

A DESCENT INTO THE ATAVISTIC FEMININE: THE DANCES IN *FACING THE WIND*

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LOST SYMBOLS

In his essay *Note sul gesto*, Giorgio Agamben describes cinema as a place where “a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss” (Agamben, 2000: 52). This idea is an underlying theme of the film *Facing the Wind* (Con el viento, Meritxell Colell, 2018), a family drama set in the vestiges of a world on the verge of extinction. Colell’s film tells the story of Mónica (played by Mónica García), a dancer who, after having lived for many years in Buenos Aires, returns to Spain upon the death of her father. When she arrives at her childhood home, a rustic, run-down farmhouse in the Castilian countryside, she is reunited with her mother (Concha Canal), her sister (Ana Fernández), and

her niece (Elena Martín). From the vegetable garden to the barn, from the farming tools to the fire stoves of a primitive kitchen, the movements of the four characters awaken the dormant memory of multiple generations of women who lived on that same land.

In recent years, Spain has seen a proliferation of diverse discourses that all reflect an interest in restoring a connection with the country’s rural spaces, in repopulating the empty or deserted land with ancient whispers, or at least in being there to document their disappearance. These discourses have provided a forum for the first voices of a specifically rural feminism, articulated in the works of various women creators in different artistic fields. Many of them share a common objective: to reclaim the gestures of the rural woman,

the woman of the countryside, and to identify in those gestures the signs of a silent, atavistic intimacy, even when in most cases those signs only amount to an iconography of the absent form. A good example of this can be found in the book *Land of Women* by the Cordoban writer and field veterinarian María Sánchez, in a passage where the author looks at her hands and recognises her female ancestors in them, a long line of nameless women:

I too form part of that lineage of women of the land, their hands overflowing with corn to feed their chickens, their hands in the hands of those who trapped hares, who know about lime and the places where the poachers hide, who rise up, despite it all, like the knees of all women, covered in dirt and pebbles from endless olive picking (Sánchez, 2019: 109).

The poetics of gesture suggested in *Land of Women* involves an effort to gaze on the empty spaces and to seek in them the mirror in which the spectres of the past are reflected. *Facing the Wind* has a very similar premise. The character of Mónica represents a generation which, as Agamben argues, must reconnect with what is no longer there, with something that has vanished, through a reactivation of the space that its disappearance has left behind. This idea is tied in with the notion of anachronism as Georges Didi-Huberman explains it in many of his writings, as a “phantasmal reappearance” and as “what survives of an anthropological dynamic and sedimentation that have become partial, virtual, because they have been largely destroyed by time” (Didi-Huberman, 2018: 36). In *Facing the Wind*, Meritxell Colell tries to find a way of expressing the anachronistic, i.e., a language that can integrate the past into the present, even when that past has been almost entirely erased. The character of Mónica finds that language in dance.

In a more recent text, Agamben describes gestures as suspended movements, acts emancipated from any purpose (2018). Dance is in many ways a

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stylisation of these movements. According to Agamben, dance could be understood as the essence of the gesture taken to its ultimate abstraction. The structure of *Facing the Wind* is framed by two dance scenes at the beginning and the end of the film. In the opening scene, Mónica is dancing in a rehearsal room. Her body, moving in and out of a beam of white light, appears to be coming to life, unfolding its limbs. In the final scene, Mónica dances in the light of a blazing dawn sun, on a Castilian hillside battered by a high wind that hollows out the landscape as if to make room there for the voices of the dead. As will be explored below, this final dance is an attempt to embrace absence, to enter the void and perhaps also to reclaim all the lost gestures it holds. The scene conveys the idea of a historical transmission that is necessarily residual, incomplete, in a way that is reminiscent of the legend recounted by Godard in a voice-over at the beginning of *Oh, Woe Is Me* (*Hélas pour moi*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1993):

When my great-grandfather had a difficult task to do, he would go to a place in the forest, light a fire and lose himself in silent prayer. And his task would be done. When my grandfather had to face the same task, he would go the same place and say: “We don’t know how to light the fire anymore, but we still know the prayer.” And his task would be done. Later, my father also went to the forest and said: “We don’t know how to light the fire anymore, nor do we know the mystery of the prayer, but we do know the exact place in the forest where it would occur. That should be enough.” And it was enough. But when I had to face the same task, I stayed at home and said: “We don’t know how to

light the fire anymore. We don't know the prayers anymore. We don't even know where the place in the forest is. But we still know how to tell the story."

And what are we left with when we can't even tell the story? That is when dance comes into play. Various authors have seen in dance the ideal means of evoking a kind of hazy image of the past in the present. "In our ignorance of the art of dance, we imagine its birth," suggests Jean-Luc Nancy (2005: 138) in an essay which, incidentally, compares the body's awakening in dance with the expansive development of the foetus as it creates itself inside the uterus. In this article, I propose to analyse the dances in *Facing the Wind* as cinematic forms of memory, no longer able to imitate those lost atavistic gestures, but still capable of establishing a dialogue with them. My objective is to consider the strategies used in Meritxell Colell's film to construct a visual representation of memory, an approach that could potentially be associated with other contemporary Spanish films exploring rural themes, most of which have been directed by women, in a tradition that began with films like *The Sky Turns* (*El cielo gira*, Mercedes Álvarez, 2004).

CHOREOGRAPHING GESTURES

What does dance represent for the memory of a community? The field of anthropology has explored this question. In 1974, as part of the Choreometrics Project, the ethnologist and musicologist Alan Lomax made a documentary titled *Dance and Human History: Movement Style and Culture #1* (Alan Lomax & Forrestine Paulay, 1974), which identifies a series of geometric patterns in popular dances in different regions around the world, and then relates these movements to the main activities performed in each region. Lomax concludes that all folk dancing is associated with the gestures that each society has developed through the use of its axes, hoes or pitchforks, its crafting implements, its fishing and hunting tools; these gestures are therefore anchored in the very roots

of each society's economy. Lomax points out, for example, that the curving motion of the Aragonese jota dance is the same movement made with the sickle to reap the wheat harvest. Even with the evolution and modernisation of each society gradually consigning these archaic gestures to oblivion, we can still find vestiges of them in traditional dances (Lomax, 2005).

Choreographing gestures means inscribing them in time, an idea that informs the work of the art historian Aby Warburg, who established the nameless science that only after his death was baptised by Erwin Panofsky with the name "iconology". Warburg's project culminated in the monumental construction of the nearly 80 panels that comprise the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which might well be described as an interminable choreography of gestures. This is particularly evident in one of the most famous and widely studied panels, panel number 46, the Nymph. At the very bottom of the panel is a photograph of a Tuscan peasant woman taken by Warburg with his own camera during a visit to the village of Settignano. In the photograph, the woman appears to be in a hurry, her body leaning forward as if rushing past the camera and out of the frame. In this pose, Warburg identified a gesture found repeatedly in art history since ancient times. It is the gesture of the dancing nymph, which combines different female figures depicted in motion, swift-footed, on the run. The speed of her steps is apparent in details like her draping clothes, her flowing hair, and feet that barely touch the ground.

In an article published some years ago now, Iván Pintor argues that Warburg's work, and especially the *Atlas*, offers an ideal methodological

CHOREOGRAPHING GESTURES MEANS INSCRIBING THEM IN TIME, AN IDEA THAT INFORMS THE WORK OF THE ART HISTORIAN ABY WARBURG

framework for studying the gesture in contemporary cinema (Pintor, 2012). This framework is informed by a phantasmal vocabulary filled with dynamic concepts, of which one of the most important is the concept of afterlife (*Nachleben*), referring to the collection of timeless energies that have returned again and again over the course of history. As Agamben suggests, in the *Atlas*, “images of the past that have lost their meaning live on as nightmares or spectres” (2010: 53). Warburg himself refers to the *Atlas* in his notes as a ghost story for adults. The figure of the nymph appearing on panel 46 perfectly reflects this idea of afterlife. In his book *The Surviving Image*, Didi-Huberman describes the nymph as “a kind of transversal, mythical personification,” an “impersonal heroine” who “combines a considerable number of incarnations of possible characters” (2018: 231). In this way, Warburg is able to transform the peasant woman of Settignano’s everyday gestures into a phantasmagorical movement.

Like Warburg’s nymph, the dances in *Facing the Wind* resurrect the symbols of an ancient world buried in the dust of ages. The whole film constitutes an exploration of vestiges and ruins. There are two sequences, each one showing two women—the first, a mother (Fernández) and a daughter (Martín); the second, a grandmother (Canal) and her granddaughter (Martín)—cleaning out a hayloft filled with long-forgotten family heirlooms. Among these are a pair of clogs for walking in the mud, a machine for making chorizo sausage and a set of manufactured wooden parts of some kind of toy. All these obsolete objects retain the silenced voices of tradition, the mnemonic footprint of working the land, of the way of life of the people who came before them. “Things come to an end, and we all come to an end,” remarks the old woman resignedly. Beneath the straw, the hayloft preserves the fossilised memory of the dead. When the loft is emptied, the dead are stripped of their objects of worship,

their hierophanies. Now not only have they disappeared, but their relics are gone as well.

Agamben suggests that this loss of gestures described in his *Note sul gesto* began occurring discreetly in 19th-century bourgeois societies; since then, the process has accelerated in modern societies with the culmination of the rural exodus. The hayloft in *Facing the Wind* is the tiny theatre in which this desertion is depicted. Once dismantled, it becomes what Walter Benjamin identified as a “place of facts” (2003: 58), a crime scene, a space where the human element has been completely removed. All that remains of it are the signs of absence and the ghosts that challenge us through the abstraction of emptiness. This is why it is so significant that it is within the crumbling walls of the hayloft that Mónica should take the first steps of the dance that ends the film, a dance that seems to be inspired by the experience of that emptiness. When the family has sold the house and disposed of their memories, it is the fleeting nature of the dance that offers the possibility of a reconciliation with the gestures that have been lost.

In his observations about the sanctification of the home in traditional societies, Mircea Eliade suggests that “the experience of sacred space makes possible the ‘founding of the world’” (Eliade, 1959: 63). The final sequence of *Facing the Wind* suggests the idea of a reencounter with the world as it was in the beginning. Thus, during the dance, Mónica comes out of the hayloft and embraces the freedom of the outdoors, where the mountains gleam red in the dawn sun and the wind blows with a deafening silence. The dance dishevels her hair and gives her the appearance of a quivering figure, vibrant and ethereal (Figure 1). The whole scene thus takes on a mythical dimension, where myth is defined as a narrative that attempts to explain something of our prehistory, before writing, before all records, where the first memory of humankind lies dormant (Benjamin, 1969). Moreover, Mónica, like the peasant woman of Settigna-

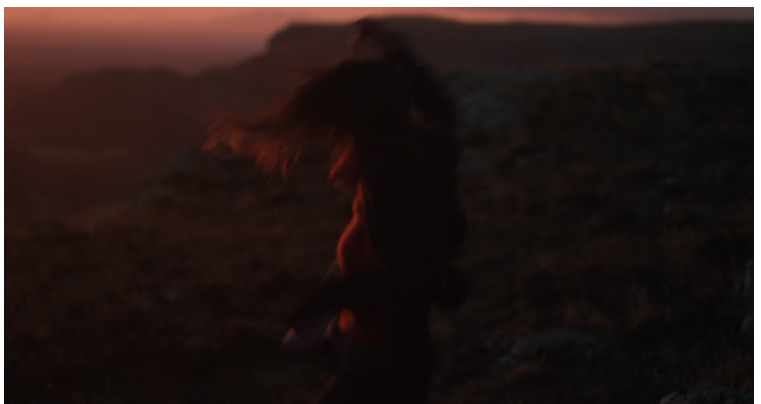


Figure I. Mónica dancing at the end of *Facing the Wind*, with the rugged landscape in the background and the reddening dawn sky above. *Facing the Wind* (Meritxell Colell, 2018)

no transformed into a nymph, has the appearance of a mythical heroine. Her body is a channel for dialogue with the lost gesture, invoking, absorbing and even encapsulating it, while balancing on the slipstream of time.

As this final dance reveals, *Facing the Wind* is from beginning to end a film about learning gestures. In this learning process, the point of view of the film's protagonist is important: the prodigal daughter, the stranger who returns one night to her hometown, crossing back over the threshold of her family home after so many years. From that moment, the film begins composing a frieze of ritual gestures that form the very foundations of tradition. From the barely moving lips of women reciting the Lord's Prayer around a table covered with an oilcloth, to the arms of the bell ringer pulling at the bell rope; from the hands like roots planting onions in the furrows of the vegetable garden, to the youthful hands sanding down the bars of a bicycle. All these moments weave together a web of buried meanings, internal dialectics and lines of kinship that keep expanding until they find their form of survival in the final dance. Throughout the learning process, the spectator is drawn into a subtle universe of gestures that does not belong to Euclidian space or causal time, a universe that has developed rhythms of its own.

THE ELOQUENCE OF HANDS

Between the first and last dance in *Facing the Wind* there is a series of internal echoes, rhymes and counterpoints. The film begins with a bright light that floods the whole screen. This is followed by the sound of factory machinery. The screen goes dark, and then suddenly two amorphous flashing lights appear, which after a few seconds transform into the parts of a swiftly dancing body. All at once the body stops, and we see two feet, barely moving, their shape carved out by the shaft of white light. Then the body resumes its movement,

and once again it is unrecognisable. After a moment, it comes to another halt. The image takes shape to reveal a sinewy back, leaning forwards, carved out by the shadows of muscles and vertebrae. The body starts moving once more and then stops again. In the darkness of the shot we see a detail of two trembling hands, their fingertips reaching into the light (Figure 2). Thus ends the first dance. This image of hands, infused with all kinds of meanings, has a corresponding image in the last shot of the final dance: the camera moves up from Mónica's face to her hands, which are raised as if trying to comb the air. Then there is a cut to black and the film ends.

How can an image be charged with time? Agamben asks this question in his essay "Nymphs", in relation to a visit to the exhibition titled *Pasions* by the video artist Bill Viola. In Viola's work, human figures are shown in slow motion; bodies surrender to the trance of what Agamben describes as a "moving pause", a moment of delay when "all images virtually anticipate their future development and any of them recalls the gestures that preceded it" (Agamben, 2010: 11). Drawing on Agamben's ideas, the two shots of hands that bookend *Facing the Wind* could be understood as two images that find their moving pause and become charged with time and memory. If there is any part of the human body that is especially inclined to engage with memory, it is surely the hand. This is how Henri Focillon explains it in his book *In Praise of Hands*, when he writes: "In the active life of the hand, it can tense and harden as well as mould itself around an object. All this work leaves marks on a palm in which we can read, if not the linear symbols of past and present, at least its trace and, like the memories of a life elsewhere faded away, maybe even its distant legacy" (Focillon, 2018: 55).

The close-ups of hands suggest that the dances in *Facing the Wind* have an archaeological meaning; they are, as noted above, fleeting visions of atavistic memory that find a place in the filmic



Figure 2. Mónica's body first appears in a shaft of white light in the opening sequence. *Facing the Wind* (Meritxell Colell, 2018)

space. Very close to this idea are some of the notions developed by Didi-Huberman in *Le Danseur des Solitudes*, a short book dedicated to Israel Galván's revitalisation of the *jondo* variety of flamenco. Before each performance, Galván performs a flexibility exercise that Didi-Huberman describes as a caress of the ground, a haptic manoeuvre whereby the performer activates a representation of absence and brings it onto the *tablao*. In this way, after this exercise Galván leaves the stage and "dances with his solitude, as if for him that solitude were a partner, that is, a complex solitude filled with images, dreams, ghosts and memory" (Didi-Huberman, 2008: 19). Didi-Huberman explains that in his dances Galván generally positions himself on the edge of darkness, on the boundary of the spotlight, using his movements to construct the shape of a void that cannot be filled, as if, in the caress of the ground, in the primordial contact with the earth, the performer were aligning himself with the dead.

Often, the iconography of hands is associated with an expression of time. In the hands of Auguste Rodin's *The Cathedral*, drawn together in a spiral movement, and its reinterpretation in M. C. Escher's famous hands drawing one another, there is an idea of eternal return and circular time. These two works help explain the interaction between the shots of hands at the end of the two dances in *Facing the Wind*. They are hands that seem interconnected in the film, as if one image were answering the other, or better still, as if both were part of a single question that finds its answer outside the film, in the endlessness of the pink clouds or of the blackness of the final cut (Figure 3). In the first dance, the fingers point forward, as if probing the shadows. In the second, the fingers point upward, towards the open sky at dawn. Of course, this correlation lends itself to all kinds of interpretations, but what I am interested in highlighting here is that the two static positions of the hands are actually two stages of an invisible

movement, brief albeit delayed; a movement during which the film's story takes place.

Between the first and last dances, a few other detail shots of hands appear over the course of the film, to the point of becoming a recurring visual motif. According to Meritxell Colell, in the preparatory exercises that she did with Mónica García to develop her character, the first thing they worked on was how her hands needed to interact with the environment. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that, apart from their significance in the dances, her hands play a decisive role in at least four other moments in the film. The first is in the scene of the *verbena* celebration, which begins with a sequence of shots of hands lighting sparklers and waving them in the silence of the night; then, the camera finds the hands of four women who are holding a paper lantern representing the soul of a dead man, and they accompany it carefully until it blows up and flies away, its light disappearing into the blackness of the night. The second is the series of images of hands planting onions in the garden. The third is the moment when Mónica raises her arm to touch the snowflakes swirling around her like wisps of light. And the fourth is when Mónica's hands search through the dust of the hayloft to feel the texture of a wooden beam (Figure 4).

These four moments of the film make up a harmonious series rife with meaning. The representation of the four primordial elements are recognisable here: the fire of the sparklers, the earth of the vegetable garden, the water of the snow, and the dust-filled air of the hayloft, combined to invoke a distant memory reaching back to the dawn of time. The contact with the elements imposes a time on the characters that is regulated not by the clock but by the cycles of nature, the transformation of the landscape through the seasons, the calendar of the harvest, and also the inexorable nature of death; it is a time observed by some of Colell's

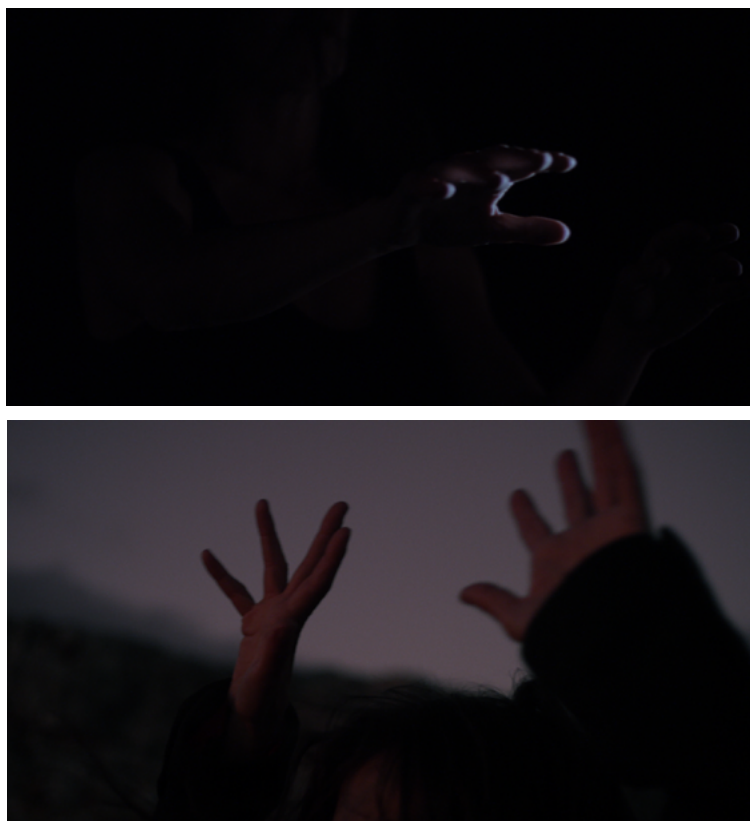


Figure 3. Mónica's hands at the end of each dance create a dialogue that runs through the whole film. *Facing the Wind* (Meritxell Colell, 2018)

biggest influences, perhaps the most obvious of which can be found in the gestures of the actors and actresses in Rossellini's films. In visual terms, Mónica's last dance is prefigured in the ending to *Stromboli* (Terra di Dio, Roberto Rossellini, 1950), in Ingrid Bergman's ascent to the smoking volcano, her face turned toward the stars, in a manner similar to Nazario Gerardi's characteristic gesture in *The Flowers of St. Francis* (Francesco, giullare di Dio, Roberto Rossellini, 1950), when he covers his face with his hands and turns his eyes to the sky.

Facing the Wind represents a desire to return to the primitivism of the rugged landscape, and at the same time a recognition that this return cannot happen without invoking cinema's capacity to recover lost gestures and ancestral emotions. The choreography of time traced by the hands is complemented by the expressions on the women's faces. They are faces that say little or nothing, as



Figure 4. Hands are associated with the elements to invoke a distant, primeval memory. *Facing the Wind* (Meritxell Colell, 2018)

the dialogues are nearly always spoken off-camera. They are faces that move in the ambiguity of silence, that exchange puzzled gazes or turn to the horizon and cry primal tears. What is it that looks at us in the faces we see? And whatever it is, where does it look at us from? These are the two questions that Didi-Huberman asks at the beginning of *What We See Looks Back at Us* (1997: 13-18), a book based on the idea that concealed behind every face is the emptiness of the gaze of a dead person. At the same time, in *Facing the Wind*, the female face is a mirror filled with the ghosts of a lineage, with the memory of the faceless women who slept in those same bedrooms, who lit the fire in the same kitchen and who knelt to gather the harvest in the same field.

PHYSIOGNOMIC PRIMITIVISM AND INTIMACY

Outside Spain, various European films of recent years have invented strategies to repopulate the

deserted landscapes with the faces of those who inhabit them or who did so in some bygone era. Films like *Faces Places* (Visages, villages, Agnès Varda, 2017) from France and *Happy as Lazzaro* (Lazzaro felice, Alice Rohrwacher, 2018) from Italy, both directed by women, draw on the intimacy of the human face to tell a story about those forgotten in the rural exodus. In *Faces Places*, we see it in the huge portraits used that the photographer JR plasters on town walls, building façades and other surfaces; giant faces, as rough as tree bark, rising like spectres over the fields. In the anachronistic farming community in *Happy as Lazzaro*, we are struck by the luminous face of the young peasant who appears among the leaves of a tobacco plantation, like a saint awaiting the blessing of eternal life. *Facing the Wind* could be described as the Spanish contribution to this trend. These are three films very different in technique and form, but similar in sensibility, in their way of asking how to represent the survivors of a world that no longer exists.

Colell's film belongs to the category of physiognomic studies. The camera scours the topography of naked faces, the darkness of their lines and wrinkles, the weight of their eyelids and the tremor of their sighs. In each of these details, the aim is to find an emotional revelation in its pure state. Hence the importance of the physiognomy, an ambivalent term that refers both to the primitivism of the cinematic form and to a cultural, non-verbal primitivism associated with the emotions. In an article published in 1924, at the height of the silent film era, the filmmaker and theorist Béla Balázs argued that "expressive movements are the origin of speech" and that "the language of gestures is the true mother tongue of mankind" (Balázs, 2010: 20). Keeping the sense of these words alive, in many of the scenes in *Facing the Wind* great care is taken not to film the face of the character speaking, but only of the person listening, who responds to the external stimuli with the eyes and hands. An emblematic example of this is a scene with a static shot showing Mónica crying wordlessly in the foreground, staring into space, while Elena Martín's character speaks to her from the blurred background of the frame.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that the compositions in *Facing the Wind* all conform to a single pattern. The challenge for the camera is that throughout the film it must reinvent its presence over and over in relation to the bodies, gestures and faces. Thus, in the discussion between the two sisters in the shed, the camera shifts swiftly along a horizontal axis between one character and the other, in time with the rapid fire of their rebukes. When the daughter washes her mother's hair, on the other hand, the camera seeks out the two heads in a curved, enveloping movement that resembles an embrace. The camera's treatment of the faces is especially eloquent in one moment that could be described as the very heart of the film. Mother and daughter are playing a game of cards after dinner, at one corner of the kitchen table. The camera swings between the

Figure 5. The faces of mother and daughter draw together as the card game progresses and an intimacy develops. *Facing the Wind* (Meritxell Colell, 2018)



two characters and slowly hovers around the two faces, which move closer and closer together (Figure 5). The shot closes in slowly, as if the camera were breaking into the intimacy of their private den. Within the frame, a mutual understanding develops between the two characters, as if playing the game, exchanging the cards, constituted a meeting point between two generations, connecting two different eras.

There are various elements that mark the importance of this scene. The kitchen, a ritual space of caring, offers an opportunity to repair the bonds that were broken, while the attitude adopted by the two women suggests a familiarity regained. On one side, the daughter hesitates, makes a mistake, forgetting the rules of the game. On the other, the mother instructs her, guides her, corrects her plays. The mother is signified in her reactions, marked by a wry familiarity, while her eyes shine with a childlike tenderness. The most revealing elements are the facial expressions, the intensity of the gazes, and the shifting movements of the four hands that hold the cards. A communicative context is created between them that is also choreographic, raising the possibility of re-establishing a connection that was cut off years before. The cards serve as a metaphor for this connection, linking it to tradition, to ancestral knowledge and folk wisdom. The cards are like ancient proverbs, like that oral literature whose authorship belongs to the voices of the people, living and dead, who have preserved their memory over the course of time. The card game is the bridge to a lost past, or at least to the empty plain where that past once existed.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO A RURAL FILM GENRE

In 1990, in the final chapter to *The Woman at the Keyhole*, Judith Mayne concluded that “contemporary feminism has been obsessed with the excavation of a space, an area, somehow prior to and therefore potentially resistant to the realm of the

patriarchal symbolic” (Mayne, 1990: 202). More than thirty years have passed since Mayne wrote those words, yet the archaeology of landscapes continues to constitute the keynote of a particular kind of films made by women which, in the Spanish context, converges with a rural film genre. It is a trend that was first consolidated with *The Sky Turns*, the 2004 documentary that follows Mercedes Álvarez’s return to the village of her ancestors, a place with only fourteen inhabitants lost on the mists of the Castilian high plains. This personal journey introduces a film that digs into the past and exhumes the dead buried beneath the landscape. It speaks to us of the ghosts who light up the windows of an abandoned mansion and of the bones of the peasants crowded into a weed-infested cemetery; it is a descent in time that takes us all the way back to the fossils of the dinosaur graves of a paleontological excavation.

The obsession with a prior world described by Judith Mayne is articulated in *The Sky Turns* around the signs of what has vanished. The film begins with a painting hanging in the studio of the painter Pello Azketa, showing two children looking along a lakeshore for something that has been swallowed up by the water or that is perhaps about to rise up to the surface. Azketa’s painting connects with other images from recent Spanish films, such as the beginning of *Fire Will Come* (O que arde, Oliver Laxe, 2019), where a camera moves mysteriously along the ground, showing the trunks of a forest of eucalyptus trees that seems to be disappearing into the night as a bulldozer cuts a fire-break through the woods. What do the films *The Sky Turns* and *Fire Will Come*, made fifteen years apart, have in common? Among other things, both are the products of a similar impulse of two filmmakers who decided to go and film the villages where their grandparents had lived, in one case in the Castilian province of Soria and in the other in the Galician region of Los Ancares. Both films are set in a deserted space with a family history that is brought back to life on the screen.

The theme of the return to the place of one's origins heralds a trend that has characterised several Spanish films of the past few years. Most of these films have been directed by women, and most are notable for their visions of the rural feminine, which could be described as shaped by the characteristics of each region. In some cases, this return gives rise to fantastical encounters, as in *Thirty Souls* (Trinta lumes, 2018), where Diana Toucedo takes us into the lower woodlands of Galicia, filled with ferns and moss, invoking myths of the feminine associated with nature, such as the enchanted *moura*. In other cases, a more realist approach is taken, such as in the domestic portrait of the seamstress played by Lola Dueñas in *Journey to a Mother's Room* (Viaje al cuarto de una madre, 2018), the first work by Sevillian filmmaker Celia Rico Clavellino, shot in her hometown of Constantina. "It is no mere coincidence that the protagonist is a dressmaker like my mother. For me there will always be a relationship between motherhood and sewing, which is something I see as a task of dressing and protecting absent bodies," explains Rico Clavellino in an interview with the newspaper *El Cultural* (Sardá, 2018). In this context, she takes a delicate approach to capture the everyday movements of her protagonist, associated with the act of sewing, but also with motherly care; gestures, in short, that are infused with the tradition of multiple generations of women who have passed the baton from one to the next in the heart of the family home.

All of these ideas resonate in *Facing the Wind*, a film that follows this same trend, taking a position at an intermediate point between the evocation of ancient myths in *Thirty Souls* and the domesticity of *Journey to a Mother's Room*. Like Álvarez, Toucedo, Rico Clavellino and Laxe, Meritxell Colell returns to the land of her ancestors, to a house that is filled with autobiographical echoes, thanks to the cinema. There she finds a formula in dance that enables her to descend into that excavated space described by Mayne, a world prior to the patriarchal

symbolic: a realm of the feminine atavistic. *Facing the Wind* meets all the criteria of Didi-Huberman's concept of anachronism, locating the past in the present in order to enter the orbit of certain feminist discourses. It is, after all, a film without men, in which four women in a family must learn how to relate to one another again; to find, in the memory of a space and the caress of the earth, the tools they need to strengthen their bonds. ■

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A DESCENT INTO THE ATAVISTIC FEMININE: THE DANCES IN FACING THE WIND

Abstract

In the context of the discourse related to the Empty Spain, there is a clear trend in the so-called New Spanish Cinema of exploring the idea of a return to the deserted rural landscape, to repopulate it through images and, in this way, resurrect an ancestral memory that has all but disappeared. It seems more than a mere coincidence that since the release of Mercedes Álvarez's *The Sky Turns* (*El cielo gira*, 2004), this movement has been led mainly by female filmmakers. In the early 1990s, Judith Mayne argued that contemporary feminism had become obsessed with the idea of excavating a space to uncover a world that existed prior to the realm of the patriarchal symbolic. This article is articulated around the analysis of a recent film, Meritxell Colell's *Facing the Wind* (2018), which, through the director's way of filming gestures, and specifically, dances, is able to evoke an atavistic time of the rural feminine.

Key words

Gesture; Atavistic; Rural; Survival; Anachronism; Dance; Choreography.

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UN DESCENSO A LO ATÁVICO FEMENINO: LAS DANZAS DE CON EL VIENTO

Resumen

Existe una tendencia evidente dentro del llamado Nuevo Cine Español alineada con los discursos sobre la España vacía o vaciada que propone regresar al medio rural, repoblarlo a través de las imágenes y, de este modo, reactivar una memoria ancestral ya casi desaparecida. No parece casual que, desde que Mercedes Álvarez hizo *El cielo gira* (2004), hayan sido sobre todo mujeres cineastas las que han liderado este movimiento. Judith Mayne (1990) escribe que el feminismo contemporáneo se ha obsesionado con la idea de excavar el espacio para encontrar un mundo anterior al reino de lo simbólico patriarcal. Este artículo se articula alrededor del estudio de una película reciente, *Con el viento* (2018), de Meritxell Colell, que, en su manera de filmar los gestos y, específicamente, las danzas, logra evocar un tiempo atávico de lo femenino rural.

Palabras clave

Gesto; Atávico; Rural; Supervivencia; Anacronismo; Danza; Coreografía

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