japan, the cultural difference is always clear, so that you can easily recognise a film from one country or the other, not only for the way they compose a particular narrative, but also because the specific locations in each case are representative of the actual places where the films are set. Obviously, Japanese cinema has had a longer and more sustained history, dating back to the Second World War, but Korean cinema has enjoyed spectacular growth over a very short time. In less than two decades, film production from this country has begun vying with Japanese cinema. It has clearly distinguished itself despite the proximity that seems to affect the two countries’ models, if it’s possible to speak of narratives that share a specific continuity in their treatment of the image. The teachers of the generations of Japanese

filmmakers who are finding success today are still classic universal filmmakers like Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu or Akira Kurosawa. These directors left an indelible mark on their successors, to such an extent that it has been said more than once that Hirokazu Koreeda was the new Ozu, a description associated as well with filmmakers who have made an impact at some festivals, like Naomi Kawase, Takeshi Kitano, Kihachi Okamoto, Masahiro Shinoda or Tetsuya Nakashima, to mention a few. Korean cinema, on the other hand, has been going from strength to strength with filmmakers like Lee Chang-dong, Shin-yeon Won, Kim Jee-woon, Yeon Sang-ho, and Na Hong-jin, who have been responsible for some of the biggest titles at international festivals. So the transnational consumption of content over the last three decades is not easy to map, given that it has been very uneven, and therefore a more thoughtful approach is needed to this question, considering these two countries in a broader context, to be able to consider it in all its complexity.

Domingo López

As is the case with all foreign film industries that manage to make waves on festival circuits in the West, Asian productions that break beyond their own borders do so by taking their international audience into account. Japanese directors are quite frank in describing a certain style of film in their country as “Cannes cinema”, referring to pictures by directors like Hirokazu Koreeda or Naomi Kawase, who receive much more attention in Europe (often with films co-produced by European companies) than in their homeland. There are various targets in the promotion of Japanese cinema in Europe (a phenomenon at the macro-level that could easily be extrapolated to markets like Latin America). On the one hand, there is a type of cinema with exotic elements and social issues that connects very well with a segment of the public that is mostly female and of a certain age. On the other is a style aimed at younger audiences that

adapts well-known manga stories, both in live action and animated forms. In the case of Korea, violent action films predominate, like what Hong Kong cinema used to be known for. As happens with many other film industries, whether Asian or not, this gives a totally skewed and erroneous image of what is being made in these countries, where most production has nothing to do with what is exported.

José Luis Rebordinos

I think that the Japanese and South Korean films screened at festivals offer a wide variety of forms, styles and themes; from the most radical films, which try out new ways of telling a story, to genre films, which are also selected widely by major festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Venice or San Sebastián.

Ángel Sala

I think the Japanese and South Korean films that have been presented at festivals in the last few years are widely varied, ranging from more independent cinema to very commercial big-budget productions. A certain directorial style has been promoted through the recognition at these festivals, very especially in the case of South Korea, above all with Bong Joon-ho or Park Chan-wook, which also reflects a similar view, especially within South Korea. In Japan it is different. While the talent of Takashi Miike or Sion Sono has been widely recognised, domestically they are not viewed the same way, perhaps because of the type of film they tend to make. A consensus has been established in relation to Koreeda and some anime filmmakers, like Hayao Miyazaki, or recently with Makoto Shinkai. The focus on these filmmakers has boosted the interest of transnational viewers in Korean or Japanese cinema. I think that without the success of Bong Joon-ho or Koreeda, certain viewers would not venture to explore more films from these countries. However, it is also true that the bubble that certain au-

teurs create bursts quickly. Think of the success in Spain of Kim Ki-duk—*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul geurigo bom, 2003) or *3-Iron* (Bin-jip, 2004)—or of Shunji Iwai in France and how forgotten he is to-

day. You might say that the consumption of Asian cinema in some countries is erratic; it still has big historical gaps and moves sort of in waves or fads, as demonstrated by the recent boom of *Parasite* (Gisaengchung, Bong Joon-ho, 2019).

2. What expectations does a Spanish-speaking audience have of Japanese and South Korean films? In the disconnect between supply and demand, what contribution has been made by these countries' actions of cultural diplomacy, and more generally of public diplomacy (e.g. the strategies of official cultural promotion agencies, government subsidies for the audiovisual industry or other programs to promote cultural industries)? What role do consumer groups, audiovisual industries and national and transnational distribution circuits play? In general, do these expectations arising from different sources operate as effective commercial strategies at the transnational level?

Quim Crusellas

The audience grows with the cinema. And their knowledge and preferences grow with the expansion of possibilities for accessing that cinema. In the case of Japan, TV anime, the Japanese animated series that found success in Spain in the 1970s, created a group of viewers who recognised the narrative qualities, and especially the stylistic qualities, of these products. Series like *Marco, 3000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (Haha o Tazunete Sanzen Ri, Isao Takahata, Fuji TV: 1976), *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (Alps no Shōjo Heidi, Isao Takahata, Fuji TV: 1974) or *Mazinger Z* (Tomoharu Katsumata, Fuji TV: 1972-1974) were the precursors to *Dragon Ball* (Daisuke Nishio and Minoru Okazaki, Fuji TV: 1986-1989) and the whole manga and anime phenomenon that came after them. And very soon, types, genres, styles, etc., were established within the anime movement. And today, anime audiences and manga readers are expert consumers of animation, knowledgeable and capable of classifying many different spin-offs from a single artistic source. In other genres, the progression has been slower or later, but there are successful cases, like J-Horror or Korean *noir*. Historically,

there have been the *kaijū* (Japanese monster movies), *chanbara* (samurai cinema), ninjas, *yakuza*, *tokusatsu* (Japanese special effects films) and the wisdom of the classics, like Ozu, Mizoguchi or Kurosawa. Identifying in some way with a genre, a filmmaker or a fashion establishes some huge expectations every time a new project is released. For the producers and distributors of these countries, the support of government departments and the diplomatic corps is good news. It is a good boost for promotion and prestige, in addition to facilitating the release and distribution of their films beyond the local market. And for the public agencies involved it is an honour and an obligation to promote the culture and the film catalogue of their countries. This makes for a convergence of interests. And in this endeavour all the players are important: the audience receiving a sometimes invisible film industry in search of a market, and the distribution circuits with the possibility of drumming up business on different fronts, from pay-TV platforms eager to reach all kinds of customers even in the most difficult niches, to the traditional channels for cinema, DVDs and Blu-rays, with a much more restricted but loyal audience.

Menene Gras

It cannot be denied that there is an interest in discovering new film industries, but the consumption of certain productions that seem to show signs of a welcome reception is never guaranteed. The mechanisms in place to ensure a fluid distribution to all the potential markets and audiences for Asian cinema in the West, or for films made in the West in Asia, are probably insufficient. This is true not only for cinema, but also for literature and visual arts, or for cultural production in general. Why isn't there more interaction in these fields, in a society that shares the potential for speedy transmission of media content and a global market? It may be that the saturation resulting from the omnipresence of screens in our lives is one of the factors behind the resistant attitude that seems such a common reaction to the new, to what comes from far away and therefore affects us less. In any case, it's not always possible to speak of expectations met in relation to the role played by public diplomacy on both sides, if we accept that we can speak of parties on two sides in this field where promotion is essential to get a response from the audience that is supposed to consume the cultural product in question. It is obvious that the efforts of the Japanese and Korean governments have been decisive, both in terms of film creation and production and in terms of promotion. Japan is still the country that spends the most after the United States on exporting its culture, and the country that coordinates the most assistance programs for audiovisual creation and the promotion of its cultural production. Since the Korean government was able to begin implementing these programs and funds for audiovisual production, its success has been indisputable. In both cases, institutions of public diplomacy like the Japan Foundation and the Korea Foundation have also been important for supporting promotion, whatever trajectory they have taken. In any circumstance, they have always constituted a major reinforcement of the direct action taken by these government agencies in their respective countries.

On the other hand, distributors have in turn contributed considerably to boosting these film industries, demonstrating their interest both through the sale of rights to European and North American distributors and in the awards received by productions from Japan and Korea at the biggest international festivals in the Western world.

Domingo López

In the end, it is the viewer who has the last word, who decides whether a product is accepted or not, regardless of the efforts made by diplomatic promotion offices. At most, these offices manage to create cycles for film libraries that often do little more than baffle a viewer whose expectations are not going to be met. If a Korean thriller fan is presented with the real hits of the year in South Korea, they will only be disappointed to find a bunch of parochial comedies and dramas.

José Luis Rebordinos

Spanish-speaking audiences generally view Japanese and South Korean films with the expectation of something exotic, different, with a slower narrative tempo, etc. However, the keener film-lovers, who go to festivals like Sitges or San Sebastián, already understand the full complexity and variety of the cinema from these countries. I think that in the case of these two countries, the importance of the work done by their official promotion agencies is not as great as that done by other countries like France or Chile. I think that here what is more important is the positioning of the audience itself and of the distribution companies—consider, for example, the case of *Your Name* (Kimi no na wa, Makoto Shinkai, 2016) and *Selecta Vision*. Cultural diplomacy, with its focus, also contributes to getting the films of its country programmed more regularly.

Ángel Sala

I think there is a big historical problem with the distribution of South Korean and Japanese audio-

visual content for Spanish-speaking audiences. Dubbing is impossible (it has proven ineffective) and the need to screen the films with Spanish subtitling, with the financial crisis and the decline of specialised circuits, is proving more difficult. The crisis in viewer numbers and their ageing (not only chronologically but culturally) is making exhibitors and distributors look for independent products and unusual film industries that appeal to the tastes of these consumers. And that's where we find a predominant taste that is somewhat conformist and not really open to surprises or visual excesses, which radically filters out a lot of films coming from Japan or South Korea in favour of bourgeois comedies and inconsequential showcases, or an occasionally harmless US indie film. And this explains why Koreeda, beyond the question of quality, finds success with a style of storyline that appeals to this sector of viewers, or titles like *Sweet Bean* (An, Naomi Kawase, 2015) and even some of Hong Sang-soo's films. You can see that today nobody remembers Kitano, who was a success in niche film circuits in the 1990s, perhaps

too violent and rough for these contemporary audiences. And this isn't helped by the lack of risks being taken by distributors and exhibitors, which are more concerned about not losing this conformist audience than recovering a more open audience or attracting a younger one. Moreover, distributors specialising in Asian cinema have all but disappeared, and the ones that remain operate more for home video or platforms. In Spain, the only ones still carrying the flame are Media3 for more general films (and focusing more on re-releases), La aventura and, above all, Selecta Vision for anime, along with some historic distributors of art-house, like Golem, with its relationship with Koreeda. The official agencies of these countries, like the Korean Film Council or the Japan Foundation, have a good relationship with festivals, but they could do more to support the promotion of the product at these forums, as well as outside the festivals through museums, film libraries and other spaces, in addition to reminding us more actively of their country's film history, an educational task that has yet to be fully addressed.

3. The relatively recent success of some Japanese and South Korean film offerings has generally been marginal in terms of box office returns in the Spanish-speaking world. However, they continue to increase in numbers at these festivals. How can we explain this divergence between what we could call their marginal presence in the "general market" and their success in spaces of "specialised consumption"? Might this dynamic be due to the audience's tendency to identify Japanese and South Korean cinema with certain genres (action thriller, horror) that traditionally fall outside mainstream tastes? Might the need for cultural references or metanarratives complicate their enjoyment and recognition by a broader audience?

Quim Crusellas

The general market continues to be held hostage by the major studios. Most cinemas are still tied to contracts with big distributors, which are the ones that have the most promotional channels and outlets. The audience is an American mainstream movie audience. Asian cinema, and

in this case Japanese and Korean films, have a very small but loyal audience. The festivals have become the alternative to this mainstream circuit. They're like little specialist shops compared to the huge department store filled with familiar brands and a sensation of product "cloning". Even so, Japanese and Korean films, with successes

like *Your Name*, *Sweet Bean*, or more recently, *Parasite*, have managed to make inroads thanks to some valiant independent distributors. Asian cinema followers deconstruct the assimilation of Asian titles with certain mainstream genres. The horror genre in Japan is not really the same as it is in the United States, and comedy or detective films certainly are not. There is a certain type of viewer who is more specific about the genre or topic: it isn't just a thriller, but a Korean thriller. It isn't just a "horror movie" but a "Japanese horror movie". And adding the demonym to these genres turns them into something much more specific and identifiable. For decades we have been used to seeing American cinema and it is comfortable for us as viewers when we watch Hollywood movies. But the diversity that we are fortunate to be offered by festivals, new broadcasting platforms, etc., has led to new cultural connections, habits and even ways of telling a story that are becoming increasingly accepted. The exotic is not rejected any more; instead it has become something intriguing and attractive. Asian cinema continues to be an escape for more curious viewers, but it is opening up more and more to a broader public outside the conventional patterns of film distribution.

Menene Gras

What happens at film festivals doesn't have much to do with the products that find commercial success in this sector. However, there are exceptions like *Parasite*, to give a current example, directed by the Korean Bong Joon-ho, which is breaking box-office records in Europe after taking the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival. South Korean and Japanese cinema is not always identified with the horror or the action thriller genre. It might seem that way if we think of the audiences that attend a fantasy film festival like Sitges, where a third of the programming is Asian genre cinema. Films like *Intimate Strangers* (Wanbyeokhan tain, Lee Jae-kyoo, 2018), for example, would probably

never make it into our theatres, although we did select it for the Asian Film Festival in Barcelona (AFAA). In fact, despite the efforts of certain European distributors to introduce different national film industries to the market, a lot of films commonly only get screened at festivals, regardless of the interest they arouse or the awards they win. We are a very long way from achieving an exchange of productions between Europe and the United States and the Asian continent. At last year's AFAA (2019), we featured 133 films and 25 shorts from 23 different countries: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan (China), and Vietnam. All the productions were originally released in 2018 or 2019, except for one in 2017. Of all the countries represented, some attracted attention because their films are already well-known, and a significant contribution was expected from them in terms of what the new generations are producing right now. In countries like Afghanistan or Kazakhstan, there is considerable curiosity about what is happening in the sector, as there is about the stories being told in some countries of southeast Asia, like Singapore or Indonesia, where the film industry is growing exponentially, especially in the latter case. There is still a lot to be done, however, to bridge the distances between countries and cultures that still know so little about each other.

Domingo López

Genre films (whether horror films or thrillers) have always formed part of the mainstream, but Asian cinema has always been part of a separate niche of fans, like manga or opera lovers. It has never become part of general mainstream cinema (with the exception of a few isolated successes) and it is unlikely that it ever will be. Most audiences are used to the narrative codes of Hollywood and anything that doesn't conform to that model

seems strange and needs the stories concerned to pass through the filter of a remake. Beyond the festivals and conventions, there is more access now than ever to Asian cinema via platforms like Amazon Prime or Netflix, which include hundreds of titles from all over Asia in their catalogue for consumption by the Asian population living outside their home countries. However, most of these titles are unknown even to Asian cinema fans, because they haven't been filtered for their tastes and they end up tired of watching things that don't fit with the idea they had of what Korean cinema was, for example.

José Luis Rebordinos

What happens in Spain to the films from these two countries is not so different from what happens to films coming from Latin America, or even from other European countries. Any films that don't come with the support of the huge promotional machinery of the US film industry have a hard time at the box office. And it has nothing to do with the identification with a genre; on the contrary, genre films are popular and commercial, so if that were the case, they should attract a large number of viewers. Every film that is released ends up being marginal unless it is from the United States, except for the odd isolated case. Sometimes there are pleasant surprises, like the big box office success all over the world, including Spain, of *Parasite*.

Ángel Sala

Festival audiences are looking for something different, to escape the wasteland that the film

theatre has turned into. Asian genre films find success at niche festivals through a tradition that was born in the 1990s with the impact of J-Horror or the new Korean fantasy or action genre and that continues into our times in the form of following certain filmmakers or trends, and seeking out new innovations. But they are also successful at generalist festivals and not just with genre films, although the division between genres is blurrier in Asian cinema. *Parasite* is a comedy, drama, horror and suspense, as was *The Handmaiden* (Agassi, Park Chan-wook, 2016), which was an extraordinary blend of genres. Today, horror and science fiction dominate the tastes of mainstream viewers. There's no need to look further than the box office, but based on an American template, at the level of both the blockbuster and the indie film. Perhaps in some filmmakers it is possible to see the influence of Asian cinema on the mainstream, such as in the work of Christopher Nolan, Mike Flanagan or the odd indie director like Oz Perkins, but the Asian stylistic models are viewed today as belonging very much to a niche. I don't think this adversely affects the perception of films from these countries in general, as although there are viewers who identify Japanese or Korean cinema with "violence" or "weirdness", the success of Koreeda, Kawase or Hong Song Soo give it a reputation for sensitivity and detail, as well as high quality. The idea of Japanese or Korean genre films comes from the cult film (sometimes with a massive following), from the festivals, and now from streaming platforms, now that direct home video has practically disappeared.

4. To what extent has the internet transformed the impact of niche festivals? In this context, do you believe that the festival brand benefits more from its role as a content influencer for niche audiences, or that instead it should be identified with the expansion of new horizons through new film industries?

Quim Crusellas

The internet is what the local movie theatre was in the 1980s. The most unexpected films are there, and some of them are copies of dubious origin. And this “guiding” enthusiast hooked into the “torrent” is also a festival fan. Instead of an illegal way of watching a film with no distribution in our country, it has turned into a place to explore and discover titles. And the fact that online platforms have become popular throughout the population is thanks to this launching pad. Personally, I think the internet is an excellent support for festivals like ours. It’s a display window that informs, nourishes and spreads our work; and through digital media and forums from different countries we discover titles in pre-production and advances, and we find out about other festivals, film industries, etc. It is the movie house of the twenty-first century.

Menene Gras

The internet has contributed, paradoxically, to the dissemination of film industries that were previously out of reach, with ease of access to some productions thanks to platforms like Netflix or Filmin, or due to widespread piracy, in the case of films that are uploaded to the internet illegally. However, it is also true that this dissemination has occurred to the detriment of film theatres, where audiences used to share the experience of watching a picture. This has been largely lost, yet cinema continues to serve an irreplaceable function. In this sense, the role of festivals responds to initiatives launched in the sector to show films that don’t tend to make it to the commercial screens, as they are projects that make their particular proposal, which the distributors try to exploit, although not always successfully. Consequently, it is impossible to guarantee that festivals

will not turn into niche events or become content influencers for niche audiences. The expansion of horizons is also still related to the inclusion of new geographies in the context of everything that comes out of the cultural turn in geography, to the extent that it is not only a geographic expansion of the regions where films come from, but a proposal that allows the audience to explore film industries and narratives which, in principle, are unknown to them or not as familiar as is sometimes assumed.

Domingo López

Film festivals function as events where thousands of fans come together to share a passion, expecting certain identifying features in the programming that will ensure that they can repeat the kinds of moments they have enjoyed in the past. The festival thus functions in both ways, offering viewers what they expect to see, while at the same time they discover directors and styles that may fit with their tastes, always within the festival’s parameters.

José Luis Rebordinos

The internet has changed everything. The immediacy it offers allows users to share opinions and reviews in real time. But it also complicates the ability to distinguish between stakeholders and non-stakeholders. We have access to more information than ever, but it’s impossible for us to analyse it in depth. That’s why influencers are more important than ever. And festivals are increasingly occupying that space. And yes, festivals are a good place to access new categories of films, either in terms of their place of origin or in terms of their formal, aesthetic or narrative qualities.

Ángel Sala

Platforms, both general and niche, and festivals are bound to go hand in hand, based on content influencing (which is already very difficult through the promotional press or critics) or promotion. But the activity of a festival shouldn't stop the-

re, as it is essential for it to be researching new markets, emerging film industries and young talent, as well as audiovisual archaeology through recovering titles that were lost, poorly distributed or worthy of another look, and the restoration of indisputable classics.

5. To what extent do specialised festivals have a responsibility to know about film industries outside the hegemony of English-language production? How can they give visibility to film traditions eclipsed by historiography (taking advantage of the interest in certain genres, based on commercial successes that don't get exported, expanding the range of genres, exploring new languages)? And, most importantly, do "peripheral film industries" constitute a source for renewing the language of contemporary cinema, contributing to cultural hybridisation, or alternatively, are they merely exotic contributions to the Western view of cinema?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, this hybridisation is essential. We are not just a movie theatre. We like to show the cultural, historical and ethnographic dimension of the films. In Vic there is a large Asian community that participates actively in our festival. They prepare meals from the countries of origin of each film, there are performances and exhibitions of dance and martial arts before each screening, and at some of them, like the ones dedicated to the Bollywood film industry, we offer a natural recreation of an Indian film screening, with people singing and dancing songs during the film, getting up and whistling when the leading man or women appears, etc. It is essential and exciting to imbue the film with what it has in its suitcase: its origin and complementary dimensions. This turns it into a unique experience, distinct from a conventional show in a Western film theatre.

Menene Gras

That responsibility is taken on in most offerings made at festivals insofar as their resources allow. Obviously, there is an interest in expanding the geographical range of the productions selected for

screening at most festivals, because you always want to be presenting something that is not accessible or has been successful in other parts of the world. It is equally true that festivals don't always manage to give visibility to film traditions eclipsed by the hegemony of the English-speaking tradition or the dominance of Eurocentrism over other cultures. But this is not the case only in cinema, as it exists in any area of audiovisual culture and culture in general. The never-ending debate over the Eurocentric positions that are sometimes repressed but nevertheless still present does not end when you think you've adopted measures to address it, despite their explicitness. There is a lot of talk of Eurocentrism without acknowledging that it comes into play almost unconsciously in a lot of cases. The result of its stagnation is the absence of other worlds that are also our world for our particular radars. This situation exposes the damage that this focus has caused and how hard it is to correct its impact. On the other hand, peripheral film industries make an important contribution to the renewal of the language of contemporary cinema, both for the cultural difference they reveal and for the stories they tell. Without

doubt, despite contributing in some cases to the maintenance of the exotic nature of their origins (as, for example, is the case of Afghani cinema, where audiences expect to obtain information related to everyday life, both urban and rural, in a country about which they know very little), most film industries that the West considers “peripheral” in Eurocentric terms obviously take part in the cultural hybridisation resulting from contact, which is inevitably associated with the contemporary diasporas and other phenomena that have established a need to know the Other. It is clear that this has favoured the renewal of languages and narratives, and it has also had an impact on the perception of those others that we cannot go on ignoring. Cinema is one of the best ways for us to get closer to one another.

Domingo López

It is clear that all international cinema, and especially Asian cinema, has had a huge influence on Western cinematic traditions, especially among genre films. We try to carry out the work of cinematic archaeology through cycles like the ones we have organised dedicated to Panna Rittikrai, to *kaijū eiga*, to *tokusatsu* or to Stephen Chow. We can't fight against the commercial sameness imposed by Hollywood, but we can show spectators that there is much more beyond the mainstream, and leave it up to them to explore it, after giving them a little taste. Insofar as Japanese cinema is concerned, comedy is one of the genres that has never made the leap into the West (again, with the odd exception of award-winning titles) and at the festival we try to give visibility to titles that are very well accepted by our audience, both indie works and more commercial fare.

José Luis Rebordinos

As festivals we have the responsibility to give a voice to different films that don't merely reproduce the same old features of the dominant film tradition. Peripheral film industries often represent

an opportunity to gain access to other ways of seeing. They are usually in countries undergoing economic, political and social transformation, which make films with less money, but sometimes with much more freedom (this is not the case of Japan or South Korea, but it would be of India, Peru or Bolivia). But increasingly, the periphery is getting closer to the centre; the global world is making distances much shorter, but it also tends towards cultural hegemonisation. In any case, what we need to do is get away from the exotic view of emerging film industries...

Ángel Sala

Peripheral film industries are being incorporated into the world of audiovisual culture as a base for information on trends and talent. Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe are all on the rise in this sense, although Hollywood's synergy and sympathetic relationship with talent agencies has many filmmakers very quickly seduced into the US theatre of operations, which itself is increasingly global and diverse and is being enriched (and should be enriched more) by these peripheral film industries. In the last few years, commercial films and Oscar winners have been directed by filmmakers outside Hollywood that have more or less adapted to the system, like Ang Lee, Guillermo del Toro, Alfonso Cuarón, or Iñárritu. A few decades ago, it was unthinkable that a film like *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) would be nominated for best film given its country of origin and its off-theatrical release (Netflix). Yet Cuarón won the award for best director. Hollywood is changing little by little and this has been influenced by many factors, including those peripheral film industries.

6. There are suggestions that the new subscription video on demand (SVoD) platforms are making mass audiences more active and demanding, both in relation to content and to its reception. How does this affect the programming and development of a specialised festival? Are we really witnessing a paradigm shift in the status of the spectator, even in the case of the less specialised viewer?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, VoD is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it helps so much to promote titles that are not easily accessible to the general public and offers them the possibility of enjoying a different type of film. There is very little distribution of these kinds of films on VoD platforms, but there are also social network channels (Twitter and Facebook) that give them visibility. On the other hand, the purchase of recently completed titles released via platforms conditions the programming. Some titles are dropped in the middle of negotiations because they get purchased by Netflix or another platform. But it is always important to find a middle ground, a collateral support, and that's what we have done with Movistar. Through this platform, we have access to some very powerful titles and we can offer a joint première at the festival and on the platform, publicising it on both sides and giving lovers of Asian cinema the chance to see the same film at home and on the big screen at the festival.

Menene Gras

It is no longer possible to talk of an audience, as there are now audiences, which are generally not homogeneous. It is therefore difficult to define an audience and a trend without considering the mix of genres and the evolution of responses in real time. I don't know whether we are witnessing a paradigm shift in relation to the status of the spectator: viewers always change from one generation to the next, but they will always be the recipient that the message in any film production is aimed at. Certainly, we hope for bigger participation and communication from them, and to reach them through common issues which, in the end,

are universal in any society and era that might be explored. For decades now, everyday life has been one of the subjects of most narratives to the detriment of so-called historical cinema, which has been largely relegated to the documentary genre. I also don't know whether viewers are becoming increasingly demanding or more apathetic, although they have better access to films, more viewing possibilities and options and are apparently better informed. There are audiences that are interested in one type of cinema—whether it be fantasy or horror, drama or comedy—and others who prefer films that don't explore issues or make them think about lives other than their own, or another reality that could make them feel empathy for what is happening on the screen. It is clear that people watch a lot of films and read very little. The moving image has a power over the spectator that no other medium has experienced to date. Cinema has been able to take over, because it is the medium of mass communication par excellence, whatever its national origin may be.

Domingo López

As I mentioned before, viewers on VoD platforms wind up lost and overwhelmed with such a wide range of options, and again they need a programmer to select and filter through the hundreds of titles. At the professional level it affects us a lot, because platforms like Netflix acquire most of the important titles even before they're finished, for global distribution, making the role of programmers more complex. However, I feel increasingly happy with this, as it makes programmers go beyond the catalogue covers and allows them to do their work from scratch, dis-

covering jewels and directors that will be important in the cinema of tomorrow.

José Luis Rebordinos

I don't think it is the platforms that are making the audience more demanding. In our case, we've had a very demanding audience for many years, before the platforms began impacting on cinema. What the platforms and, especially, new electronic devices are making possible is better and more continuous public access to audiovisual content, and therefore, better knowledge of that content.

Ángel Sala

The spectator at festivals today is very demanding, knowledgeable and with a level of influence that only critics had before. This is very extreme at festivals specialising in a genre, like Sitges. You can't pull the wool over anyone's eyes when programming or selecting films; you have to explain your decisions. There has to be a festival line. It doesn't have to be literally "approved" by the public. But it should meet expectations in relation to how the films are presented, beyond whether they like them or not. These days the audience creates trends, much more than critics do.

7. What perception do specialised festivals have of the work of critics who attend them? There is a widespread cliché that the critic is not necessary. Does their role gain strength in a context of minimal media coverage and limited academic publications?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, the critic and the specialist journalist are very necessary. Films from big distributors and big festivals have their own media megaphone, but we need the media dedicated to Asian cinema, their blogs, their fan spirit, as reflected in following and constantly disseminating information on Twitter, etc. The big community of Asian cinema enthusiasts feeds off those channels, where they generate followers, and therefore, an audience and an industry.

Menene Gras

The critic's role is, among other things, to witness an event. Even if it is only to make people aware of it, it is indispensable, although their opinion may be debatable and is often not helpful for the sale of projection rights or for the audience to consume a particular product. I don't know whether it is such a widespread cliché as the question seems to assume, but whether the critic is necessary or not is perhaps not the right question. Ordinarily, the

role of the critic and that of academic publications are quite separate, although that is not to say that the immediacy of certain publications covering daily events cannot contain more elaborate discourses like those that publications promoting academic studies by film historians and researchers are supposed to have. It is obvious that the critic's role gains strength to the extent that it can boost or sink a particular title and their opinion can be based on many aspects, which may in turn be rejected by other critics, despite the fact that agreement is more common than radical disparity between one critic and another. Criticism should occasionally be more disinterested and less partisan, but in both criticism and academic research in this field, when dealing with the film industries of a global society like the one we live in, there should be a sharing of interests and objectives.

Domingo López

Critics give visibility to the content of the festivals, although often they don't have the back-

ground necessary to judge a lot of Asian content, and most of the time they limit themselves to contextualising the film they have just seen with the few titles that have been distributed here, perpetuating clichés and stereotypes, conveying erroneous ideas, such as that most Korean films are violent thrillers or that in India all the films are musicals.

José Luis Rebordinos

The critic is very important. They are another necessary influencer. The problem is that these days there are very few serious critics. Most of them are film lovers, expressing urgent opinions, often about the title credits of the films without going further. There is a lot of headline and very little thoughtful analysis. Moreover, the democratisation brought by social networks means that there are thousands of people expressing opinions and that the audience has a hard task separating the interesting from the trivial.

Ángel Sala

The critic is experiencing a crisis produced by the weakening of the cultural dimensions of the media, based on the precarious condition of the media and the lack of a clear method. The festivals have changed; they've developed in many directions, and critics, or some of them, continue applying the same old criteria and trying to survive by means of an old and outdated analysis. There are many critics, not just the traditional ones but also new ones, who come out very much against the activity or the model of festivals, but in many cases the critics are unaware of their operational mechanisms or funding, which have changed, and a lot. But critics have not bothered to investigate and are holding onto a theoretical vision that has nothing to do with the pragmatic reality. Moreover, traditional critics haven't been able to keep up with the pace of evolution of the enlightened opinion of enthusiasts and spectators on social networks or online, and, little by little, they

have been displaced in the analysis of the impact of events and the creation of trends. Criticism is necessary, vital; it is a pillar of the festivals, but it needs to be restructured internally, to undergo a reorganisation and engage in dialogue with the festivals for a new model. This is urgently needed.

| conclusion

GUILLERMO MARTÍNEZ-TABERNER

When you have the privilege of bringing together a chorus of specialist voices to discuss a topic as multifaceted as the transnational circulation of Korean and Japanese cinema, it is logical and expected, and even to a certain extent intentionally sought after, that there would be certain dissonances in the opinions expressed. But the answers provided by this group of festival directors based on their vast experience converges in the explanations they give that nuance certain “clichés”, enhancing our knowledge and contributing to our understanding of the circulation of Korean and Japanese cinema in Spain, which was the ultimate aim of this section.

In this sense, for example, while there has been some consensus expressed about the existence of aesthetic and narrative patterns characteristic of the film production of these two countries, the responses have underscored the richness and variety of their audiovisual production in terms of genre, themes, budget, quality, international impact, etc. This richness leads to categorisations that go beyond the already well-known use of demononyms like “Japanese horror films” to include a particular movement in Japanese cinema classified as “Cannes cinema”, an obvious allusion to films produced specifically with interaction with the European industry and viewer in mind, as Domingo López explains.

A second “cliché” that the conversation here exposes is the idea of “peripheral film industries”. Beyond the Eurocentric and Orientalist narratives, the constant contribution of East Asian cinema to the transnational film industry seems obvious, calling into question the idea of “peripheral” as something distant from a centre of content production and identifying it, as Ángel Sala explains, as a “film industry incorporated into the world of audiovisual culture as a base for information on trends and talent.” In this same sense, the discussion here highlights the influence of Asian cinema on Western film production, especially on genre films, making it a key source of influences, trends, genres, talent, etc., that hardly fits in a definition of “peripheral cinema”.

To understand the success of Korean and Japanese cinema, two basic variables are normally invoked: the quality of the product and its capacity for positioning in international markets. All the experts consulted here agree in describing the production of these two countries generally as being made up of quality films that have been internationalised with the support of their cultural industries, as well as their international promotion agencies, although these efforts to promote the film industry are not comparable to the huge promotional machinery of the American film industry, which in many cases determines box office success, as José Luís Rebordinos explains. Howe-

ver, all our participants stress that the cornerstone of the increasing circulation of Asian content in Spain is not the mechanisms and stakeholders in the global market, but the viewers. One of the most reliable pieces of evidence of this would be how the consumption patterns of millennials have contributed to the rise of Japanese and Korean audiovisual content available in Spain on the main digital streaming platforms. This is an audience which, as Quim Crusellas explains, is increasingly knowledgeable and mature in terms of its preferences.

The disruptive force of technology for audiovisual content distribution, the new generations of European viewers, and the variety of Japanese and Korean films, among many other factors, make it difficult to map out the transnational consumption of the films of these two countries, as pointed out by Menene Gras. But at the same time, this situation has sparked academic interest in tackling the challenge of connecting all these global and local forces into a complex narrative that will help make sense of the phenomenon of the circulation of Japanese and Korean cinema in Spain over the last few decades, possible future trends, and the capacity for transformation of local cultural industries. ■

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BEYOND THE SPORADIC SUCCESS OF ASIAN CINEMA: THE CIRCULATION OF KOREAN AND JAPANESE CINEMA IN SPAIN

Abstract

Continuing with the investigation of the monographic about the porosity of our audiovisual regarding its Japanese and South Korean counterpart, in the section of (Dis)agreements we congregate the people in charge of the most relevant festivals for the circulation of these cinemas inside the Spanish territory to monitor the situation from their role as gatekeepers of these cinematographies. Quim Crusellas and Domingo López (director and programmer, respectively, of the Festival Nits Cinema Oriental de Vic), Menene Gras (director of the Asian Film Festival of Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director of the Donostiako Nazioarteko Zinemaldia in Donostia) and Ángel Sala (director of the Sitges Film Festival) answer to the questions posed by Guillermo Martínez Taberner and Antonio Loriguillo-López on facets of the circulation of these films, the evolution of the Spanish audiences, or the irruption of video on-demand platforms.

Key words

Film festivals; San Sebastian; Sitges; Nits Cinema Oriental; Asian Film Festival; Japanese cinema; South Korean cinema.

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MÁS ALLÁ DE LOS ÉXITOS PUNTUALES DEL CINE ASIÁTICO: LA CIRCULACIÓN DEL CINE COREANO Y JAPONÉS EN ESPAÑA

Resumen

Siguiendo con la indagación del monográfico sobre la porosidad de nuestro audiovisual con respecto a su contraparte japonesa y surcoreana, en la sección de (Des)encuentros congregamos a los responsables de los festivales más relevantes para la circulación de estos cines dentro del territorio español para monitorizar la situación desde su papel como puerta de entrada de dichas cinematografías. Quim Crusellas y Domingo López (director y programador, respectivamente, del Festival Nits Cinema Oriental de Vic), Menene Gras (directora del Asian Film Festival de Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director del Donostiako Nazioarteko Zinemaldia de Donostia) y Ángel Sala (director del Festival Internacional de Cinema Fantàstic de Catalunya de Sitges) responden a las cuestiones planteadas por Guillermo Martínez Taberner y Antonio Loriguillo-López sobre facetas de la circulación de estas películas tan dispares como la evolución del público español o la irrupción de las plataformas de *video on-demand*.

Palabras clave

Festivales de cine; San Sebastián; Sitges; Nits Cinema Oriental; Asian Film Festival; Cine japonés; Cine surcoreano.

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VANISHING POINTS

**SPIRIT AND MATTER: ANDREI RUBLEV
(ANDREI TARKOVSKY, 1966) AND HEART
OF GLASS (WERNER HERZOG, 1976)**

Chantal Poch

**THE BIRTH OF A NEW WOMAN
IN THE WESTERN: BECOMING A HEROINE
IN THE WIND (VICTOR SJÖSTRÖM, 1928)**

Laura Antón Sánchez

**COMPLETELY IN RUINS: BÉLA TARR'S
WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES**

José Manuel López

**WALTZ WITH BASHIR: DOCUMENTARY,
ANIMATION AND MEMORY**

Javier Moral Martín

SPIRIT AND MATTER: ANDREI RUBLEV (ANDREI TARKOVSKY, 1966) AND HEART OF GLASS (WERNER HERZOG, 1976)

CHANTAL POCH

INTRODUCTION

In the opening sequence of *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966), a man who will be identified in the credits as Yefim climbs up to a hot-air balloon tethered to the top of a tower and embarks on a short flight that we will see from his perspective, looking down from a bird's eye view at the tiny figures of the people below as they watch the rudimentary invention float above them. Yefim shouts in excitement, but his elation soon ends when the deflated balloon crash-lands on the edge of a river. This sequence is an untitled prologue with no narrative connection to the rest of the episodes that make up *Andrei Rublev*: a first block comprising this sequence, followed by "The Jester" (1400), "Theophanes the Greek" (1405), "The Passion according to Andrei" (1406), "The Celebration" (1408) and "The Last Judgement" (1408), followed by a second part with "The Raid" (1408), "The Silence" (1412) and "The Bell" (1413). The first

sequence of *Heart of Glass* (Herz aus Glas, Werner Herzog, 1976), although related to the main story, also seems somehow separate from the rest of the film as it takes place during the opening credits. A man (whom we will later identify as Hias, a character who will disturb the townspeople with his visions of the end of the world), has his back to the camera as he gazes at a herd of cows in a foggy landscape. A frontal shot shows us his face, staring in engrossed contemplation; the use of time-lapse photography shows the fog rolling like ocean waves. In the next shot, Hias is reclining in the grass looking out over a foggy, mountainous landscape, stretching his arm out slowly and reaching with his hand into the distance. This will be followed by a series of apocalyptic visions narrated by Hias in a voice-over, accompanied by mysterious images of nature.

These two sequences bear a number of things in common. First of all, both offer a depiction of nature based on movement and mixture. From his

balloon, Yefim allows us to see a landscape where the elements alternate right up to the crash-landing: from river to field, back to river, and then to mud. The high-angle view of the water shows a sky seen entirely through its reflection. Similarly, the opening to *Heart of Glass* shows earth and sky playing at fusing together in the scene of a low fog, while air and water appear together in a thick mist that resembles an ocean tide over the landscape. In both cases, the landscape becomes a space where the classical elements are mixed together, offering a vision of nature as something that is sensed as being alive. Secondly, and along the same lines, both these prologues linger for a moment on the presence of animals. In *Andrei Rublev*, after the balloon's crash-landing we see a black horse lying on the ground, rolling around in the grass. In *Heart of Glass*, the cows that Hias contemplates are shown after their first appearance in a shot of their own, in which the only action is their grazing. The horse and the cows are thus shown as completely disengaged from human affairs, concerning themselves only with living. Nature carries on in its own way, oblivious to the story being told. And finally, in both Yefim's action of flying the balloon and Hias's gesture of reaching his hand out to the horizon we can identify a similar intention: to attain the immaterial, the far-off, by material means.

This last point will serve as the starting point for my analysis. The historian of religion Mircea Eliade points out a concern in this respect, in relation to what he calls modern man: "Tilling, or the firing of clay, like, somewhat later, mining and metallurgy, put primitive man into a universe steeped in sacredness. It would be vain to wish to reconstitute his experiences: too much time has elapsed since the cosmos has been desanctified as a result of the triumph of experimental science. Modern man is incapable of experiencing the sacred in his dealings with matter" (Eliade, 1978: 143). In this article I will argue that the loss of a connection between the sacred and the materi-

al, i. e., between spirit and matter as described by Eliade, is a central concern of these two films, and that ultimately this is the real loss hinted at by a narrative motif that the two pictures share: the loss of a secret of production. In *Andrei Rublev*, the last episode, "The Bell", introduces a new character, Boriska, the young son of a deceased master bellfounder, who to get a job claims to know his father's secret for casting bells, although in reality the secret is lost. In *Heart of Glass*, the whole film revolves around a similar situation: the only man who knows the secret behind a type of red glass that was the town's livelihood dies without passing the secret onto anyone. Like the mining and metallurgy that Eliade refers to, the production processes that appear in both films served a function of spiritual importance in their community in a pre-filmic past: the bell as an instrument for praising God; the glass that is identified in the film itself as what keeps the town alive. Their loss represents the breakdown of a relationship between people and gods or between people and the world.

ANDREI TARKOVSKY AND WERNER HERZOG

The proposition of a possible connection between the filmographies of Andrei Tarkovsky and Werner Herzog is not new. Gilles Deleuze (2013: 105) most famously linked the two filmmakers when he used them as the clearest examples of his concept of the "crystal-image". What this article aims to do is to delve deeper into this connection between Andrei Tarkovsky and Werner Herzog, previously identified on a number of occasions but never specifically explored through a comparative analysis of two of their films which, as I will argue here, reflect certain thematic commonalities that are more than superficial, with a view to shedding light on some of the concerns that mark all their work. My hypothesis is that underlying the shared motif of the secret of a lost craft is the

same thematic core: the loss of the relationship between matter and spirit.

The only recorded reference made by one of these two directors to the other is the following statement by Herzog: "Figures like Tarkovsky have made some beautiful films, but he is, I fear, too much the darling of the French intellectuals, something I suspect he worked a little bit towards" (Cronin, 2002: 137). Despite this refusal to acknowledge Tarkovsky as an influence on his own work—a refusal consistent with his persistent dismissals of any type of influence that he himself has not identi-

fied—it is reasonable to expect that Herzog has at least had some contact with Tarkovsky's work, bearing in mind his interest in Russian culture, about which he has made three documentaries: *Glocken*

aus der Tiefe - Glaube und Aberglaube in Rußland [Bells from the Deep - Faith and Superstition in Russia] (Werner Herzog, 1993), exploring certain age-old religious traditions; *Happy People: A Year in the Taiga* (Werner Herzog and Dmitry Vasyukov, 2010), dedicated to the admirable work of the hunters of the Siberian woodlands (which, in what may or may not be a mere coincidence, includes Tarkovsky's nephew, Mikhail, among its protagonists); and *Meeting Gorbachev* (Werner Herzog and Andre Singer, 2018), the director's last film to date, based on interviews with the Soviet leader. In relation to this last film, Herzog remarked that he sought "to find something that is not only his own soul, but in a way the soul of Russia" (AFP News Agency, 2018). Any artist interested in the "soul of Russia"—a concept he has also referred to on previous occasions (Cronin, 2002: 252)—would necessarily have to be interested in the work of Andrei Tarkovsky, who has explored the theme so deeply.

**A SERIES OF COMMON THEMES EMERGE:
MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE,
MAN'S STRUGGLE TO EXIST IN THE
WORLD, AND A CONCERN WITH THE ERA
IN WHICH THEY LIVE.**

Both directors are frequently placed in the ambiguous category of cinematic modernity: the New East Cinema and New German Cinema, respectively. And both elude such categorisations, being studied as unique cases in their respective contexts. Both are classified as auteurs and have been widely studied by academics, while also achieving some degree of commercial success at different stages of their careers. If we leave aside the question of actual connections between the filmmakers to explore the places where the films themselves share common ground, a series of

common themes emerge: man's relationship with nature, man's struggle to exist in the world, and a concern with the era in which they live. Both directors would explore these concerns outside their films: the publication of Tarkovsky's book

Sculpting in Time (1985), as well as his diaries, poems, Polaroids, and many of his lectures, reveals a filmmaker who was also able to explore the issues that concerned him from a theoretical perspective; in Werner Herzog's case, *Conquest of the Useless* (2004)—essentially a journal of the filming of *Fitzcarraldo* (Werner Herzog, 1982)—and *Of Walking in Ice* (1978)—a kind of diary of his pilgrimage on foot from Munich to Paris on a mission to save Lotte Eisner—are texts with the same power as his films, to which we should add his interviews, press conferences and other appearances, which pile up year after year like reams of footnotes to his equally prolific filmography.

The two auteurs have also produced a similar reaction among critics who have given special attention to the more Romantic aspects of their work. Tarkovsky has been identified as "one of the last Romantics", offering "depictions of man faced with the immensity of nature, in a spirit close to the nineteenth-century movement that had one

of its greatest visual models in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich" (Tejeda, 2010: 60), and his films would be noted for their many "privileged elements of Romanticism" (Arroyo, 2012: 115). Of Herzog it has been asserted that "he appropriates all the German Romantics (including their precursors)" (Carrère, 1982: 55) and that his films "re-imagine overlooked aspects of Romanticism" (Johnson, 2016: 2), a connection that Herzog himself, following its tradition, is averse to (Cronin, 2002: 135).

SPIRIT AND MATTER

The connection with Romanticism is more than merely aesthetic. Romantic philosophers and artists mourned over what they felt was an abandonment of the spiritual in favour of the rational. Considering this same concern, Tarkovsky would write: "I am convinced that we now find ourselves on the point of destroying another civilisation entirely as a result of failing to take account of the spiritual side of the historical process. We don't want to admit to ourselves that many of the misfortunes besetting humanity are the result of our having become unforgivably, culpably materialistic. Seeing ourselves as the protagonists of science, and in order to make our scientific objectivity the more convincing, we have split the one, indivisible human process down the middle, thereby revealing a solitary but clearly visible spring, which we declare to be the prime cause of everything" (Tarkovsky, 1989: 239-240). The idea of splitting the material and spiritual sides of things, also expressed in Alexander's monologues in *The Sacrifice* (Offret, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986), in a way marks the life of Andrei Rublev, with his quest to find a means of expressing the invisible on a palpable canvas.

Heart of Glass examines the same issue. How can ordinary glass be turned into that ruby glass which, in the words of one of the townspeople, "contains the life of the town" and, in the words

of the prince, "protects us from the evils of the universe"? There is something divine in this glass that has been lost. The heart of men is no longer in the red glass; matter and spirit have been split in two. In the scene where a servant girl is invited into the prince's room, a painting underscores the matter: Saint Francis of Assisi receiving his stigmata, the divine leaving its mark on the flesh. Herzog's decision to subject the actors to hypnosis for their performances also creates the impression that the townspeople are living without souls. In their hypnotised state, their speech and gestures look strange, disengaged from their meaning. The split between the material and the non-material exhibits another symptom here: a speech pathology, also expressed in *Andrei Rublev* in the form of muteness.

The spatial configuration of *Heart of Glass* reflects this too: "a clear topographic and poetic realm in opposition to a philosophical, almost alchemical, bewildering realm. On one side, the town; on the other, the mountainous natural environment that surrounds it" (Carrère, 1982: 38-39). It is perhaps this parallel that gives rise to the need in the film to keep returning to nature, repeatedly observing it as if to show something else. Prominent in these scenes is the view of nature as something living, already hinted at in the prologue, marked by a special attention to the coexistence of and conflict between elements. The film's opening sequence could be read as an encapsulation of this: Hias contemplates the formation of a cloud as it grows thicker, until a fade turns the motion of the cloud into the motion of waterfalls with the same white and blue hues as the previous landscape. Then we are offered the image of a kind of boiling mud, a material reflection of the mixture of water and fire. This slow evolution of water into boiling liquid—and fire-water, as Bachelard (1966: 143) describes alcohol, will have an extremely important presence in the film as well—culminating in the fire that burns down the factory, a fury of flames in the night. The landscapes filmed in Yel-

lowstone Park, interspersed with shots of Bavaria, show smouldering lakes, lakes that belch fire and swallow trees, salt that looks like snow, earth that does not look like earth.

This juxtaposition of elements is also a prominent feature in *Andrei Rublev*. Chion points out how in the opening sequence of the balloon a man “rises up from the earth and looks down from above to water thanks to fire, before falling down into the mud” (Chion, 2007: 17). During the pagan celebration witnessed by the protagonist the lit torches blur with the river, and just before the beginning of “The Bell”, a piece of burning coal suddenly gives off smoke when it is thrown to the snowy ground. The potential fire is thus put out by frozen water. The elements struggle against one another and come together; to look at them is to look at the possibility of union with the world, and the possibility of hitting upon the right mixture to make the ruby glass or the ringing bell. In both films, the attention to nature, its elevation to the category of landscape, reflects the definition that Georg Simmel gives of nature as a “spiritual configuration” (Simmel, 2013: 9, 20). The lingering on a scene of pure natural matter, the decision to present it and thus to compare it to the events in the film, imbues it with another dimension.

LOOKING BEYOND

In describing Werner Herzog’s films, Radu Gabrea writes: “[a] meditation on the inner/outer relationship, expressed through the here/there relationship, accompanies all his images. [...] What characterises his shots is an insistence of the gaze placed on the landscapes shown, a kind of lingering of the camera that here adopts a function of observation” (Gabrea, 1986: 184). This “function of observation” is made perfectly explicit in *Heart of Glass* through the character Hias, a prophet for his town. As Gabrea suggests, “his function of guarding [garder] the secrets of nature goes hand in hand with his role of observing [regarder]

them” (Gabrea, 1986: 184). From the beginning of the film, when we see him engrossed in his contemplation of nature, to the end, when he fights with a bear that only he can see, and with all his visions and the doubt over their veracity (“I only say what I see; whether to believe it or not is up to you”), Hias develops a whole dialectic of vision over the course of the film: Is what I see real? Does everyone else see the same thing? Hias, looking at the horizon, says: “I see a new earth.” This idea of a new earth, a new world, is an idea explored by both directors: in Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes, 1972), *Fitzcarraldo*, and all his “travel” documentaries; and in Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (Solyaris, 1972) and *Nostalghia* (1983). In Herzog’s exploration of the secondary levels of perception, Hias emerges as a bearer of the ability to see beyond, to see the earth as “new”, as if he were treading upon it for the first time.

About *Andrei Rublev* Tarkovsky would write: “The monk Rublev looked at the world through the naive eyes of a child and preached that we must not resist evil, that we must love our neighbour” (1989: 233-234). Andrei, like Hias, sees the world through new eyes. It seems reasonable to assume that what interests Tarkovsky about Andrei Rublev’s paintings is this very gift: in *The Sacrifice*, when Alexander admires some of the artist’s prints, he remarks: “What wisdom and spirituality, and childlike innocence too!” The ability to see as a child does is also the ability to perceive what others do not. Both Hias and Andrei maintain a special connection to the spiritual, a bond that those around them do not fully understand. In his exploration of cinema, Amedée Ayfre quotes the definition of the sacred offered by Malraux: “the presence of another world. Not necessarily infernal or celestial, not just a world after death; a present beyond this one. For the sacred, on different levels, the real is appearance and there is something else, which is not appearance and is not always called God” (Ayfre, 1969: 6). It is the vision of this other world, this new dimension beyond the

material, that both Hias and Rublev are reaching for; something that those around them have lost. The glass and the bell, without their secret, are mere appearance.

SPIRIT OR MATTER

Like Malraux's definition, Hias's and Andrei's gift goes beyond a specific religion. In both films we find an evident wariness of the Church. In *Andrei Rublev*, Theophanes the Greek displays a far from humanitarian attitude, while Kirill is shown to be terribly jealous. The film is sympathetic to the pagans, who are persecuted because of their faith. Moreover, Andrei himself expresses doubts about his own beliefs throughout the film. *Heart of Glass* portrays a superstitious town and a prince who, although surrounded by Christian iconography, mixes it with superstition and even cruelty. It is an artificial faith that is not inspired by humanity. In his prophecies of the end of the world, Hias mentions a crazed Pope who appoints a goat as his successor. The greatest act of faith in this context comes as spontaneously as Boriska's gaze to the sky while they are digging the pit for the bell; a gesture so powerful that the camera will follow him until he has become tiny in the shot. At that moment, all that remains in the frame are Boriska's gaze, a dove flying across the image and a tree.

And yet, at the same time, the rational is shown to be useless, ineffective. Yefim's Promethean endeavour to fly will be punished with death. We can find a repetition of this theme of the punished flight with Icarus in *The White Diamond* (Werner Herzog, 2004), where the protagonist, Graham Dorrington, determined to fly over the Kaieteur Falls in an airship, tells of how his predecessor and idol died in a similar mission. Herzog had explored the human desire to fly previously in *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* (Die große Ekstase des Bildschnitzers Steiner, Werner Herzog, 1974) and *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (Werner

Herzog, 1997). If these episodes tell us anything it is that technology is not infallible, that rational knowledge can fail. In *Andrei Rublev*, Boriska takes a little clay and squeezes it in his hand. He moulds it, brings it up to his ear to listen to it, breaks it in two, and puts it back together. His decision that it is no good for his purpose is not based on any kind of rational analysis; it is a sensory decision, made by his hands, eyes and ears. Both Yefim with his balloon and Graham Dorrington with his airship will fail. But that is because they have tried to fly rationally. At the beginning of *Ivan's Childhood* (Ivanovo detstvo, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1962), the little protagonist (who, significantly, is played by Nikolai Burliaev, the same actor who will later portray Boriska), rises slowly up off the ground and looks down laughing at the landscape below him. At the end of *Invincible* (Werner Herzog, 2001), the protagonist propels his little brother along until their hands break apart and he watches as his brother takes off in flight. In both cases this ascent into the sky, impossible in the realm of the real, becomes possible in the realm of dream and vision. The ascent occurs through the irrational world.

This wariness of both reason and religion places both films in the context of post-secular cinema, a label based on the philosophy associated with filmmakers like Terrence Malick, Lars von Trier, Ingmar Bergman and, of course, Tarkovsky (Caruana and Cauchi, 2018: 3; Bradatan, 2014: 10). Caruana and Cauchi describe the concept as follows: "The term captures the work of those filmmakers whose films explicitly hover over that grey zone that dissolves the strict boundaries that are often established between belief and unbelief" (Caruana and Cauchi, 2018: 1). Post-secularism questions the narrative of the contemporary decline of religion, but at the same time rejects the idea of a return to traditional religion. *Andrei Rublev* includes the following dialogue between the monk Kirill and Theophanes the Greek regarding Andrei's paintings:

—Remember what Epiphanius said about Sergius's virtue: "Simplicity without flourish." That's what it is.

It's holy. Simplicity without flourish.

—I see you're clever.

—Really? Wouldn't it be better to follow your heart's calling in the darkness of the irrational?

—Too much wisdom brings much sorrow.

—He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow.

Knowledge will not come from science or technology, or from religion. Then what are we left with? Personal faith; the inner force that has nothing to do with institutions. This "darkness of the irrational" is the place shared by Tarkovskians and Herzogians, people moved by a faith without an object, based simply on the believing subject. Amit Chaudhuri (2018: 16) associates *Andrei Rublev* with a concept developed by Harold Bloom, known as *belatedness*, the feeling of having been born at the wrong moment in history. Indeed, Andrei does not seem to fit into his historical period; he is a peaceful individual committed to his ideas, prepared to sacrifice everything for art in an age when the notion of the artist has barely even emerged. This drive to self-sacrifice is a testimony to the fact that these are not films in favour of religion, but of faith. Institutionalised religion is depicted as artificial, as an obstacle between man and his union with a sacredness that resides instead in nature. Hias and Andrei turn their backs on society; they are presented as solitary individuals pushing against the grain in a world viewed as dysfunctional. When we see Hias for the first time, nothing distinguishes him from Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. We cannot see his face: shown as an anonymous silhouette, he recalls the *rückenfiguren* so common in Romantic painting, figures with their back to the viewer, solitary and ambivalent according to Rafael Argullol, suggestive of "the devastating realisation of their own smallness in the face of the immensity" (Argullol, 1987: 47). These figures

with their back to the viewer appear frequently in the filmographies of both directors—such as the famous opening scene to *The Mirror* (Zerkalo, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975), where the mother sits waiting on the border fence of the family home—and in its absence, other aesthetic resources suggest the same idea: emphasising the relationship between foreground and background, presenting the characters as tiny figures in the midst of a vast landscape or their disappearance in the distance.

ART

But without science or religion, where can man place his trust? In creation. What moves Andrei to create is the same thing that moves Yefim to fly: faith and science are two sides of the same quest for knowledge that is denied to us. France Farago defines Tarkovsky's filmmaking this way: "to make us guess and feel, to suggest the impalpable presence of Being, of God: such is the role he assigns to his art, the vocation he vindicates" (Farago, 1986: 25). Herzog, in *Tokyo-Ga* (Wim Wenders, 1985), offers what would be the best manifesto of his filmmaking: "Everything should be very simple and there should only be pure images. Looking at all those buildings, it is impossible to see them as solitary images. We would have to dig like an archaeologist, to dig... until we could find something pure in this decadent landscape." This decadent landscape is the landscape of empty matter, and the solution involves looking beyond, like Andrei and Hias; to dig with the gaze.

It is easy to see a metaphor for the filmmaking process in the production processes depicted in both films, as both are presented in their dual nature as technological processes and acts of creation. The processes shown in the fragments chosen are enveloped in a certain aura of occultism; in the bell this begins as molten metal, a metal that is a dream of strength, of excessive fire (Bachelard, 1994: 265), and culminating in a scene filled with luminous clouds of smoke

against which Boriska's complexion looks blackened, populated with hundreds of people in motion, throwing water over themselves, crossing the shot between light and shade, and with roaring machinery that forces the characters to communicate by shouting. *Heart of Glass* also features the imagery of the factory in operation, at once fascinating and dangerous, with the molten glass running red-hot and the (real-life) workers sweating, in an atmosphere that Heringman (2012: 256) identifies with the paintings of Joseph Wright of Derby and the industrial subgenre of Romantic painting. Both processes are shrouded in confusion and mystery, with the lost secret of production being substituted by an element that is beyond human comprehension: Boriska pretends to know the secret of the bell, which, by some miracle, will ultimately end up ringing perfectly; on the other hand, the secret of the ruby glass, according to the crazed owner of the glass factory, must involve the addition to the mixture of a virgin woman's blood. Instead of being the products of scientific knowledge, the bell and the ruby glass are both associated with a ritual creation, an archaic alchemical process to which the plots of age-old stories will contribute. As Eliade puts it, "[t]o make' something means knowing the magic formula which will allow it to be invented or to 'make it appear' spontaneously. In virtue of this, the artisan is a connoisseur of secrets, a magician; thus all crafts include some kind of initiation and are handed down by an occult tradition" (Eliade, 1978: 101-102).

The bell and the ruby glass are not just any objects. The bell, with its significance in the Christian imaginary (Herzog also revealed an interest in the instrument and its role in Russian culture in *Glocken aus der Tiefe - Glaube und Aberglaube in Rußland*), is suggestive of transcendence and as-

BOTH THE STEAMING LAKES AND BUBBLING MUD IN HEART OF GLASS AND THE MIRE THAT MARKS THE WHOLE JOURNEY OF ANDREI RUBLEV ARE ALSO, AND ABOVE ALL, HOT MOISTURE.

cent. The glass possesses the magic of transparency and the igneous force of the colour red, presented as having a narrative quality in the playful story that the servant girl Ludmilla constructs around a dining set made from this material: "How strange, a whole city made of glass, with people living in it. How can people live in glass houses? Here the church is made of glass. There are animals living in the church, all kinds of animals: hares, chickens, deer, birds, cows... But there are no people in the church. The streets are empty."

The processes shown are not artistic processes per se, but in this mystical depiction they are more than merely industrial. Between technology and art, as between the painter-magician and the cameraman-surgeon described by Walter Benjamin (2012: 48), there is a very blurred boundary and a single concept in common: the concept of creation. Creation as a concept is less cultural and more elemental than art, which

explains the importance that it has in the work of Tarkovsky and Herzog, both of whom reject the traditional definitions of art and are inclined to mock what they understand as "art for art's sake". In the films of both directors, creating is of greater importance than the end result. According to Farago, the secret of creation is one of the essential themes in *Andrei Rublev*, a film whose message he interprets to be "when the sacred dies, art expires" (Farago, 1986: 26). Every creation is the repetition of a cosmogony, a repetition of the first act of all; to lose the secret of creation is to lose our connection with this original sacredness.

Both the steaming lakes and bubbling mud in *Heart of Glass* and the mire that marks the whole journey of *Andrei Rublev* are also, and above all, hot moisture. In the words of Bachelard: "In many cosmogonies, hot moisture is the foundational principle. It is what animates lifeless earth and brings

living forms out of it" (Bachelard, 1978: 155). Water mixed with earth produces mud and clay, the primordial experiences of matter, yet to be shaped (Bachelard, 1978: 161), offering us a present-day view in the collective imaginary of the origin of the world, of its primal force. It is thus a landscape that is still taking shape (like the one suggested in *Fitzcarraldo*), promising a creation. The constant movement of nature in these films, its bubbling activity, speaks to us of an almost alchemical process. When asked about the possibility of this idea in *Heart of Glass*, Herzog replied: "I am wary of speaking of alchemy, but yes, there is a quest inside each one; it is what makes us human"¹. The result of this process is the union of Everything. After the miracle has occurred, the production of the bell without the knowledge of its secret, Boriska and Andrei embrace in the mud, as if fusing with it, in a gesture reminiscent of a Russian ritual of "confession to the earth" (Spidlik, 1986: 346, quoted in Muguiro, 2013: 31). As Tejeda points out, this moment is echoed when the protagonist hugs the earth in *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979) (Tejeda, 2011: 58), but it can also be seen in *Salt and Fire* (Werner Herzog, 2016), when Dr. Laura Sommerfeld, along with the two children who have been abandoned together with her in the salt desert, lies down to listen for sounds beneath the ground. Man and earth touch one another.

The quest in both films ends with new births: the appearance of Andrei's artwork in colour and the arrival on an island in the middle of the ocean. In both cases, these final visions begin with a pile of smoking wood, evoking the hearth, the place where the first tales were told. Andrei's paintings and the beginning of a new story about a group of men who decide to embark on a voyage into the unknown appear this way, as tales. If the production of the bell and the production of the red glass required the union of spirit and matter, the epilogues to both films seem to be telling us that this reconciliation occurs in art as well. ■

NOTES

- 1 Quoted from the audio commentary for *Heart of Glass* in the British Film Institute DVD edition.

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SPIRIT AND MATTER. ABOUT ANDREI RUBLEV (ANDREI TARKOVSKI, 1966) AND HEART OF GLASS (WERNER HERZOG, 1976)

Abstract

Andrei Rublev (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966) and *Heart of Glass* (Werner Herzog, 1976) both explore the theme of the loss of a secret of production: casting a bell in the first case; making ruby glass in the second. In this article, I will argue that behind this thematic coincidence lies a shared concern with the separation of spirit from matter.

Key words

Andrei Tarkovski; Werner Herzog; Creation; Vision; Post-secular Cinema; Spirit

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ESPÍRITU Y MATERIA. SOBRE ANDREI RUBLEV (ANDREI TARKOVSKI, 1966) Y CORAZÓN DE CRISTAL (WERNER HERZOG, 1976)

Resumen

Andrei Rublev (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966) y *Corazón de cristal* (Werner Herzog, 1976) coinciden temáticamente en la pérdida de un secreto de fabricación, el de una campana en el primer caso y el de un cristal rubí en el segundo. En este artículo argumentaremos que detrás de esta coincidencia temática se esconde una preocupación común por la separación entre espíritu y materia.

Palabras clave

Andrei Tarkovski; Werner Herzog; creación; visión; cine postsecular; espíritu

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THE BIRTH OF A NEW WOMAN IN THE WESTERN: BECOMING A HEROINE IN THE WIND (VICTOR SJÖSTRÖM, 1928)*

LAURA ANTÓN SÁNCHEZ

«This is the story of a woman who came
into to domain of the winds»¹

I. UNDER CONSTRUCTION: THE PLACE OF THE FEMALE SPECTATOR

Having identified the patriarchal ideology in the realist structures of (classical) Hollywood cinema (Mulvey, 1975), feminist theorists were then faced with the challenge of rediscovering or re-designing, as a kind of system failure, a textual space for the female spectator. The main conclusion drawn by the British scholar Laura Mulvey in her seminal study was that narrative cinema is intended to meet the neurotic needs of the male ego, founded on the threat of castration, through a fetishistic and sadistic attitude towards the female figure. While this analysis offered tools for identifying the power of the gaze in iconic representations (Mayayo, 2007), it also revealed rather dismal prospects for the female spectator. In this study, I seek to continue the task of reconstruction of this cultural space, which since the 1970s has benefited from contributions by a significant

number of feminist film scholars (Johnston, 2000; Kuhn, 1991; Kaplan, 1983; De Lauretis, 1984; Doane, 1987; Modleski, 2002). The space to be rewritten, silenced by the hegemonic discourse and reactivated by a theoretical approach attentive to the symbolic discourse of reality offered by film and other audiovisual productions, has been associated with parody, a strategy that constitutes *a kind of resistance* against the unconscious work of myth (Johnston, 2000; Hutcheon, 1991) and/or a way for the heroine to *resist* her socialisation by the patriarchal system (Modleski, 2002). This cultural space of female resistance provides the central hypothesis that will guide this reading of identity construction in *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928).²

I.1 Audiovisual discourse on identity

Textbooks on audiovisual narratives generally sum up the development of a film's story in three main sections: an initial situation of balance is

threatened by a conflict that continues through to the end, when the original balance is restored. This formalist outline tends to neglect a dramatic element that unfolds over the course of this temporal process: the journey associated with the *becoming* of the subject of the action. In other words, it overlooks the fact that what lies at the very heart of this archetypal structure is the basic question of identity that forms the very foundation of human culture. In this sense, the destabilising element at the beginning of the story coincides with a breakdown of being that prompts the protagonist to act, to embark on a quest. The metaphor of a journey underscores the idea of change and access to knowledge that constitutes a repeated updating of the mythical story of Oedipus. The etymology of the word “identity”, from the Latin *identitas*, *identitatis*, derived from *idem* (“the same”), reflects the aspect of repetition that characterises this journey.

In this process of social construction and affirmation lies much of the pleasure experienced when watching an audiovisual product. That pleasure culminates in a recognition: the protagonist, and with him/her, through a process of identification, the spectators, become *heroes or heroines*. The question here is how this gender difference has been constructed in the narrative in which viewers recognise themselves. Since the 1970s, the journey of *becoming a woman*, although criticised for being based on male structures, has been explored from various perspectives. As noted above, a number of feminist studies have highlighted the idea that femininity is associated with a form of resistance that infiltrates the patriarchal forms of the language. In 1990, the psychologist Maureen Murdock (2010), in a critical response to the influential model of myth proposed by Joseph Campbell (2001), suggests that in this patriarchal system the woman has to embark on a quest to recover her feminine being.³ Inspired by Campbell, Christopher Vogler’s (1999) proposition responds to the criticism of such “gender problems” in fair-

ly simplistic terms with respect to the form and objective of the quest, arguing that “much of the journey is the same for all humans” (Vogler, 1999: xxi).

THIS CONTEXT OF CHANGE MAKES IT PARTICULARLY INTERESTING THAT THE QUESTION OF BECOMING A WOMAN (IN THE WESTERN GENRE) SHOULD FEATURE IN ONE OF THE LAST MASTERPIECES OF THE SILENT FILM ERA.

The analysis of this temporal and cultural process unfolding in the heart of the narrative through the energy of desire is especially interesting in *The Wind*. This film is an essential work for exploring how the concept of identity has been constructed within the symbolic constellation of the Gothic heroine and the contemporary female investigator, as it is an audiovisual narrative that offers a metafictional reflection on femininity. The circumstances surrounding its production were conducive to a reconsideration of the hegemonic conception of identity. Produced at a time of severe economic and social unrest, shortly before the Wall Street Crash of 1929, its release came at a time in film history that has been characterised in ambivalent terms. On the one hand, it has been defined as a period of splendour, a golden age for the misnamed “silent film” as a narrative and aesthetic form, but also a time of uncertainty due to the rise of the talkie, a new movement opposed, as it happens, by the driving force behind *The Wind*, Lillian Gish. On the other hand, it was also a time of significant social and political changes for women. Following the Great War, women in the United States entered the workforce in large numbers, and it was only a decade earlier, in 1920, that they had received the vote. This context of change makes it particularly

interesting that the question of *becoming a woman* (in the Western genre) should feature in one of the last masterpieces of the silent film era.

The most obvious textual evidence that this film is especially fertile symbolic terrain for the mobility of a cultural response to the question “Who am I?” is the unique nature of the plot. The value of the film for study lies in the way it challenges established genre boundaries, a characteristic feature of the woman’s film (Doane, 1987: 128). Its storyline, classical only in appearance, connects the universes of the Western and the horror film. These two genres are in fact not so very different, as both explore the idea of the border separating civilisation from the territory of the Other, a strange and lawless realm. Its customary definition as a melodrama, an expressive mode that is traditionally denigrated and associated with the woman’s film, supports this possibility for revisionism. In her study of the melodramatic female body in early cinema, Margarita María Uribe points out that “melodrama is itself constituted as the main means of restoring a kind of ‘hidden morality’, a possibility of expressing emotions constrained by modern rationalism in a desecralised world” (Uribe, 2016: 156).⁴

The control held by women over the film’s production underscores the possibility for a change in the cultural discourse. Gish recalls that after working on *La Bohème* (King Vidor, 1926) and *The Scarlet Letter* (Victor Sjöström, 1926) for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, she thought that Dorothy Scarborough’s novel,⁵ written in 1925, “was perfect for a motion picture as it was pure motion”, and that an “overworked” producer, Irving Thalberg, effectively put all the work in her hands.⁶ In his analysis of the film, Bo Florin (2009) offers some other interesting details about this project. Gish wrote a four-page story outline that served as a starting point for the screenplay written by Frances Marion, and to play the role of Lige she chose Lars Hanson, who had played her forbidden love in the Victorian New England of *The*

Scarlet Letter. With shooting already under way, Clarence Brown voluntarily withdrew from the project, and Gish suggested the Swedish filmmaker Victor Sjöström to direct it instead.

The role of women in the conception of the project highlights the story’s implicit crossing of another frontier identified in the symbolic territory of the narrative. Teresa de Lauretis describes the gender difference inscribed in the story with reference to the universal Oedipus myth: “Therefore, to say that narrative is the production of Oedipus is to say that each reader—male or female—is constrained and defined within two positions of sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other” (De Lauretis, 1984: 121). However, in this case the monstrous Other is the product of the female imagination. Desire, the energy that triggers the action and marks the relationship between subject and object (Greimas, 1987: 263-267) spills over the boundaries through the actress’ bodily movements and gaze, in a strategy that failed to convince a significant number of critics. On its release it was a box office failure and received discouraging reviews for being *overwrought* and “too explicit in its evocation of the threatening landscape” (quoted by Jacobs, 2008: 75-76).

1.2 The resistance against becoming a heroine in the Western

Although readings of the film have generally focused on the duality between heroine and landscape, this duality has been viewed not as an essential feature in the journey towards femininity but as a mark of the author’s (director’s) style or of the influence of the naturalist pessimism that had prevailed in Hollywood since the release of *Greed* (Erich von Stroheim, 1924) (Jacobs, 2008: 74-76). Described by Jean Mitry as a “masterpiece” in which Sjöström’s filmmaking achieved “total perfection” (Mitry, 1989: 387), for Florin (2009) the landscape acts as a “mental space”, a directorial

signature that provides an aesthetic connection to his work in Sweden.⁷ This dramatic value accorded to the landscape has also been noted to identify the style of David W. Griffith (Mottet, 1998), and has often been cited as proof of the aesthetic capacity of cinema in general. Edgar Morin (2001) identifies this dramatic connection as one of the principles that facilitated the transformation of the cinematographic image into *the magic of cinema*, exemplifying “the powerful current that carries each film along” with the climax of *Way Down East* (David W. Griffith, 1920): “Thus the heroine is turned into a piece of flotsam. The ice floe itself becomes an actor” (Morin, 2001: 70). Meanwhile, Núria Bou (2006) suggests that the function of the landscape in Griffith’s films is to mark a melodramatic construction of femininity: “dynamic and heroic masculinity’s objective is to rescue the girl, while femininity’s is to convey the intensity of the emotions clearly to the spectator” (Bou, 2006: 102).

Indeed, the wind and the landscape operate as melodramatic elements in the construction of female identity, characterised as a result of a highly emotional process. Through the shot/reverse shot structure, female desire is projected onto the monstrous Other, in an encounter which, as Linda Williams (1984) points out, is crucial to the breakdown and subsequent recognition of the woman, as historically the two have shared the cultural space of alterity. One clear piece of evidence of the importance that this strategy of projection has for the construction of the subject in *The Wind* is a shot with a mirror that appears in the party sequence, a significant moment in the heroine’s initiation (Image 1). The *double-framing* effect with an extreme close-up of Letty in the mirror adds to the *mise-en-abyme* of the representation that marks the whole text, with the presence of windows and doors. It also points to the central theme and, at the same time, thematises the gaze through the strategy of interpellation. It would not be the only instance of such a



Image 1. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)

technique, as from the beginning of the film the discourse problematises two issues of relevance to the study of the relationship between women and cinema, critically positioning the point of view and the image of the woman at the root of her conflict with the wind.

My starting hypothesis for this study is that in this early Western, with its self-reflexive “superwestern” (Bazin, 1967: 150) tone, atypical of the genre thanks to the invocation of the Gothic and female desire in its narrative, the representation of identity is a precursor to the narrative of the Gothic heroine in the classical Hollywood cinema of the 1940s. Mary Ann Doane (1987: 123-154) has studied this cycle of films, belonging to the “woman’s film” subgenre and characterised by generic hybridisation, to which she gives the name “paranoid woman’s films”. Like the Gothic heroine, Letty is positioned at the centre of the story, but her gaze is associated with anxiety and terror, placing her in the role of the victim. She is the subject of desire, but she encounters *the void*, identified by Doane with the aesthetic category of abjection posited by Kristeva (1988), the place where the signification culturally associated with the woman collapses. Doane concludes that Goth-

ic woman's films represent the difficulty involved in the psychological journey of *becoming a woman*. Through the gaze, the woman enters into an encounter with an earlier phase of language, prior to the establishment of identity, which, according to psychoanalysis, is identified with the place of the mother.⁸ Thus, Letty confronts the mother figure, Cora, and after her marriage, it will be in the space of the angel in the house that the female fantasy will be fully expressed. Here we see the reappearance of the wild horse ghost which, according to Wirt Roddy, the sinister herald who initiates the travelling woman at the start of the film, drives people—especially women—to madness. This liminal emotional state is a common feature of the Gothic woman and the contemporary female investigator, who suffers the lack of comprehension of a male world. Like Cassandra, madness operates as a kind of martyrdom in the forging of the heroine, the penance to be paid for her transgression.⁹

As prescribed by the archetypal odyssey that forges (the identity of) the hero (Campbell, 2001), the adventure begins with a train journey, the image of the trajectory towards a new femininity in the Wild West, far from her home in Virginia. On this winding journey, Letty's relationship with the wind is rendered visible, in classic Gothic and Expressionist style, as a fantasy that can be interpreted as the *heroine's resistance* (Modleski, 2002) against becoming the epic Western heroine. This resistance is reflected in the terror in her gaze and the movement of a melodramatic body that oversteps the boundary. Commonly defined as patriarchal, the Western presents a mythic vision of the woman as wife and mother, a figure with a special connection to nature, the earth; a vision that Letty ultimately seems to reconcile herself to: "where the figure of the mother is, despite everything, an object of veneration: as a repository of tradition, a principle of continuity, and of serene, almost 'telluric' force. Rooted in the natural, organic world, never exposed or excluded from any

manifestation of life, she is the soul itself of every home" (Astre and Hoarau, 1997: 135). A similar idea has been proposed by André Bazin: "The myth of the Western illustrates, and both initiates and confirms woman in her role as vestal of the social virtues, of which the chaotic world is so greatly in need. Within her is concealed the physical future, and, by way of the institution of the family to which she aspires as the root is drawn to the earth, its moral foundation" (Bazin, 1967: 145).

The happy ending demanded by the distributors to replace the tragic conclusion to the novel, the imposition of which, according to Gish, was considered a moral outrage by the whole production team,¹⁰ could not erase the woman's resistance. According to Florin (2009), it would have transformed her usual image from Victorian victim to empowered heroine. However, the resistance of the creators—Gish and Marion—against this change by the commercial censors is described by Marion's biographer as being because their objective was to break down the Romantic vision of the Wild West (quoted by Berke, 2016: 9). Instead, with this new ending, the film contributed to the establishment of *the myth* of the wife and mother (Johnston, 2000; Kaplan, 1983) imposed by the Western narrative. It is no accident that this ending should be reflected in the grammar of the scene that serves as the memorable opening to another masterpiece of the genre: Martha, blinded by the intense light of the desert, opens the door to *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) to welcome home, from her perspective (desire), the man she loves and the antihero of the story.

1.3 Gish's leading role

It is a little known fact that film stars exerted extraordinary power in the final years of the silent period. The artistic work they performed with their bodies was considered similar to that of the scriptwriter or the director, as it overlapped into these creative territories. In a revealing analysis of the theoretical work of the actress, who in 1930



Image 2. *Way Down East* (David W. Griffith, 1920)

wrote “A Universal Language”, Annie Berke (2016) debunks the cliché of Gish as subordinate to the work of her mentor David W. Griffith. Gish’s writings, consulted by Berke at the New York Public Library, reveal a conception of performing that affirms her claim to authorship of the work on an equal footing with the screenwriter and the director. Indeed, the art of performing was a factor behind her opposition to talkies, as dialogues ostensibly cut down that art. All this leads Berke to identify an allegory for this creative empowerment in the film: “*The Wind*, ostensibly the story of a weak, victimized woman, functions as an allegory for a silent film star at the height of her power, so committed and controlled that the rest of the film bends to her will and vision” (Berke, 2016: 11).

The creative work of this petite and powerful actress, who directed a film that is now lost, *Remodeling Her Husband* (1920), has been eclipsed by the hegemonic notion of the auteur in film studies, eliding the fact that much of the modernity of the cinematic image arises from its collective authorship. Together with the characters portrayed by Mary Pickford and Janet Gaynor, Gish’s characters have been identified with the old-fashioned archetype of the Victorian heroine, a model of the romantic, virginal woman, firmly rooted to the earth, which tends to be associated with the male imagination. At the same time, she is defined

as childlike and naive, because her actions are not motivated by sexual desire. The model of the *adult woman*, which stands in opposition to the Victorian model, was embodied by Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer (Bou, 2017: 109), interpreted as a reflection of the *new woman* who appeared after the First World War in the form of the flapper or *garçonne*. However, in titles like *The Scarlet Letter* and *Way Down East*, the actress known as the virginal muse to the father of film grammar displays with her actions, performed in solitude in contrast to the hostile crowd confronted by the transgressive woman, a determination and strength that reveal the apparent fragility of her characters to be merely superficial. The memorable climax to *Way Down East* could be viewed as a precursor to her work in *The Wind*, as an actress who surrenders her body to the excesses of a belligerent emotion. In one of the most melodramatic moments of the film, Anna confronts the patriarch (whose subjective point of view is the one the spectator identifies with), who casts her out for having had a child out of wedlock, while she reveals the man responsible (Image 2). Her body movement punctuates the timing of the scene and expresses an emotion that rebels against Victorian norms. When she goes outside, she is caught in the snowstorm and it is this same melodramatic movement that establishes a continuity with the previous scene. The wind and the snow that fall

on the woman seem to punish her for what happened in the heat of the hearth and, at the same time, contribute to underscoring her mood, establishing an alliance between female expressiveness and nature. Indeed, it is an alliance so strong that the heroine will ultimately become one with the landscape, carried on an ice floe towards a waterfall before being rescued *in extremis* and becoming the hero's wife.

2. THE HORIZON OF THE NARRATIVE

The introductory intertitles of the omniscient narrator point in a particular moral direction, suggesting the breach of another boundary thanks to the hegemony of male actions in the epic feat of conquering the Earth.¹¹ But unexpectedly, the second intertitle pushes the male subject out of the leading role to assign it instead to a woman, thereby subverting the prevailing conventions of the genre and highlighting the passage through a first threshold for the character who is called upon to be the heroine of the story. The actions of the woman take on an audacious quality, as if, by

assuming the dimension of a heroic act, she were guilty of a transgression.

The omniscient perspective of the opening shot visualises one of the most immediately recognisable motifs in the visual repertoire of the Western. In the background, we see a horizon lined with mountains that presages, as a kind of narrative promise, the place where the story will unfold (Image 3). Indeed, this iconic image will reappear several times as the story progresses, its view distorted by the wind. Its appearance underscores the important role of the landscape, the earth and its relationship with the wind as a symbol of the psychological drama. Thus, in the second sequence, a shot of the horizon dissolves into a medium shot of Letty and Lige travelling on the carriage to the Sweetwater ranch. Shortly afterwards, Lige explains to Letty the ghost horse legend of the "Injuns", and it is at this moment that we see the first dreamlike vision of the white horse of the north wind, underscoring the couple's desire-gaze. In the party sequence, after Letty's confrontation with her cousin's wife, Cora, the exterior shot of the horizon blurred by the wind cuts back to Letty's gaze. Apart from serving as a metaphor for the developing suspense of the story, the shot of the horizon has an ambivalent function, signalling a romantic connection with the earth, verging on a sense of the sublime, exploring the idea of the vastness of nature alluded to earlier by the omniscient narrator, while at the same time acting as a kind of compass, a comfortable cultural site that will be constantly distorted, as the legend of the "Injuns" warns, by the phantasmal violence of the wild horse of the north wind. It is precisely in the opening shot that this untamed horizon is presented, before the iron horse comes into view, ploughing across the rugged terrain of the arid landscape. The lap dissolve, one of the most notable strategies in the film's discourse, highlights the objective of the continuity system of narrative cinema and points to the symbolic relationship between the worlds

Image 3. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)





Image 4. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)

outside and inside the train, where we see Letty for the first time.

2.1 Ariadne's thread

Evident in the organisation of the narrative is the rhetorical figure of parody, identified by Claire Johnston (2000) as one of the basic strategies of the woman's film and, according to Linda Hutcherson (1991), used in postmodern culture as a means of updating certain forms whose use has become naturalised. Generally associated with modern and postmodern narratives, this self-referential feature can be found in other films of the 1920s as well. Perhaps one of the most emblematic examples can be found in the comedy genre, in *The General* (Buster Keaton & Clyde Bruckman, 1926), which makes use of parody for comic effect to ridicule the figure of the hero and the cultural construction of masculinity. The horizon, the visual motif of the "Wild West" *par excellence*, and the gaze that illuminates it if the wind does not prevent it, are the two elements that are parodied in *The Wind*. Even at the beginning of the film, the question of point of view (that invisible but revealing Ariadne's thread in the analysis of an audiovisual text) and the female image are turned into objects of reflection, thereby questioning the enunciative transparency of classical discourse. On the textual level of the story, it is obvious that the film's key theme is the female gaze. Letty's eyes and the object of her gaze, the landscape,

are repeatedly afflicted by the relentless wind. At the same time, the narrative reveals a high level of self-awareness on this question. The opening sequence introduces a structure that is repeated all the way through to the final climax, developing the idea of the threat that the male gaze poses for the female object of desire. The shot that introduces Letty portrays the minority status of the female traveller (Image 4). She has her back to us in a carriage full of men, in a composition that conveys the idea of the woman's vulnerability. It is also interesting to note the point of view of the shot, as the privileged position from which the story is told and the power (of the gaze) is controlled in an audiovisual narrative. What at first seems to be a neutral perspective is soon revealed to be a diegetic point of view. The next shot, of a man gazing at the woman, is not introduced in the conventional manner, with a sharp cut, but with another lap dissolve, serving as a visual emphasis of the domination of the male gaze. It is significant that a film with a female protagonist should introduce her with an archetypal image resulting from male scopophilia. In this way, the first phantasmal image in this Gothic Western is established: the image of a man gazing at a woman. At the end of the climax, this Gothic villain's body will disappear as if he were merely an evil spirit.

This mythic vision is also associated with other characters portrayed by Gish. In *Way Down East*, the image of the poor country girl Anna

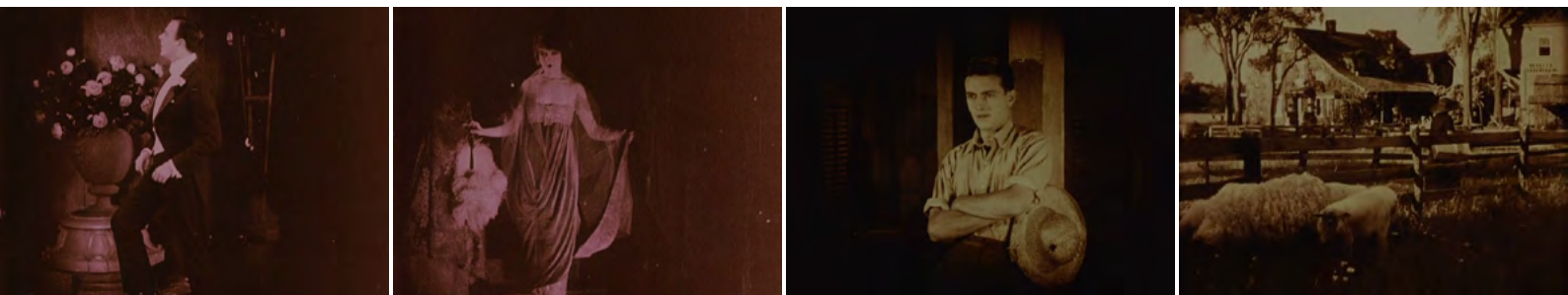


Image 5. *Way Down East* (David W. Griffith, 1920)

Moore fluctuates between the glamorous view of the dashing Lennox Sanderson, the villain who tricks her into a fake marriage, and the pastoral view of the hero, David Bartlett, which wears away feminine emotion in *the great storm* of the climax (Image 5). However, it does not acquire the self-referential quality of *The Wind*, where the male gaze is associated with a restlessness that seems to increase the force of the wind, in a metaphor for female desire. The connection between the two is presented in the first shots of the film. Later on, Lige, whom Letty initially confuses with her cousin Beverly, exhibits a gaze that also fits into this pattern, when he and another man waiting for Letty engage in a target-shooting contest to determine who will get to travel in the carriage next to the trophy-woman. At the family ranch, these same two men will compete for her attentions and, a little while later at the party, will flip a coin to determine who will get to ask for her hand in marriage.

In this male domain of the iron horse, the symbol of reason, the empowered gaze of the travelling woman will be punished by the wind. A shot/reverse shot juxtaposes the gazes of the man and the woman, marking sexual difference. This exchange of gazes is interrupted by the omniscient point of view of the narrator to create a

situation of suspense. In an exterior shot, we see the force of the wind against the train, obscuring it and the view of the horizon. Back inside the train, the woman leaves the established axis of action to gaze through the window, and it is here that her gaze is assaulted by the wind, suggesting that the outside space is a source of anxiety. As the action unfolds, this relationship will become increasingly violent. The various scenes where it reappears include the dinner at her cousin Beverly's house, at the party, in her new home with Lige, and even in the climax sequence, where the imaginary level of the diegesis, i.e., the subjective realm of the story, takes over the action. The window also serves another semantic function here, as it establishes a diegetic *double-frame* that alludes to the spectator's view of the screen. This *mise-en-abyme* of the representation underlines the spectator's identification with the character's desire.¹²

In the final climax, the structure of parodic signification developed throughout the text resumes with renewed intensity, suggesting a circular pattern that seems to return us to the beginning (Im-

age 6). In a picture with a background of flowers, centred in a medium shot, the virginal figure of the young woman is looking to a point off-camera. This other mythic image of the woman

Image 6. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)





Image 7. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)

in a kind of lost paradise, symbolised here by her home state of Virginia, is suddenly dominated violently by a man's gaze, as the shot dissolves to an unsettling close-up of the villain's eyes, recalling the phantasmal image at the beginning of the film. The next shot is a neutral POV of the man gazing at the picture of Letty through a stereoscope, and then from the man's point of view we see Letty herself performing household chores. Once again, it is this restless point of view that seems to exacerbate the pressure of the wind, which is shown in a shot/reverse shot with Letty.¹³

It is also worth noting how the opening sequence is organised around a duality, the rhetorical figure with which the question of identity has been culturally signified. In addition to the woman-wind binary, one of the basic strategies in the construction of this duality is the fade to black. Most of the narrative blocks are separated by this kind of transition between shots, marking an ellipsis and organising the information in a binary manner. In this way, in the first sequence, in addition to the spatial relationship (inside/outside) and the binary of gender identity (male/female), the fade-to-black divides the block into two parts associated with the duality of day/night. The repetition of certain shots with slight modifications emphasises this division. In the second part of the film the shot of the couple engaged in dialogue is repeated, but the image of the woman has changed; her smile is gone and her clothes

are darker and more mature, contrasting with the light and innocence of her first appearance. This sinister inversion is combined with references to confusion. When she gets off the train, Letty confuses Lige with her cousin Beverly. Later, at the Sweetwater ranch, there will also be connections of identity between Letty and Cora, as when Beverly carries his cousin into the house in his arms, as if she were his newlywed wife soon to assume the role mother.

The dualistic organisation is supported by the relationships established between female and male characters through the composition of frames and the editing. Thus, as the film progresses, the villain Wirt Roddy will be established as a counterfigure to Lige Hightower. This division is revealed in the climax sequence at the end of the film through the strategies of repetition and confusion of identities. Similarly, the gaze of the dark and rough Cora, who contrasts with Letty's lightness and fragility, is also a source of violence. Through her malicious gaze we see Letty talking intimately to Cora's husband and winning the affection of her children. The reverse shots of Cora, in a depiction evocative of the witch in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand et al., 1937), drive home the idea that she sees in Letty the wife and mother that she can never be.

The strategy of duality is combined with the triangular form of the characters' relationships, suggesting a reading of Letty's story as an Oedi-

pal journey (Image 7). In the first part of the film, and again in the ending, the triangle is Letty-Roddy-Lige, while at the Sweetwater ranch another triangle is established between Letty, her cousin Beverly and his wife Cora. As the maternal figure, Cora assumes the role of teacher of the initiate, explaining to Letty the only option left to a single woman with no financial resources who wants to survive in those arid desert lands: marriage. With a symbolic lap dissolve that questions the enunciative transparency, the narrator shows the consequences of this alliance: a shot of Letty's hand, on which Lige has placed the ring, dissolves into a shot of dirty dishes, and then to one of a household lamp. The marriage is not consummated and the house is depicted as an ambivalent space that protects her from the wind but at the same time imprisons her.

3. THE DUEL OF THE GAZES AND A NEW CULTURAL HORIZON

The expression of desire and its object, identity, effectively splits the most exciting sequence in the film into two parts. The first, in an Expressionist visual style, presents Letty's progressive state of madness. The imaginary level of this scene—dominated by the actress's gaze and physical performance, together with the representation of a space that offers a troubling portrait of her emotions and the return of the dreamlike image of the ghost horse—establishes an intertextual reference to the female fantasy depicted by the painter Henry Fuseli in *The Nightmare* (second version, 1790-1791). The second part represents a return to the symbolic level of the film's narrative, where the woman's new identity is established through her love for the other.

On the imaginary level, Roddy's assault of Letty increases the violence of the wind and the image of the white horse is replaced visually with sexual aggression. The following morning, Letty confronts her nemesis in classic Wild West style,



Image 8. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928)

with a revolver. This test of initiation, the duel between heroine and villain, is notable in various ways, all of which point to the self-referential theme that marks the whole film: the gaze. The exterior shot of the dawn lighting up a new horizon after the storm dissolves into a high-angle shot of Letty, her back to us, which draws our attention to the point of view and returns to the idea of a looming threat (Image 8). This is followed by an autonomous camera movement, an enunciative mark of the "great imaginer" which, in a suspenseful moment, foreshadows the heroine's use of the weapon. The male gaze off camera once again positions the woman with her back to us. But this time the woman's gaze off camera is not to remind us of the presence of the wind but to represent her resistance. Letty turns to Roddy and says: "I'm not going away with you."



Image 9. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928); *A Lady of Chance* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1928); *The Kiss* (Jacques Feyder, 1929)

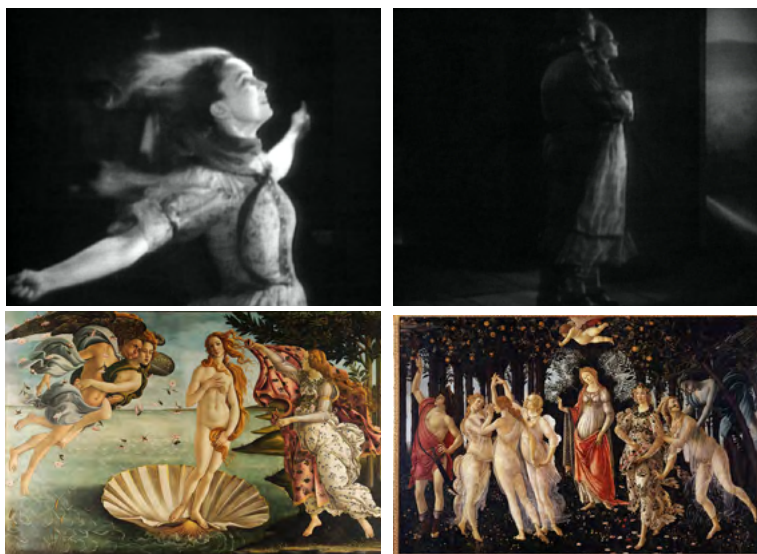
In other pre-Code genres, female protagonists also turn to guns to exact justice. In an era in which emotion was paramount, both the Victorian-era heroine of the Far West and the new urban woman take up arms against men who refuse to respect their wishes (Image 9). In the romantic drama *A Lady of Chance* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1928), a female con artist nicknamed “Angel Face” (Norma Shearer), redeemed by love, threatens the villain with a pistol in hand to stop him from conning the man she loves. This female recourse to violence against an authoritarian male also forms part of the climax to *The Kiss* (Jacques Feyder, 1929), another masterpiece of Hollywood’s silent era. After she is acquitted for her husband’s murder, Irene (Greta Garbo) confesses her crime to her lover and defence lawyer, while it is presented in a flashback.

3.1 Birth of a new woman

By way of conclusion, it is worth considering an intertextual relationship on which the construction of female identity in the film is based, and which exemplifies the cultural dialogue between the art of cinema and the art of painting. In the final shots, the wind acts as a kind of baptismal element for the heroine. The woman celebrates her new identity with her hair flowing wildly like the goddess of love imagined by Botticelli in *The Birth of Venus* (1482-1485) (Image 10). Embracing

one another on the left, Zephyr and the nymph Chloris are blowing air at the central figure, Venus, who is actually slightly off-centre, leaning towards where the goddess Flora awaits the new woman with her cloak of flowers. The figures of Flora, Chloris and Venus herself raise a question about the representation of femininity, as they

Image 10. *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928); *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928); *The Birth of Venus* (1482-1485); *Primavera* (Botticelli, 1477-82)



all appear to depict the same female model, inspired by Simonetta Vespucci. In his reading of the work, Edgar Wind (1972: 129-144) identified the concept of division at its heart. In this sense, the diptych comprising *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* (Botticelli, 1477-1482) present the elemental and pastoral scenes of the same theme: love, featuring two Venuses, the heavenly and the ordinary. The scene showing the triad of figures on the right side in *Primavera* represents a metamorphosis, when Zephyr abducts the nymph Chloris, who is transformed into Flora, while the figure of Mercury has its counterfigure in Zephyr. Both the film and the painting depict desire, associated with violence and love, through the gaze. It is through these emotions that the identity of a new woman is born. And in both cases, female identity is understood as a temporary process operating under a duality: a woman who is both the object and subject of desire, touched by the arrow of a blind Cupid; an abducted woman and a lover, embracing her kidnapper; a self-absorbed heroine nymph and goddess with an empowered gaze.

Yet another analogy could be proposed. The Florentine master focused solely on the last part of the myth, leaving its sinister aspect outside the frame: the goddess of love was born out of the genitals of Uranus, cut off by his son Saturn and mixed with the foam of the waves, and she was led by Zephyr to the Earth, where the Horae dressed her. Eugenio Trías explains how the ghastly event that gave rise to this birth has not been omitted altogether, as it is symbolised in “the foam of the sea, highlighted by Botticelli in such a way that the omitted scene is present nonetheless” (Trías, 2001: 79). Similarly, *The Wind* makes reference to the horrifying event which, according to the discourse of this strange Western, serves as the foundation for the love of the Other and the problem of *becoming a woman* in a space dominated by the male gaze: the virginal Persephone is transformed into a goddess of love. The last shot not only constitutes the epic confrontation of the

Western couple with the wind, but also highlights the liberating effect of the female gaze. This empowerment is possible at the end of the Gothic journey thanks to the disappearance of the female fantasy; in other words, the disappearance of fear and its phantom: the male fantasy of the woman. In this way, framed in the doorway appears another intradiegetic screen reflecting a mise-en-abyme of a new cultural horizon for the woman and the couple in the Western. ■

NOTES

- * This article forms part of the project conducted by Universidad Rey Juan Carlos' CUVVAC research project (Visual Culture and Contemporary Artistic Practices: Languages, Technologies and Media).
- 1 First intertitle in *The Wind*, presenting an introduction by the film's omniscient narrator.
- 2 In the film's credits appears the name Victor Seastrom, which was used by the Swedish author for the films he made during his time in Hollywood.
- 3 In previous studies, the journey of the female investigator has been characterised as a self-reflexive exploration of femininity (Antón, 2016; Antón, 2019).
- 4 *The Wind* is one of the three films selected as a case study. However, Uribe's analysis focuses less on the “modern female body” introduced by the melodrama (Uribe, 2016: 11) than on the elided event in the climax and the change to the ending (Uribe, 2016: 189-208).
- 5 Scarborough's literary creation is marked throughout by a Gothic aesthetic, which became a focus of theoretical study. According to Inés Ordiz (2014: 18), “Dorothy Scarborough's study [*The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917)] is considered to be the first work to offer a systematic analysis of the Gothic”. Initially published anonymously, *The Wind* would become her most acclaimed work.
- 6 From “*The Wind* presented by Lillian Gish”.
- 7 Gösta Werner's documentary *Victor Sjöström: Ett porträt* (1981), apart from emphasising this directorial signature, sums up his stay in Hollywood with a few still shots and the idea that Greta Garbo eclipsed Lillian Gish.

- 8 Lila's Gothic journey in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) leads towards a similar questioning: on a subterranean, subconscious level of the dark mansion, the woman confronts the mummified body of the mother, which expresses the emptiness of the signifier "woman" (Antón, 2016).
- 9 On this point, it is worth noting that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar associate the constant of the mad woman in nineteenth-century British and American literature with a revision of the imagery of the woman (Gilbert and Gubar, 1998).
- 10 From "The Wind presented by Lillian Gish".
- 11 (1): "Man—puny but irresistible—encroaching forever on Nature's vastnesses, gradually, very gradually wresting away her stranger secrets, subduing her fierce elements—conquers the earth!" And then (2): "This is the story of a woman who came into the domain of the winds."
- 12 In his analysis of the connections of hypnosis with cinema and the train, Raymond Bellour writes, with reference to *The Wind*: "Dans le film de fiction, la fenêtre du train peut cerner au contraire le motif qui va la hanter, par l'abstraction sensible dont elle frappe le double regard du personnage y du spectateur: ainsi ces admirables plans réitérés de *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928), qui condensent au fil du voyage inaugural la fureur du sable tournoyant et s'accumulant, comme illuminé, contre la fenêtre sombre du compartiment, aux yeux effarés de Lillian Gish destinée tout le film durant à ce sable et à se vent" (Bellour, 2009: 78-79). Translation: "In the fiction film, the train window may instead frame the motif that will haunt it, through a visible abstraction that afflicts the gaze of both character and spectator: thus, these brilliant repeated shots in *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928), which encapsulate the fury of the sand that swirls and piles up there over the course of the journey, like something illuminated against the dark window of the compartment, before the frightened eyes of Lillian Gish, destined throughout the film to gaze upon this sand and wind." (Italics are mine.)
- 13 Griselda Pollock, in her study of the Impressionist artists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassat, questions the

modern painting movement from a feminist perspective and identifies in the paintings of women in public spaces the theme of the male gaze as a pressure on the woman (Pollock, 2015: 111-136). The male gaze is also characterised as a source of anxiety in the audiovisual narrative of the female investigator (Antón, 2016).

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THE BIRTH OF A NEW WOMAN IN THE WESTERN. BECOMING A HEROINE IN THE WIND (VICTOR SJÖSTRÖM, 1928)

Abstract

Taking as point of departure the aesthetic aspects and contexts of the production of the film that promoted the transformation of the dominant discourse on identity, this article presents a countercurrent reading of Victor Sjöström's *The Wind* (1928) with the intention of reconstructing the cultural space of the female spectator. The analysis focuses on a structure of meaning that runs through the text with which they parody, within the symbolic territory of western, the narrative resources in the study of the theoretical relationship between cinema and women. From the beginning, the narrative situates in a self-conscious way the resources of the point of view and the image of the woman in the origin of the feminine conflict with the wind. Through the analysis of how the gaze circulates, we understand as a vehicle of the desire of the characters, and also of the discursive figures, we can perceive a metafictional reflection sense of sense the mythical vision of the woman in the distant west to which the protagonist travels. This reflective trait and its passive gaze allow us to inscribe this identity trajectory on femininity in the symbolic constellation of the Hollywood universe configured by the Gothic heroine and the contemporary investigative woman. Beyond the usual reading that places the woman in the role of the victim, our starting hypothesis is in the twilight and atypical, the protagonist's relationship with the wind is visible, in the gothic and expressionistic way, a fantasy which can be interpreted as the feminine resistance to heroic epics of western.

Key words

Lillian Gish; *The Wind* (1928); Audiovisual Culture; Female Desire; Heroine; Identity; Metafiction; Myth; Western.

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EL NACIMIENTO DE UNA NUEVA MUJER EN EL WESTERN. LLEGAR A SER HEROÍNA EN EL VIENTO (THE WIND, VICTOR SJÖSTRÖM, 1928)

Resumen

Partiendo de aspectos estéticos y contextuales de la producción del film que promovieron la transformación del discurso dominante sobre la identidad, este artículo presenta una lectura a contracorriente de *El viento* (The Wind, Victor Sjöström, 1928), con la intención de reconstruir el espacio cultural de la espectadora. El análisis se centra en una estructura de significación que recorre el texto con la que se parodian, dentro del territorio simbólico del *western*, dos recursos narrativos que se han considerado relevantes en el estudio de la relación teórica cine y mujer. Desde el inicio, la narrativa sitúa de manera autoconsciente los recursos del punto de vista y la imagen de la mujer en el origen del conflicto femenino con el viento. A través del análisis de cómo circula la mirada, entendida como vehículo del deseo de los personajes y de las figuras discursivas, puede percibirse una reflexión metafictional de sentido crítico sobre la visión mítica de la mujer en el lejano oeste al que viaja la protagonista. Este rasgo reflexivo y su mirada pasional permiten inscribir este trayecto identitario sobre la feminidad en la constelación simbólica del universo de Hollywood configurado por la heroína gótica y la mujer investigadora contemporánea. Más allá de la lectura habitual que coloca a la mujer en el rol de víctima, nuestra hipótesis de partida es que en este *western* crepuscular y atípico, la relación de la protagonista con el viento hace visible, a la manera gótica y expresionista, una fantasía que puede interpretarse como la resistencia femenina a llegar a ser la heroína épica del *western*.

Palabras clave

Lillian Gish; *El viento* (1928); Cultura audiovisual; Deseo femenino; Heroína; Identidad; Metaficción; Mito; *Western*.

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COMPLETELY IN RUINS: BÉLA TARR'S *WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES*

JOSÉ MANUEL LÓPEZ

"One must still have chaos within, in order to give birth to a dancing star."

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2008: 15).

It is possible that the first map in human history was not a geography but a cosmography, a tentative description or drawing of that strange, star-speckled vault that our ancestors lifted their eyes to with a sense of dread, of *vanitas*, of the fleeting nature of life. In the early twentieth century, the art historian and theorist Wilhelm Worringer attributed humankind's first artistic impulse to that "immense spiritual fear of space", an inner feeling of anxiety provoked by the vagaries of the outside world and the unshakeable sensation "of being lost in the universe" (Worringer, 1997: 15-16). It is a cosmic angst, a dissonant cosmo(a)gony or lack of harmony with the music of the stars that has plagued us ever since the Enlightenment, which the Romantics sought to alleviate with their impossible desire to return to a primordial nature and live in harmony with the cosmos once more:¹

If, *ex hypothesi*, the universe is in movement and not at rest, [...] if it is a constant wave (as Friedrich

Schlegel says), how can we possibly even try to describe it? What are we to do when we wish to describe a wave? [...] For these Romantics, to live is to do something, to do is to express your nature. To express your nature is to express your relation to the universe. Your relation to the universe is inexpressible, but you must nevertheless express it. This is the agony; this is the problem. This is the unending *Sehnsucht*, this is the yearning [...], this is why we indulge in all manner of fantasies. This is the typical Romantic nostalgia. (Berlin, 2001: 105)

What are we to do, then, to describe this constant cosmic wave? In contemporary cinema, the best attempt—and perhaps the best expression of Romantic *Sehnsucht* as well—is the 9-minute, 40-second sequence shot that opens *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, 2000) directed by Béla Tarr.² The first image in the film is of a wood-burning stove (a common object in Tarr's imagery) into which a hand empties a half-finished pint of beer to put out the flames.

The camera pulls back to reveal the owner of the hand, the barkeeper in a shabby little tavern, who is telling the assorted drunks gathered there to go home as it is closing time. One of the drunks asks him to wait a little so that János Valuska (Lars Rudolph) can show them something. Valuska leads the man into the centre of the empty room and says to him: "You are the Sun." He goes to another man who he says will be the Earth, and a third who will be the Moon:

"And now, we'll have an explanation that simple folks like us can even understand about immortality. All that I ask is that you step with me into the boundlessness where constancy, quietude and peace reign in an infinite emptiness."

They then begin to act out a mythical tale with a clumsy choreography in which the Earth and the Moon dance together while they revolve around the Sun. In this way, under the instructions of their shaman, three human bodies become three heavenly bodies to give life to a lyrical, drunken cosmogony, the closest these men will ever be able to get to the harmony of the stars. But then something happens: the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon between them form a line and Valuska stops the three dancing bodies because an unexpected astronomical event has occurred (Fig. 1). The air turns cold, the sky darkens, "and then, complete silence. Everything that lives is still."

The music of Vig Mihály, a regular contributor to Tarr's films, rises out of the silence to provide accompaniment to his words. "Will Heaven fall upon us? Will the Earth open under us?" muses the *Sidereus Nuncius*, this makeshift Sidereal Messenger: "We don't know, for a total eclipse has come upon us." The camera stops orbiting around the bodies and at this moment Valuska stops his



Figure 1. The eclipse of human bodies converted into celestial bodies in *Werckmeister Harmonies*

story and falls still. It is the end. Or at least, his words conform to the discourse of the various "fictions of the End", as Frank Kermode (2000: 35) describes them in *The Sense of an Ending*, echoes of the profuse imagery of the Biblical apocalypse that has punctuated history with all manner of imagined ends for the world. And they also describes that timeless fear of primeval humans of the earthly, meteorological and cosmic phenomena that were beyond their understanding; an ancestral terror of the unknown which, of course, is still engraved in our collective unconscious.

The inspiration for *The Eclipse* (L'éclisse, 1962) was a solar eclipse that Michelangelo Antonioni had filmed in Florence a few months earlier. In the preface to his book *Sei film*, the filmmaker recalls the powerful impression that the phenomenon made on him: "Sudden cold. A silence different from all other silences. Earthly light, different from all other lights. And then darkness. Complete stillness." The alienating effect provoked by an eclipse is a universal sensation, as demonstrated by the similarity of the words chosen by Antonioni and those spoken by Valuska. "All I can think is that during the eclipse all feelings probably stop as well," concludes Antonioni (quoted in Font, 2003: 155).

The eclipse is thus like a paralysis of all living things, like a rehearsal for the end of time. But Tarr's camera begins moving again in a tracking shot that pulls back slowly until one of the overhead lamps in the tavern appears in the foreground at the top of the frame (Fig. 2): the sun has come out again and the dance—the world—can begin once more. Valuska then decides to rescue his inebriated companions from an eclipse of the emotions: "But no need to fear; it's not over," he reassures them, and he invites everyone present to join the dancing constellation. And so they do. The *End of Time* that had arrived with the eclipse seems to have ultimately been avoided, although perhaps it has only been postponed, because the order that the young postman yearns for—and which, like the philosopher, the musician or the mathematician, he looks for in the stars—will drift further away from his world with every step and every hour that brings him closer to day-break. The first crack will appear when the tired barkeeper breaks up the planetary dance and tells everyone to leave. "But Mr. Hagelmayer, it's still not over," replies Valuska, before walking out into the cold and solitary streets of the town. Out on those streets he will be confronted with the next sign of instability or imbalance when an engine

Figure 2. One of the lamps in the tavern appears in the foreground: the sun has come out again and the dance—the world—can begin again in *Werckmeister Harmonies*



breaks the silence of the sleeping town. A tractor is hauling a gigantic metal trailer and Valuska stops to watch it, his small silhouette outlined against its huge, blank, impenetrable surface, until it disappears at the end of the street. When he turns around, the mystery of this sight seems to have filled his eyes: What is inside that monstrous structure being hauled across town? He casts one last look towards the source of the noise as it moves further away, before straining to move on, as if having to wrench his feet out of their lethargy. Valuska walks out of the frame without noticing a poster announcing the arrival in town of a circus: "Fantastic! The world's largest giant whale! And other wonders of nature! Guest star: The Prince."

THE HARMONY OF THE STARS

"The whole of the West is suffering from a loss of destiny. [...] We wander aimlessly. We set destinies for ourselves to alleviate our lack of destiny. That is why we lead empty lives. [...] [O]nly the stars have a destiny. A tragic destiny."

Jean-Pierre Léaud in *The Birth of Love* (La naissance de l'amour, 1993) by Philippe Garrel.

Valuska watches. And walks. These are his basic activities. His steps are portrayed as wandering as much as visionary, because "János is essentially a sensible surface" (Rancière, 2013: 58) marked by things that for others might go unnoticed. Open shutter, long exposure, perpetual motion: the images captured by Valuska come out blurry because everything around him is changing. He walks around this unnamed town seemingly anchored in some indeterminate moment of the late twentieth century and comes to the headquarters of the local newspaper. "How are things in the cosmos?" a woman working there asks him. "Everything is fine" is his distracted answer, but a sense of impending doom seems to hover over this pre-apocalyptic town, both in *Werckmeister Harmonies* and

in the novel on which it is based, *The Melancholy of Resistance* by László Krasznahorkai (who also co-wrote the screenplay with Tarr). Thus, the woman begins describing the “coming catastrophe” (Krasznahorkai, 2000: 5) while Valuska listens from another room: a shortage of coal and medicines, extreme cold and piles

of garbage everywhere, the school and the town hall closed, the telephone service and street-lights not working... The people bolt their doors and tremble, dreading the future, because, as the woman suggests, “it’s certain that something is to come” to this unruly and discordant town.

And the ultimate sign of this “process of disintegration” (Krasznahorkai, 2000: 4) is the circus that has just arrived in town, with a whale of Biblical proportions as its main attraction, along with a mysterious character, “The Prince”, an apocalyptic preacher who spouts blasphemous and godless sermons that inspire rioting, looting and killing. Because, they say, some men have arrived in town, men who follow the circus wherever it goes, fascinated with the whale (says one), or maybe with the mysterious prince (says another), a character who is believed to possess “magnetic” powers. Or at least, that’s what the receptionist at the hotel claims when Valuska brings him the daily newspaper. Valuska says goodbye and his steps lead him to the town square, where the huge trailer holding the whale has now been parked. Around it are gathered hordes of men, silent and inscrutable. They smoke, watch, and wait. But what are they waiting for?

In 2004, Béla Tarr was one of the twenty-five directors who contributed an episode to the col-



Figure 3. Valuska looks into the great dead, empty eye of the Leviathan in *Werckmeister Harmonies*

lective film *Visions of Europe*. The barely five minutes of “Prologue” begins with a tracking shot moving along a line of people to music by Vig Mihály. When we finally reach the start of the queue we discover that they are lined up at a window where a woman is passing out food and drink. Tarr filmed a queue of im-

poverished Hungarians to offer his gloomy vision of his country in the lead-up—the prologue?—to its entry into the European Union.² His camera captured each and every one of the faces of these individuals, singling them out of the anonymous mass of bodies. With a duration similar to that of the tracking shot and with exactly the same significance, the second part of this short film contains the final credits in which Tarr includes the names of every person we have seen, thereby affirming their individuality and their *entity*, i.e., the fact of their existence. They are the ones who are, the ones who exist.

But in *Werckmeister Harmonies* the crowds of men who occupy the square cannot be read as individuals. They are simply there, in silence: they are horde, a mass, a crowd. They await the watchwords of the princely prophet who travels with the circus. When the huge door of the trailer opens, Valuska buys a ticket and reverently enters the mausoleum of the Leviathan, passing in front of the great dead eye and gazing at it in the dim light (Fig. 3). Vig Mihály’s music, the same tune we heard in the cosmic dance that opened the film, underscores the *wondrous* significance of the moment. Because for the *trusting* Valuska, the one who has faith, the great cetacean is but one more example of the order of creation, the

same order he sees every day in the map of the night sky that hangs over his bed. This is what he expresses to a neighbour he meets on the way out: “How mysterious is the Lord that He amuses Himself with such strange creatures.” As Rancière suggests, for the viewer the whale evokes references to Jean-Pierre Melville and to a whole symbolic repertoire of evil, but Valuska “sees no more than the wonder that stands as testimony to the power of a divinity capable of creating such amazing creatures” (Rancière, 2013: 59).

Valuska, the *Dostoevskian* idiot, a simple man of the street, is an unwitting victim of Romantic *Sehnsucht*, that unattainable desire for communion with the universe; and he shares his longing with Eszter, a learned musicologist who lives shut up in his house, obsessed with the idea of recovering the “pure” pre-modern chords that were destroyed by the “equal temperament” developed by Andreas Werckmeister, among others. This old man, estranged from his wife and cared for with dedication by Valuska, wants to return to the days of Pythagoras and Aristoxenus, when “our forefathers were satisfied with the fact that our purely tuned instruments were played in only some tones, [...] for they knew that heavenly harmonies were the province of the gods.” However, as the musicologist continues, in a long monologue that he records on tape while Valuska listens, Man in his infinite *rational* arrogance “wished to take possession of all the harmonies of the gods [...] charging] technicians with the solution: a Praetorians, a Salinas, and finally an Andreas Werckmeister, who resolved the difficulty by dividing the octave of the harmony of the gods, the twelve half-tones into twelve equal parts.”

Eszter’s words reveal his disappointment with “constant-tempered” modern music, which in the seventeenth century became definitively severed from the sacred, from the pulses of the universe and the gods that had created it, to become a slave of Reason, one of the scientific disciples of the *Quadrivium* of the Renaissance, along with

arithmetic, astronomy and geometry. Just like the *tetractys*⁴ or the right angle, the modern harmonic system allowed mankind to inhabit a comfortable *Harmonices Mundi*, as Johannes Kepler named it in his landmark work (see Calderón Urreiztieta, 2013). Because of all this, Eszter believes we need to turn our backs on the so-called “equal temperament” and bring back naturally tuned instruments: “We have to correct Werckmeister’s mistakes. We have to concern ourselves with these seven notes of the scale [...] as] seven distinct and independent qualities, like seven fraternal stars in the heavens.”

In other words, what Eszter wants is to recover “the harmony of the stars” in which seven notes shone like stars in their pure and mutually different intervals. Valuska, in the cosmic dance of the opening scene, was dethroning the Werckmeister harmonies and reinstating—albeit briefly—the primordial purity of the harmony of the stars.

COMPLETELY IN RUINS

“‘From on high’ the stars and the gracious spittle trickle down; toward on high each and every starless bosom yearns. The moon has its own court, and the court has its mooncalves; but to all that comes from the court the beggar folk and all skilful beggar virtue pray. ‘I serve, you serve, we serve’—thus all skilful virtue prays to the prince on high [...]”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2008: 153)

But chaos, in its most mundane form, spreads through the streets of this town where confusion and discord have taken over. The night has returned, bonfires light up the square and the expectant faces in the crowd gathered there to hear “the word” of the prince of chaos hidden in the whale’s trailer. This Prince is a foreign man of whom we will see only a shadow, never the body

that casts it; a disembodied voice, a Dionysian spokesman calling for the destruction of society, first of all, and finally of the world. He is a sovereign of chaos who fuses qualities of Irimias (Vig Mihály), the false prophet and policeman in *Sátántangó* (Béla Tarr, 2007) and Bernhard (Kormos Mihály), the prophet of doom in *The Turin Horse* (A torinói ló, Béla Tarr, 2011).

The messianic aspect of the Prince is hinted at in the rumours that spread from the moment of his arrival: "They say that when they were bringing the Prince around, the clock of the church began to go, just like that. The clock that had stopped years ago, and there it started all over again. And the poplar tree fell. A great crack and out came its roots." All of these are apocalyptic signs, as the end pursued by this prince and his court of servants is just that: the End. And the stories surrounding him are told in the symbolic narration of the *eschaton*, the discourse of doomsday and the eschatological signs of the end of the world. In opposition to the apocalyptic Prince, Krasznahorkai and Tarr place Valuska, the man-child, the poet without verses, who has returned to the square with the intention of seeing the whale once more. He wanders among the bonfires and the huge battalion of men now occupying the entirety of this urban space and slips unseen inside the trailer. There inside he hears a conversation between the circus director and the Prince, with the intermediation of a translator (played by Kormos Mihály, the apocalyptic prophet of doom in *The Turin Horse*). The director is trying to convince the Prince to calm the crowd down, and then we hear the shadow for the first and last time, explaining through his translator the destructive ambition of his apocalyptic plan:

The Prince alone sees the whole. And the whole is nothing. Completely in ruins. What they do and what they will do is illusion and lies. Under construction, everything is only half complete. In ruins, everything is complete. The Director doesn't understand that his followers are not afraid and do

understand him. His followers are going to make ruins of everything! His followers will do what he tells them. There is disillusion in everything and they don't understand why. But the Prince knows full well that it is because the whole is nothing. It is finished. We will crush them with our fury! We will punish them! We will be pitiless! The day has come! There will be nothing left! Fury will overcome all! Their silver and gold cannot protect them! We'll take possession of their houses! Terror is here! Massacre! Show no mercy! Slaughter! Arson! Slaughter!

The Prince's words of course evoke the feverish nihilism of Mikhail Bakunin and Russian revolutionaries, especially Bakunin's famous maxim that the passion for destruction is a creative passion; or Nietzsche's philosophy of the hammer and *hybris* (1996: 131), that sacrilegious excess and violence that inflame the modern subject when he accepts his will to power; or Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling's notion of evil as a positive power for change and alteration that arises out of the human will (Carrasco Conde, 2013). But for Valuska, all that he hears is sound and fury. In that moment he understands that the whale is not the cause of what is happening in the town

Figure 4. Valuska sees the true *imago* of the chaos, the *Nosferatu* shadow of the prince of shadows in *Werckmeister Harmonies*



but merely a gigantic, dead veil that conceals the real *image* of the chaos, the *Nosferatian* shadow of the prince of darkness and his symphony of horror (Fig. 4). Valuska runs on and on without looking back, only turning when he hears an explosion. He stops and looks back at the town from its outskirts, his body cloaked in black, barely distinguishable in the darkness. The sound of explosions repeats like a terminal heartbeat and the light from them crowns the facades of two white buildings in the distance. The revolt has begun. Recalling the words of the Prince—"Arson! Slaughter!"—Valuska, the humble philanthropist, turns around and runs back towards the town. Tarr keeps the shot empty for nearly a full minute, and the explosions continue until we cut directly to the agents of the chaos: an army of men advancing down a street of the town. They walk resolutely, but in total silence, their eyes cast downwards, the clouds of their breath in synch with the martial sound of their footsteps. The camera passes back over them in a four-minute tracking shot, offering an overview of the long line of men; but it also moves down among them, allowing us a glimpse of their empty faces, from which any trace of individuality has, once again, been erased.

The Prince's subjects march on to some unspecified location, and just as they were in the square, they continue to be an anonymous horde. An illuminated door opens before them and a second sequence-shot begins, this one eight minutes in length, showing the gang of rioters charging into a hospital, where they begin smashing everything and beating the patients. They are like an army of empty, unfeeling automatons, with neither a scream of fury nor a battle cry, "no feeling of rage



Figure 5. Upon tearing back the veil of the horror, the violent, anonymous horde comes to the borderline of humanity, of empathy and perhaps of pity in *Werckmeister Harmonies*

against their victims or of pleasure in what they are doing appears on their faces, which remain in the shadows while their arms do their work" (Rancière, 2013: 64). The carefully choreographed camera movements and the bodies moving in and out of the frame turn this shot into a violent dance that stops as abruptly as it began: the only two men whose faces we recognise among the crowd (because of a brief conversation they had earlier with Valuska) tear down a shower curtain, the veil of the real horror, to discover an old man so naked that he even seems almost to have lost the flesh that covered his bones and tendons; a helpless old man, clothed only in the signs that time has left on his emaciated body (Fig. 5). The futility of violence—the borderline of humanity, of empathy and perhaps of pity—is thus embodied, made flesh in front of these two *individua*—the minimum, indivisible unit within the crowd—who at that moment regain their individuality. The two men look at one another briefly, turn around and begin to leave, accompanied by the rest of the attackers and by the music of Vig Mihály. It is the same music that accompanied Valuska's cosmic

dance at the beginning of the film, perhaps signalling that a certain order has been restored. This at least seems to have been Béla Tarr's idea when he filmed this sequence:

In my country there are people who are hungry and cold, who have come to the end of their strength, and who own nothing. These people are bitter towards the whole world, towards everyone who sleeps in a warm bed and eats when they're hungry. Someone comes along and talks to them about destroying the world. It doesn't matter whether this voice takes the form of fascism, communism or anything else. These people want to take action because they've got nothing to lose. Their condition is as terrible as it gets. In the film, they back off after smashing up the hospital because they're human; they weren't born to be criminals or killers. Everybody is innocent; I don't want to judge anyone. And in any case, these people couldn't destroy the whole world. They're no more than a part. (Grugeau, 2002: 24-25)

After this, a third sequence-shot begins, this one lasting three minutes, following the woebe-gone withdrawal of this defeated army of shadows, emptied even of the might of the herd that had driven them up to that moment. In this fifteen-minute sequence made up of three sequence-shots, the Prince's program of destruction has been briefly implemented, although the revolt has been nothing more than an abrupt eruption and its violent dissipation. Faced with the withered body of the old man,⁴ they rediscover their humanity and lose their resolve. But their short-lived revolution has managed to destroy something of significance—some-

thing that is also the very heart of the fictional universe of *Werckmeister Harmonies*. As they withdraw, the camera pans around to reveal Valuska, huddled in a corner and cloaked in shadows. He has seen everything (Fig. 6); his vacant stare with horrified eyes, have been flooded with images that have been engraved upon them, and that have exiled him from a world that has revealed itself to him in all its irretrievable discord: "After what for him had naturally been a terrible night, he had completely sobered up [like a man who] has lived his entire life with his eyes closed, and when [he] opened them, those millions of stars and planets, that universe of delight, simply disappeared" (Krasznahorkai, 2000: 226). The veil has been stripped, blinding him and casting him into darkness: the world has been forever eclipsed for this Adam who has lost his harmonious Eden once and for all.

Now it really does seem to be the end, but the end of *Werckmeister Harmonies* is still a little way off. Reappearing at this point will be an important character that I have not mentioned above: Eszter's ex-wife, Tünde (Hanna Schygulla, one of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's favourite actresses), who had forced Valuska to convince her ex-husband to join the "Cleansed City", a law enforcement movement that seeks to *restore order* to the town.⁵

The morning after the attack on the hospital, the streets are taken over by the army, and Tünde speaks with a senior officer just before the troops begin to march. The revolt was the excuse they were waiting for⁶ and from a hiding place Valuska watches the repressive military machinery move into gear. His gaze can ex-

Figure 6. Valuska's vacant, horrified stare upon the chaos of a discordant world in *Werckmeister Harmonies*



press nothing now, but Tarr offers a visual symbol of his devastated innocence with the poster announcing the circus that we saw at the beginning of the film—when everything, even the momentary alignment of the men embodying the Sun, Earth and Moon, was possible—but which is now torn and barely legible.

And then, once again, the only option is to flee: warned by his landlady that they will come searching for him for having taken part in the revolt, Valuska tries to leave the town behind, following the train tracks, but he will be pursued by a systemic, all-seeing power represented by a helicopter that hunts him from above.⁷ The second-last shot of the film shows Valuska sitting in silence, his gaze clouded, in a mental institution, as if since physical escape has been rendered impossible his only option is a psychological escape, a catatonic introspection that removes him from this unruly reality. At his side, Eszter speaks to him gently and promises that when he gets out they will live together at his home, despite the fact that his ex-wife Tünde has now occupied it (much like the forces of the *new order* have occupied the town). Pragmatic in defeat, the musicologist tells him that he has returned his piano to standard tuning. Nothing matters, he says; nothing matters at all. Eszter, unlike Valuska, has found a way to control himself and adapt to the times.

After saying goodbye, Eszter heads for the square to keep the promise he had made to Valuska earlier in the film. He had to see the giant whale, Valuska had told him, for him to understand “how great is the Lord’s creative impulse and power, and how omnipotence is reflected in that animal.” But when Eszter gets to the square, now emptied of people and with visible signs of the battle, he finds the trailer torn apart and the whale forgotten, left exposed to the elements. Eszter approaches it slowly, and after contemplating the whale’s great dead eye, he turns and walks out of the frame. The camera remains there, while Vig Mihály’s music fills our ears and the fog—perhaps

the smoke from the bonfires—envelops the massive corpse (which is doubly dead: physically and symbolically) until the whole scene fades to black. It is a final image that simply defies interpretation as it does not signal or represent anything but is merely presented with the unbearable allegorical nakedness of the wasteland. And it is a final image that concludes nothing, because decline and ruin do not and cannot have an end. Valuska, the unwitting visionary, had already foretold it to his drunken companions in the tavern: “*No need to fear; it’s not over.*”

CODA: ENDING WITHOUT END

“‘No sooner do we come into this world,’ said Flaubert, ‘than bits of us start to fall off.’ The masterpiece, once completed, does not stop: it continues in motion, downhill. Our leading expert on Géricault confirms that the painting is ‘now in part a ruin’. And no doubt if they examine the frame they will discover woodworm living there.”

Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in Ten 1/2 Chapters* (1990: 139).

Béla Tarr has stated many times that there are no metaphors, symbols or allegories in his films and his intention is always to “film reality” (Grugeau, 2002: 24). But his fondness for ruins (political or moral, personal or social) and for ends (of time or of history, of the individual or of the community) take him close to allegory as Walter Benjamin understood it, as Tarr’s work also “holds fast to the ruins, offering an image of petrified unrest” (2008: 273). Just as authors of German Baroque drama drew on allegory to show the ruins of a decadent society—and Benjamin made use of allegory to show the outdated nature of the notion of history itself⁸—Tarr also offers images of the petrified unrest of our age, of its relentless decline. This is exactly what the whale is: fossilised unrest, the inert factor of chaos, an allegory which, unlike metaphor, does not represent but shows,

is shown, *gives to see*. For this reason, Benjamin views allegory as an optical device⁹ that allows us to see the world through the prism of desolation and ruins, present or yet to come, because decline is of course a process that is unstoppable, but also unending.

Unending? Yes, because the victory of decline would necessarily be the victory of its *cadere*, the success of its fall, the perfection of its ruin. But could a ruin be completed and attain its *perfectio*? Could it ever be “completely over and done” when its very nature is pure undoing? The culmination of decline, which seems always to be impending, is ultimately unattainable because *the ending has no end*; in decline the peak is reached in the abyss, the zenith at the nadir, and the primordial *arché* with the final *eschaton*. The eternal return, the apocatastasis in which everything returns to its starting point, an endless circularity that could also be expressed this way: decline is a process without end, an *unmaking of*, an undoing that could only ever culminate in nothingness. And nothingness cannot exist, because if the law of conservation of matter asserts that what exists cannot have arisen out of nothingness, then it follows that nothingness cannot arise out of what exists. Everything changes, but nothing disappears. Because in the universe, plenitude (that which has a limit, and therefore can be completed) does not exist; only transition and transformation, that “constant wave” that Schlegel spoke of. In the same moment of the Big Bang, the Big End also began, because all splendour carries within it its own decay, every construction includes the germ of its ruin, and every apotheosis is merely the first step in its future and unattainable apocalypse.

Unattainable? Yes, because if all the above is true, there is no end of time but only an end *in time*: the world ending forever without ever reaching or completing that end (this may be the reason for Tarr’s fondness for the sequence-shot, for a take which, ideally, would never end). The

apocalypse could therefore not be a moment, a fragment of time, but the fall (*cadere*) in time itself, its decay and decline, like a ruin collapsing and falling (*ruere*) forever and ever. Perhaps it is precisely this ending without end that is foreshadowed and encapsulated in the mysterious epigraph chosen by László Krasznahorkai for *The Melancholy of Resistance*: “It passes, but it does not pass away” (Krasznahorkai, 2000: 1). ■

NOTES

1. This desire for a cosmic, loving connection is something that Lars Von Trier, a Romantic in spite of himself, hints at in *Melancholia* (2011) when Justine (Kirsten Dunst) strips naked so that the light radiating from the planet Melancholia, which is about to collide with the Earth, can be absorbed by her body.
2. Certainly a pessimistic vision, which Tarr also applied to Hungary before the collapse of communism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he made his first films with stories focusing on the working class of his country and of Eastern Europe in general, from *Family Nest* (Családi tűzfészek, 1977) to *The Outsider* (Szabadgyalog, 1981).
3. The *tetractys* is a triangular formation with ten points which for the Pythagoreans represented the order of the universe, ordered into four rows of one, two, three and four, respectively.
4. The old man’s body has been interpreted as an echo of the Shoah—see, for example, Rodríguez Serrano (2016) or Rosen (2016)—although if we are to consider Tarr’s own point of view, this was not his intention (Kudlac, 2016).
5. Even the name of this civic organisation evokes the numerous far-right groups that seize on the idea of *cleansing* (ethnic, social, familial, moral...).
6. My analysis of *Werckmeister Harmonies* is not political, but it is clear that its apocalyptic dread arises from the clash between a dominant class and a rebelling dominated class. And as Jonathan Romney (2003) suggests, it is tempting to compare the film with the final days of communism in Hungary (Krasznahorkai’s

novel was published in 1989), although its scope is certainly universal: the cyclical narrative of an old, decaying order, the violent eruption of the energies of a people subjugated for too long, and the equally violent repression imposed by the old order. But neither of the two groups come out well, neither the reactionaries nor the libertarians; the two are opposite extremes of a tightrope that must be walked by *the individual*, embodied by both Valuska and Eszter, two acrobats who try but fail to withstand the violent tugs on the cord.

7. An *omnipresent* and *inescapable* representation of power that can also be found in other films where a helicopter hunts for fugitives: Joseph Losey's *Figures in a Landscape* (1970); Ted Kotcheff's *First Blood* (1982); Tom Tykwer's *Heaven* (2002); and Jerzy Skolimowski's *Essential Killing* (2010).
8. In particular, see *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (Benjamin, 2019), *Trauerspiel y tragedia* (Benjamin, 2007) and *Parque central* (Benjamin, 2008).
9. "The original interest in the allegory is not linguistic but optical" (Benjamin, 2008: 296).

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COMPLETELY IN RUINS: BÉLA TARR'S WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES

Abstract

Werckmeister Harmonies (Weckmeister Harmoniák, Béla Tarr, 2000) offers an emblematic exploration of the Romantic concept of *Sehnsucht*, the modern subject's melancholic longing to recover the primeval harmony with Nature and the cosmos that the Enlightenment deprived us of. Obsessively following the wandering figure of Valuska (Lars Rudolph), Tarr portrays an eclipsed world in a downward spiral where even resistance is plagued by terminal melancholia. The signs of the "coming catastrophe" can be seen everywhere, especially after the arrival in town of a travelling circus featuring a giant preserved whale and an apocalyptic prophet named "the Prince", who adopts the symbolic narration of the *eschaton*, the discourse of doomsday and the eschatological signs of the end of the world. "Completely in ruins. Under construction, everything is only half complete. In ruins, everything is complete", we hear him proclaim. And few words better describe this process of endless decline, the perpetual ruin wrought by Modernity in which the contemporary—post-modern—subject is still immersed.

Key words

Béla Tarr; Cosmogony; Harmony; Apocalypse; Decline; Ruin; History; End.

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TODO ES RUINA: LAS ARMONÍAS WERCKMEISTER DE BÉLA TARR

Resumen

Las armonías Werckmeister (Werckmeister harmóniák, 2000) de Béla Tarr propone un acercamiento ejemplar al *Sehnsucht* romántico, aquel anhelo melancólico del sujeto moderno por recuperar la primitiva armonía con la naturaleza y el cosmos que la Ilustración había proscrito. Siguiendo obsesivamente la figura deambulante de Valuska (Lars Rudolph), Tarr muestra un mundo eclipsado y en incipiente ruina en el que hasta la resistencia está aquejada de una melancolía terminal. Las señales de la «inminente catástrofe» se reproducen por doquier, acompañadas por la llegada a la ciudad de un circo en el que viajan una gigantesca ballena disecada y «el Príncipe», un profeta apocalíptico que hace suya la simbólica narración del *éschaton*, el discurso de las últimas cosas y sus señales escatológicas del fin del mundo. «Todo es ruina. Y todo lo que se construye solo está acabado a medias. En ruinas, todo está completo», se le escucha decir. Y pocas palabras describen mejor ese proceso de decadencia sin final, de ruina perpetua de la Modernidad en el que el sujeto contemporáneo —posmoderno— está todavía inmerso.

Palabras clave

Béla Tarr; cosmogonía; armonía; apocalipsis; decadencia; ruina; historia; final.

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WALTZ WITH BASHIR: DOCUMENTARY, ANIMATION AND MEMORY

JAVIER MORAL MARTÍN

I. INTRODUCTION

It was an unprecedented event in the history of the Academy Awards. In 2009, nominated for the Oscar for best foreign language film was *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), an animated documentary from Israel based on a dark episode in the 1982 Lebanon War: the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Although the Oscar ultimately went to the Japanese film *Departures* (Okuribito, Yôjirô Takita, 2008), the success and public profile of the Israeli picture, which in addition to the Oscar accolade had received a BAFTA nomination and had won a Golden Globe, highlights the extraordinary impact currently being generated by documentary projects that make use of animation as a representational strategy.

In this respect, *Waltz with Bashir* can be analysed as an extraordinary example that encapsulates some of the most significant developments

taking place in contemporary film and television in general and in the realm of the documentary in particular. On the one hand, it shows how the documentary genre has been spilling over into the much more blurry but at the same time more inclusive territory of non-fiction. Propelled by the revolution that began with the widespread use of digital technology, Folman's film is located at the decisive moment of the breaking of the traditional pact with the truth that the documentary traditionally maintained with the event it documents, based on the idea of its supposed direct contact with reality. And this is because, as Jeffrey Skoller suggests, the animated documentary seems to have demonstrated a "profound awareness that the truth proclaimed by non-fiction forms are no longer located in the 'reality effects' of the photographic print" (Skoller, 2011: 207). It is no accident that the Israeli film is founded on certain modes of engagement with the animated image which, as Honess Roe has pointed out, place the debate

beyond the testimonial and documentary value of the photographic image (basically, by pursuing non-mimetic substitution and evocation, Honess Roe, 2013: 23).

On the other hand, *Waltz with Bashir* exemplifies the importance that “subjectivisation” and the power of memory in the social reconstruction of the past have acquired in documentary storytelling. Ever since *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985) offered its monumental exploration of the terrible historical wound of twentieth century society through the voices of its survivors, the “legitimacy of subjective expression to documentary” (Winston et al., 2017: 2) has been gaining widespread acceptance in recent decades, to the point that, as Michael Renov suggests in his landmark study, “the subject in documentary has, to a surprising degree, become the subject of documentary” (Renov, 2004: XXIV).

It is through the strategic combination of these two developments that the Israeli film offers a profound reflection on the horror of war and of how individuals can become involved in barbaric acts in contradiction to their interests. The orchestration of audiovisual resources brought into play, together with a spiralling narrative architecture that attempts to fill in a painful absence (the absence of an image, of a trace that would confirm the protagonist’s time in Beirut during the invasion and the massacre), allows the film to effectively mobilise the viewer’s emotional reaction to a barbaric act. It is surely here that the filmmaker’s aesthetic approach acquires its most political dimension: the expressive and symbolic use of the “cut-out” animation technique and a clever formal management of narrative material establishes a cognitive and emotional dialectic in relation to the events recreated in the film that fosters the adoption of a particular ethical position with regard to warfare (Murray, 1995).

2. FROM HISTORY TO MEMORY, FROM VICTIM TO PERPETRATOR

In the general context of an increasing number of documentaries exploring barbaric acts, two basic elements evident in *Waltz with Bashir* are worth noting: the paradigm shift that has privileged the use of testimonial sources and narrated recollections in the reconstruction of historical events; and the progressive public visibility of the figure of the perpetrator as an alternative (albeit highly problematic) source of information on those events. The interweaving of these two elements is facilitating the construction of new discourses that have put the subject back at the heart of the historical events while at the same time highlighting the importance of social factors in major conflicts.

2.1. From history to memory

In the contemporary debate over the confrontation of our present with the past, cinema is positioned as a privileged mediator in the construction of our memory, and therefore as a decisive instrument in the definition of our contemporary identity (Kilbourn, 2010; Sinha and McSweeney, 2009). Indeed, the construction of identity on its different, interconnected levels (individual/collective; cultural/social; national/international) depends largely on the relationship we establish with the past, that temporal space on which we project ourselves in our search for meaning. This dialogue draws on the inversion of the temporal principles that underpinned the project of modernity during the first half of the twentieth century. While modernity was founded on a blind faith in the future that represented a radical break with what came before, post-modernity has turned its gaze back towards the past (Huyssen, 2002; Radstone, 2000; Rossington and Whitehead, 2007). This veritable *volte-face* had a lot to do with the historical consciousness developed in Western society upon the revelation of the Nazi barbarism

and the essential role that the witness took on as a mediator between the “absolute event” (Blanchot, 1990: 46) and a society reluctant to confront that event directly.

A rich debate thus developed in an effort to define the complex interrelations between history and memory (Namer, 1987; Le Goff, 1988; Ricoeur, 2000; Traverso, 2007; Berger and Niven, 2014). The central idea of this confrontation rests on a distinction that is material and thematic as well as enunciative: while history is supposed to be an exhaustive interpretation of a past viewed as something completed, memory conceives of the past as something open, intimately connected to our present, and as such always capable of exerting its power over us.

This epistemological shift was consolidated emblematically in the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence in the social sciences of memory studies, a field of research that recovered and reformulated much earlier propositions by authors of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, such as the philosopher Henri Bergson (2006) or the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992) and his well-known concept of the “collective memory”, which would subsequently be developed by Adeila and Jan Assmann with their notion of “cultural memory” (Assmann, 2011). At the turn of the millennium, the concept of memory appears to have entered a new phase in which the centrality of the Shoah has been overshadowed by the appearance on the stage of other traumatic memories: the globalisation of the Shoah represented the foundation for a new international policy on human rights, while also facilitating the cultural visibility of other barbaric acts (Levy and Sznajder, 2005).

In this respect, considering the importance of cinema in the cultural processes involving the recovery of the past, it is clear that this visibility has found its best ally in documentary making. An example of this can be found in the Israeli context and the appearance of a “new wave” (Morag,

2016; Yosef, 2011) after the Second Intifada (2000–2005), which, in addition to *Waltz with Bashir*, resulted in films as significant as *Z32* (Avi Mograbi, 2008) and *To See If I’m Smiling* (Tamar Yarom, 2007). Other cases can be found in regions like Latin America, where filmmakers have revisited the dictatorships of the 1970s, such as Albertina Carri with her exploration of the murky intricacies of Videla’s Argentina to uncover the mystery of her parents’ murder in *The Blonds* (Los rubios, 2003), or María Inés Roqué with *Papá Iván* (2004), which tells the story of her father, a founding member of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) rebel group that operated in Argentina during the 1970s. Another example can be found in Southeast Asia, where Rithy Panh has attempted to find closure through the painful act of delving into the atrocities perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in many of his films, like *The Missing Picture* (L’image manquante, 2013) and *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge, 2003). And even Spain is turning its gaze back on its painful past, with films like *Nadar* (Carla Subirana, 2008), *30 años de oscuridad* [30 Years of Darkness] (Manuel H. Martín, 2009), or the false documentary *Tierra encima* [Buried] (Sergio Morcillo, 2005).

2.2. From victim to perpetrator

Along with this new engagement with the past has come another recent development in memory studies, related to a shift in focus from the figure of the victim to that of the perpetrator. Without undermining the essential role of the victim’s story, the voice of the perpetrator has begun challenging the dichotomy inherent in the victim/perpetrator binary to view it instead as a bipolarity, as extremes on a spectrum that is never definitive and that would thus allow for the emergence of a grey area between the two (Baum, 2008; Üngör, 2012; Hochberg, 2013; Canet, 2018, Sánchez-Biosca, 2018).

This shift in focus is facilitating the assessment of the perpetrator's role in major conflicts more precisely. On the one hand, most human beings could end up being executioners in certain circumstances, as Christopher R. Browning starkly concludes: "If the men of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?" (Browning, 1993: 189). On the other hand, the traditional emphasis on individual responsibility in studies of genocides has tended to sidestep the question of collective responsibility, thus overlooking the structural violence that underpins a society and legitimises the barbaric acts (Roth, 2004; Bloxham, Kushner, 2005; Morag 2016).

The phantom represented by the perpetrator, which cultural memory does not wish to see, is now being rendered visible in various media forms, although the documentary has again emerged as the genre that interrogates this figure most actively and with the greatest degree of complexity. *The Last of the Unjust* (Le dernier des injustes, Claude Lanzmann, 2013), for example, is located in that grey area of the Shoah in its portrait of the last President of the Jewish Council in the Theresienstadt ghetto; *Standard Operating Procedure* (Morris, 2008) interviews the soldiers responsible for the "infamous images" of Abu Grahb; the diptych made up of *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012) and *The Look of Silence* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014) exposes the killings perpetrated in Indonesia after the coup d'état of 1965; *Terra de ninguém* [No Man's Land] (Salomé Lamas, 2013) explores Portugal's colonialist past from the perspective of one of its mercenaries; and *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, *Enemies of the People* (Rob Lemkin and Thet Sambath, 2009) and *Duch: Master of the Forges of Hell* (Rithy Panh 2012) examine the horror unleashed by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. And of course, *Waltz with Bashir* reflects on the massacre of hundreds of Palestinian and Lebanese refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refu-

gee camps in Beirut, perpetrated between the 14th and the 16th of September 1982 by the Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia in retaliation for the assassination of Lebanon's recently elected president, Bashir Gemayel.

3. WALTZ WITH BASHIR: MEMORY, TRAUMA, PERPETRATOR

Ari Folman's film offers a perfect illustration of the two elements described above. On the one hand, it places the role of memory at the heart of the reconstruction of the past, while on the other it does so from the perspective of a perpetrator who, far from being depicted in the coarse outlines of a monster, is presented as an individual caught up in a set of social dynamics that exert a powerful pressure on his behaviour and actions.

Ari is a young soldier who has only just turned nineteen and has no prior battle experience ("I still hadn't started shaving" he remarks at the very moment he recalls his first day of combat), who is sent into a war in which he is faced with the horror of its terrible consequences from the outset: the actions he becomes caught up in cannot be explained by the logic of warfare. The conflict that torments the protagonist at this moment can be understood more clearly with reference to the cognitivist analysis developed by Albert Bandura (1999) on the moral disengagement necessary to act inhumanely. Put simply, the young Ari could not effectively disengage his moral inhibitions in relation to the actions he was required to commit in the context of war. Indeed, at the root of the protagonist's trauma is the disjunction between his moral principles and the social factors that conditioned the situation of conflict. The young soldier's mind was incapable of articulating any of the moral justifications that are normally used for military action (such as fighting oppression, preserving peace, saving humankind from subjugation, or fulfilling your patriotic duty). Ari was therefore unable to sanction his presence in the

war as something good or at least necessary, in keeping with the situation he had been thrust into. Instead, the excesses committed against the civilian population during the campaign, as well as the recognition and final acceptance of his passive participation in the vicinity of the refugee camps where the massacre took place, severely affected his moral principles and decision-making capacity.

When the protagonist begins his investigation, his friend and lawyer, Ori Sivan, explains it to him with perfect clarity: in the invasion, Ari identified with his role with that of the Nazi criminals, an unbearable idea for an individual whose personal and cultural memory is profoundly marked by the Shoah. As a result, the journey towards remembering taken by the

protagonist only serves to dig deeper, from one sequence to the next, into the terrible and devastating truth of war. There are no heroic or noble acts at any moment, but quite the opposite. The rampant shooting spree that takes the lives of a family after landing at a beach, the transportation of dead and wounded soldiers in a tank firing constantly at nothing, his comrade-in-arms Ronny Dayag's feeling of guilt after surviving a confrontation with enemy forces, the randomness and constant errors in the military objectives that end the lives of countless innocent civilians, the permissiveness and neglect of duty in the face of the atrocities committed by the Christian Phalangists, or the wild and pain-filled faces of the mothers crying over the deaths of their children after the massacre, are all scenes that expose the irrationality and meaninglessness of war.

In psychiatric terms, Ari's memory is debilitated by the excessive influx of stimuli he experienced in the war, which buried his recollections

in the deepest recesses of his subconscious. Ari is a traumatised individual who must face up to certain historical events that lie latent in his psyche, but that come back to the surface like the return of the repressed (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2004). In this sense, and in the words the filmmaker places in the mouth of Boaz in the form of a question ("Can't films be therapeutic?"), *Waltz with Bashir* operates as a kind of rehabilitation that the protagonist must undergo until what has been buried deep is reconstructed and reintegrated into his moral experience: only when he can recall what

happened in September 1982 and accept his part in the military operation that allowed the massacre to happen can he begin on the path to healing.

This therapeutic journey is expressed in the film in an especially ac-

tive way on two complementary semiotic levels: the narrative level and the figurative level. On the narrative level, the plot to *Waltz with Bashir* is constructed as a kind of investigation in the first person to deal with an obvious gap: Ari in the present doesn't remember what part he played in the military operation in the past; he can't recall any of what happened. This is the function performed by the first sequence: the conversation with his old comrade Boaz and his story of a recurring nightmare that has plagued him for years serves to reveal that the protagonist is suffering from an absence; there is a gap in his memory that he needs to fill in order to solve the mystery posed at that very moment: did Ari take part in the First Lebanon War?

However, in contrast with a classic detective story, the protagonist's investigation follows a curved rather than a linear trajectory. Because it is a traumatised memory, the reconstruction of the event proves more complex and labyrinthine.

THIS THERAPEUTIC JOURNEY IS EXPRESSED IN THE FILM IN AN ESPECIALLY ACTIVE WAY ON TWO COMPLEMENTARY SEMIOTIC LEVELS: THE NARRATIVE LEVEL AND THE FIGURATIVE LEVEL

As a result, as Maureen Turim observes in relation to films that narrate traumatic events, *Waltz with Bashir* also makes use of fragmentation, breaking up the sequences because “the dislocation inherent in modernist storytelling serves as an analogy for psychic damage” (Turim, 2010: 299). The relationship established between the past and present in Ari’s story thus differs from the causal order that governs the classical narrative. Instead, the two time periods are juxtaposed in a much more complex and ambiguous way, constructing a fractured and dispersed kind of spatio-temporal universe in which the past begins to exert its pressure on the present, gradually contaminating it as Ari’s investigation progresses. Indeed, there is nothing accidental about the regular presence of past and present on the screen from the moment that Ari’s interview with Boaz triggers his first memory-image; in a wide shot, Ari looks out over the sea on a seaside promenade that we will subsequently recognise is in Beirut [Image 01]. A sideways pan following the character’s gaze as he turns his head brings some flares into view in the background, descending slowly and bathing the scene in a yellow hue with a markedly dreamlike quality [Image 02]. From this moment, in a kind of spiral motion, the story progresses while returning on three occasions to this original image, which assumes, with clearly psychoanalytical logic, the displaced and condensed features of the traumatic image: the flares light up the seashore where a young Ari is bathing in the water with some other soldiers; they walk up to the seaside promenade and cross streets devastated by bomb blasts until, turning a corner, they come upon a crowd of women dressed in black who are crying out in grief, although we cannot hear their words (a plaintive tune floods the soundtrack).

The importance of this image, and of the search for an image that will enable Ari to overcome his amnesia (that will enable him to find meaning), is fundamental to the film’s figurative approach, a second level in the textualisation of



Image 1 and 2. *Waltz with Bashir*

the protagonist’s therapeutic journey. Drawing on the work of Freud (2001), Gil Hochberg suggests that trauma is intimately tied to the inability to view the event that caused the psychic wound; the excessive stimulus of the traumatic event leads to a “momentary shutdown of all sensory organs, most notably the eyes. The witnessing of a trauma survivor event is, more accurately speaking, a failed witnessing” (Hochberg, 2013: 45).

This is why Ari Folman, as the agent of events that he cannot reintegrate into his moral system, has also suffered a failure of perception. *Waltz with Bashir* exhibits an extraordinary awareness of the importance of this failed condition in the film’s construction, to the point of including a sequence that exposes the failure clearly: the filmmaker’s interview with a psychiatrist who talks

about the experience of a previous patient. It is the story of a young amateur photographer who dealt with the horrors of war by imagining it as a big trip that he was watching through an imaginary photo camera. Thanks to this screen, he was able to make himself feel as if he was outside the situation despite being



Image 3. *Waltz with Bashir*

in the middle of it, until one day, the psychiatrist explains, his camera “broke”: the sight of some Arabian horses abandoned to their fate, dead or wounded at the Hippodrome, shattered the lens of his imaginary camera [Image 03] and plunged the young man into a state of madness.

In any case, this problematic issue of witnessing spills beyond the phantasmal enigma-image to encompass the whole visual universe of the film. We should not forget that as a story based on memory, much of what we see on the screen is through the consciousness and the first-person recollections of the protagonist. These are recollections that cannot yet draw out the secret that has been buried deep, memories subject to the relentlessly repetitive dynamics that characterise a trauma, displaced and juxtaposed fragments that come back again and again at the very moment of sensory and emotional breakdown. It is here that the use of animation in *Waltz with Bashir* acquires its full meaning, becoming an essential ally in the figurative formalisation of the condition that afflicts the protagonist’s experience. Indeed, while in theory animation seems ill-equipped to portray external reality, it is for this very incapacity that it actually possesses “the potential to expand the realm of documentary epistemology from the ‘world out there’ of observable events to the ‘world

in here’ of subjective experience” (Honess Roe, 2009: 323).

Thanks to a particular expressive texture that rejects the idea of a faithful reconstruction of a past brought whole into the present, the animation in *Waltz with Bashir* explicitly exhibits its distance from the real image: the dark masses of

shadows that envelope the bodies on numerous occasions, the sourness of a colour range that expresses the character’s discomfort with his own memories, evade a mimetic appearance to effectively underscore the subjective experience that underpins the film (Mansfield, 2010).

The animated screen is thus established as a kind of veil masking what happened in reality, only perceptible in a displaced way as an enigma-image that emerges when Ari has his “first flashback in twenty years”. This is why he needs to return repeatedly to this image and try to decipher it, and why it is only at the end, when he acknowledges his participation in the siege on the Sabra and Shatila camps, that the missing image can emerge (Yosef, 2010), that blurred image that has been hovering constantly in the protagonist’s memory and that can finally come out into the light, although it is the light of a TV news report: the reverse shot to the close-up of the young Ari’s face (a shot that systematically closes the protagonist’s memory-images) [Image 04] is filled with the devastated faces of numerous women, old and young, searching for their loved ones, howling in horror over what they have suffered [Image05] [Image 06]. The animated image that established a distance from the event, together with the soundtrack of dreamlike chords that muffled the

impact of reality, gives way now to a truth served up raw to confirm the protagonist's sensory recovery and his acceptance of responsibility in the massacre. The harrowing television images that

Image 4, 5 and 6. *Waltz with Bashir*



now fill the screen (and that do nothing to conceal the fact that they are TV images) constitute the painful end-point of both the investigation and the film.

4. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Apart from its commercial success, the significance of Ari Folman's film can be confirmed by the recent appearance of a number of animated documentaries which, while set in other regions and using different stylistic criteria, similarly explore the power of animation for depicting traumatic historical events. *Little Voices* (Pequeñas voces, Oscar Andrade and Jairo Eduardo Carillo, 2010), which gives a voice to children who have suffered first-hand from the conflict in Colombia; *Another Day of Life* (Raúl de la Fuente and Damian Nenow, 2018), an animated adaptation of the book by Ryszard Kapuscinski about the horrors of the civil war in Angola in 1975; or *Chris the Swiss* (Anja Kofmel, 2018), which tells of the death of Swiss journalist Christian Würtenberg in the Balkan War, all reflect the increasing awareness among some filmmakers of the expressive power of animation.

Waltz with Bashir, however, continues to be an essential milestone in the evolution of a genuine pedagogy of horror for this new century: the depiction of all acts that contradict the heroic narrative of war propaganda, the investigation of a protagonist who relives a dramatic experience contrary to his moral integrity, culminating in his acknowledgement that he participated in a barbaric act, and the filmmaker's extraordinary capacity to exploit the sensory logic of animation, were all turned into strategies that contributed to the creation of a powerful audiovisual discourse capable of mobilising the spectator's emotions and eliciting a moral response on two levels (Bandura, 1999): injunctive, in that it teaches us to refrain from inhumane behaviours; and proactive, in that it encourages us to adopt attitudes

inclined towards empathy and understanding of others. Only through discourses that succeed in emotionally engaging viewers, as *Waltz with Bashir* does, can the personal truth of the individuals portrayed be placed in relation with the collective, social truth of the spectators—a connection that is essential to the construction of a better world. ■

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WALTZ WITH BASHIR: DOCUMENTARY, ANIMATION AND MEMORY

Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of a contemporary animated documentary that has been unanimously recognised as an extraordinary ethical and aesthetic example of the depiction of war through the personal recollections of a perpetrator: *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). To this end, an examination is offered of the narrative, thematic and expressive strategies of the film and their effect on the ethical engagement of the spectator in response to a barbaric act. In this way, through a clever combination of expressive effects characteristic of animation that deliberately distance the film from the hyperrealistic codes of classical filmmaking, and a heavily fragmented narrative structure that gives shape to a traumatic event experienced in the first person, *Waltz with Bashir* offers a powerful audiovisual discourse that elicits a profound degree of empathy from the spectator, encouraging a critical response to the events depicted.

Key words

Barbarism; Documentary; Animation; Trauma; Memory; War; Perpetrator.

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VALS CON BASHIR: DOCUMENTAL, ANIMACIÓN Y MEMORIA

Resumen

El presente trabajo analiza un reciente documental de animación que ha sido reconocido de manera unánime como un extraordinario ejemplo ético y estético en la representación bélica a través de la memoración en primera persona de un perpetrador: *Vals con Bashir* (Waltz with Bashir, Ari Folman, 2008). Para ello, se ponen en valor las estrategias narrativas, temáticas y expresivas del film y sus consecuencias en la implicación ética del espectador ante un acto de barbarie. Así, gracias a una sabia conjugación de los efectos expresivos derivados de la animación, que se aleja de manera consciente de los códigos hiperrealistas de la cinematografía clásica, y una articulación de la narración fuertemente fragmentada que da forma a un acontecimiento traumático que vincula la memoria individual y la memoria colectiva, el film israelí propone un potente discurso audiovisual que activa una profunda empatía con un espectador que reacciona de manera crítica frente a los acontecimientos escenificados.

Palabras clave

Barbarie; documental; animación; trauma; memoria; guerra; perpetrador.

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