

A RADICAL INTIMATE REALISM: AN OTHER NEW SPANISH CINEMA MADE BY WOMEN*

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I. REWRITING HERSELF AS SOMEBODY ELSE

Let's begin with what the gaze cuts out. A short-haired woman in pyjama pants and a grey sweater lights a cigarette under the shelter of a tree in the garden that almost seems to be embracing her. We cannot see her face, as it is hidden behind the branches (Image 1), so we watch her crossed arms and listen to her rapid breathing: with each drag of the cigarette she is trying to quell her anxiety. From outside the frame, a man calls her: "María!" She waves away the smoke, puts out the cigarette on the ground, and hurriedly obeys the call, leaving the frame. Over the now empty—or emptied—scene, the film title appears. First we see "MARÍA" all in upper case, recalling other films with women's names as titles, such as *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946), *Tristana* (Luis Buñuel, 1970), or *Veronica* (Paco Plaza, 2017). But it is quickly punctuated with a subtitle, in lower case between parentheses: "(y los demás)" ["and

everybody else"]. *MARÍA* (y los demás), written in serif typeface, rather like the measured, centred titles typed on the cover page of a script (Images 2 and 3).

María (Bárbara Lennie) is framed in a medium-long shot from what seems to be a fixed position, but in fact betrays a pulse: looking upon María's body is a gaze hidden behind the camera that also quivers. The camera is there, like those leaves that flutter *naturally*, and it covertly allows us to enter the film, with this plain and solitary María, to whom the enunciation is anchored through a point of view that will remain unchanged throughout the film. This is decisive for the process of identification. With María, we will experience the encounters with *everybody else*, those with whom she never connects, because everyone seems to be moving on. Since her mother's death more than twenty years ago, María has always tried to take care of everybody else, but her father no longer seems to need her because he is



Images 1-3. Smoking under the father's arms in *María (y los demás)* (Nely Reguera, 2016)

going to marry his nurse. Her brother is about to become a father, and her other brother is going to move out and reopen the family restaurant. María also never expected her friend to get pregnant, or that the man who plays the guitar for her would not want to introduce her to his daughters. Nor did she ever imagine that she would be selling books yet still unable to finish writing her own. Indeed, the film could be understood as an accompaniment to María through her writing process. When she has finally finished the novel and still does not dare to give it to others to read, in one sadly poignant scene, she sits down in front of a

teddy bear and fantasises about presenting it in public (Images 4 and 5):

María: Well, that's a good question... The thing is, I... I never really wanted to write about my family. It was like... I don't know, something natural that I imagine has to do with my way of writing or how I understand the creative process, that ultimately has to do with something (laughs nervously) kind of cathartic, that ultimately you need to write and that... what? No, no, no, the novel isn't autobiographical. There are things that are, you know? That are about me or my family, my surroundings, my friends, a heap of things that you pick up and that turn into something else that isn't just your life. Ultimately, the protagonist isn't me... it's a... err... Well, I don't know, ultimately, writing helps you to overcome, to..., to..., err, to overcome, er, er, to try... (her voice falters. Cries).

This monologue could be taken as paradigmatic of a certain trend in contemporary Spanish cinema—mostly in films made by women—that has been labelled autofiction. These are films in

Images 4 and 5. Sitting down before what she has written in *María (y los demás)*



which lived experience, memories and free invention are combined in the writing process. While some viewers, critics and scholars have branded such films as narcissistic, hastily and narrow-mindedly dismissing them as films that veer towards autobiography or *narratives of the self*, María's speech is clumsy and faltering yet eloquent: she never wanted to write about herself and her family, but she ended up doing just that purely out of a simple need to write, to turn her pain into something else. Writing enables María, whose care for others is her weakness, to *rewrite herself as somebody else* and discover that looking after everyone else was perhaps simply a front or a mask to keep herself from writing. Something in her servile attitude towards others extinguished her desire. But when nobody seems to need her care anymore, she is faced with the hardest step of her life: to rewrite herself as somebody else. In fact, the character uses a pen name, María Funes, which is probably a tribute by the director, Nely Reguera, to fellow director and scriptwriter Belén Funes, who worked on the screenplay to *María (y los demás)*. When it is positioned as art, cinema facilitates a process of estrangement, an operation of distancing—like those final tracking shots pulling away from the actors in *Life in Shadows* (*Vida en sombras*, Llorenç Llobet Gràcia, 1949) and in *Pain and Glory* (*Dolor y gloria*, Pedro Almodóvar, 2018)—that makes it possible to construct a distance from the trauma or from some element of mystery, resistance or repetition. As we have observed elsewhere, “the filmmaker can only direct her scene on the condition that, thanks to the art, she can get out of it” (García-Catalán & Rodríguez Serrano, 2021: 12).

Herein lies our first assertion: the new generation of emerging female directors in Spanish cinema should not be reduced simplistically to narcissists who only talk about themselves. These women understand filmmaking as a means of addressing what cannot be said and even of talking about the malaise of a generation, because what

cannot be understood in the body, the marks left by the past or the dread of a future that one has mapped out for oneself, may not be expressible in words, but sometimes it may be possible to show it in some veiled way. With this in mind, we consider it essential to approach these films with attention to the details of the writing, the subtleties of the screenplay, and especially the filmic forms related to the body that invite interpretation. However, film analysis is a poetic exercise—stripping down the processes of language is intrinsic to any poetic exercise—that is not considered very fashionable.

2. COMING BACK TO LIFE

For some time now, it might have seemed that film studies—especially when they take a semiotic, psychoanalytic or post-structuralist approach—are not valued very highly in academic circles, in terms of funding from R&D&I projects and the number of articles published in high-impact journals. Although they still account for a significant percentage of studies published in the so-called “social sciences” (Rodríguez Serrano, Palao Errando & Marzal Felici, 2019), many of our colleagues have accepted the epitaph that Bordwell (1995) and other scholars—in fields such as neo-formalism, analytic philosophy and neuroscience¹—have boasted of writing for our disciplines.

However, it is advisable to be cautious about things that are presumed dead, especially those that have supposedly been *exorcised* in a performative way—i.e., by denying them a *voice*, *scientific validity*, or *academic status*. There is of course nothing more suspicious than the apparent *debunking* of a *non-knowledge*:

It is in fact a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure, but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less certain, that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead [...]. What is going on here is a way of not wanting to know what everyone alive knows without learning and without

knowing, namely, that the dead can often be more powerful than the living. (Derrida, 1994: 48)

Indeed, dead non-knowledges have a bad habit of coming back to life, returning in the most unexpected ways: sometimes as a malaise, sometimes as an unfathomable event, or a creak, slip, or screech in the mechanisms of meaning. A surplus. The denial of a voice for post-structuralist disciplines while, on the other side of the walls of academia, questions about sexuality, identities and the uses of the body become ever more pressing is certainly another of the inevitable contradictions arising from our society's hierarchy of knowledge. That Bordwell and his disciples (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996) should deny the validity of -isms (post-structuralism, feminism, Indigenism) precisely *before* the film industry as a whole begins to openly question its own defects, abuses, and injustices, or to posit the need to redirect the focus of audiovisual production is not merely yet another symptom of a regrettable myopia, but also further evidence of the obvious disconnect between the interests of the academic world and the upheavals of that inscrutable, throbbing phenomenon known as *reality*.

Because *reality*, or more precisely, the *moment* in which these words are written (December 2021), points in a very different direction from the placid, aseptic comfort of film forms, mind-numbing security of quantitative data, and the sacrosanct status of science. Indeed, in the last two years our bodies have become veritable fields of desire (in a *Deleuzian* sense) (Meloni, 2021b), open questions that have yet to find their cinematic expression or that are finding it in strange, complex and exciting ways, in films as apparently diverse as *Titane* (Julia Ducournau, 2021), *Zeros and Ones* (Abel Ferrara, 2021), *Mighty Flash* (Destello bravio, Ainhoa Rodríguez, 2021), and *Piggy* (Cerdita, Carlota Martínez Pereda, 2022).

This lengthy introduction may be deemed to serve as a disclaimer: in what follows, we cannot offer a settled historiography of our object

of study—the rise of a new generation of female directors in contemporary Spanish cinema—because we are compelled to view it from inside the lightning flash, the instant, the specific moment in which we can glimpse a kind of cinematic avalanche that presents us with problems, hopes and challenges, as it does for so many female creators and spectators.

3. HISTORIOGRAPHY IMPOSSIBLE

In the now canonical introduction to *Historia General del Cine* written some years ago by Santos Zunzunegui and Jenaro Talens (Various Authors, 1998), these two scholars established a kind of baseline, a humble and coherent approach that invited us to abandon projects conceiving of historiography as a totalising discipline and allow in multidisciplinary influences, alterities and confusions. In keeping with this perspective, we must not succumb to the temptation of offering a hasty account of what we have tentatively labelled the Other New Spanish Women's Cinema, or ONSWC (the rationale for this choice will be discussed below). Without doubt, as the literature in this field demonstrates (Núñez Domínguez, Silva Ortega & Vera Balanza, 2012), there are obviously a number of precursors—Josefina Molina, Cecilia Bartolomé, Pilar Miró, to name a few—and apparently foundational events, such as the release of *Three Days with the Family* (*Tres días amb la família*, Mar Coll, 2009), although it had been preceded by significant works like the short documentary *Mi hermana y yo* [My Sister and I] (Virginia García del Pino, 2008) and a notable list of experimental shorts and installations by María Cañas (Álvarez, 2015), to offer just two examples.

At the same time, history has also given us warning signs. There was already a generation of female directors in the 1990s, many of whom are barely remembered today, who only managed to make as many as two or three feature films. As

long ago as 1997, for example, Carlos F. Heredero was celebrating the existence of

28 female directors, who in fact had directed a total of 25 début films, as five of them co-directed a single feature film and only one of those five went on to direct her first solo feature film. Some of them have also now won themselves a place of their own in the industry (Heredero, 1997: 10-11).

Many of the 28 names mentioned by Heredero have now been erased not just from popular memory but also, more seriously, from the specific historiography of the field. Once again, at the beginning of the 21st century there seemed to be a new wave of films directed by Spanish women. However, this would end up being dismissed as a “false boom” (Zurián, 2017). As time passed, most of these directors shifted into the more profitable field of television and/or only managed to make one feature film. To recover all those names, we need to turn to the valuable research of scholars like Zurián (2015 and 2017) and María Castejón Leorza (2015), or the work of Azucena Merino (1999), which, among many other contributions, drew attention to the work of auteurs like Marta Balletbò-Coll, Mónica Laguna and Mireia Ros, in addition to demonstrating an unusual interest in and empathy for female Latin American directors, a group that has tended to be altogether forgotten, apart from a handful of studies (Guillot, 2020).

The (improbable) historiographic account of this movement might also make reference to training institutions, competitions, associations and collectives, critical publications, workshops, festivals, etc. These occurred simultaneously all over Spain, at times with exasperating sluggishness, at times dismissed as a mere fad, at times pigeon-holed in a label (“women’s cinema”) that did not always conceal a pejorative tone, and at times with overwhelming force. But they occurred. Taking up Walter Benjamin’s metaphor, the fire could be glimpsed.

When we prepared the call for papers for this issue, our initial point of reference was the well-

known list published by *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine* in 2013, which suggested the rise of a heterogeneous and promising “Other New Spanish Cinema”. The various directors identified included barely ten women. Similarly, in one of the most acclaimed and invaluable critical anthologies of Spanish cinema, *Antología crítica del cine español 1906-1995* (Pérez Perucha, 1997), a mere five women were identified as historically significant (Margarita Aleixandre, Isabel Coixet, Ana Mariscal, Pilar Miró and Rosario Pi). Since then, thanks to the extensive, painstaking, slow and rigorous work referred to above, the panorama has been changing. In 2010, when Mar Coll won the Goya Award for Best New Director with *Three Days with the Family*, the award was presented to her by four female directors: Icíar Bollain, Patricia Ferreira, Gracia Querejeta and Chus Gutiérrez. This choice of presenters seemed to be the Spanish film academy’s way of recognising a female filmmaking tradition in the year after the Hollywood academy awarded its first Best Director’s Oscar to a woman, Kathryn Bigelow, for *The Hurt Locker* (2008), even if the recognition in Spain went only as far as the “best new director” category. It would not be until almost a decade later, in 2018, that both Goya Awards for directing would be taken home by women, when Best Director went to Isabel Coixet for *The Bookshop* (2018) and Best New Director to Carla Simón for *Summer 1993* (Estiu 1993, 2018). Without detracting from the recognition of these two directors, Carla Simón’s closing remark in her acceptance speech (“more women making movies, please”) highlights the possibility that the academies may also have been rushing to make amends, given that this was also the year of the rise of the #MeToo movement, following the allegations of sexual assault that ended the career of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein in October 2017.

The global figures, however, are far from encouraging. A recent study by Raúl Cornejo (2021)—in his brilliant book *Las cortinas son invencibles*:

Cine español desde las trincheras (2010-2020)—included a sample of around 30 titles either directed or co-directed by women out of the more than 100 films analysed. According to the 2020 report from CIMA (Spain’s Association of Women Filmmakers and Audiovisual Media) prepared by Sara Cuenca, the proportion of women working on the creation of fiction feature films in Spain is around the 33% mark. Only 19% of directors are women, a percentage that has not changed significantly in five years. On the other hand, the areas with the largest proportion of women are costume design (88%), make-up and hairstyling (75%), production management (59%, compared to 40% in 2019) and artistic direction (55%). Moreover, the cost of films directed by women has been estimated to be 51% lower than films directed by men. If we break films down by type, we find that there are more titles directed by women among film categories that have lower average costs: 19% of fiction films are directed by women, compared to 29% of documentaries. Overall, the report concludes that “the average growth in the proportion of women in the sector is slow but steady, estimated at around 5% per year” Cuenca, 2020: 42). Although quantitative analysis always needs to be put in perspective to avoid confusing the parts with the whole, there is clearly a severe gender gap that points to the need to question workflows in the industry.

4. WHAT WE MEAN BY OTHER NEW SPANISH WOMEN’S CINEMA

Of course, the analysis of this movement should not be limited to the strictly quantitative variables of the question. On the contrary, its emergence can only be understood in the context of a series of little political, economic and sociological upheavals that have led to a reassessment of the themes and forms of Spanish cinema in the first decades of the 21st century. What is of interest to us here is what is being written in ONSWC, in relation to *voice*, to uniquely cinematic processes

of signification. These processes have often been relegated to a merely incidental question even by those authors who have sought to tackle the issues of “women’s cinema” (Aguilar Carrasco, 2017: 21), inevitably sliding into essentialist manifestations in the process. However, before turning to this question associated with the *writing styles of women*, it is worth considering some strictly contextual issues.

The panorama of the film industry in 2021 is of course the product of a combination of apparently disparate factors that are not always easy to connect. These include the economic collapse following the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy in September 2008 (Marzal-Felici & Soler-Campillo, 2018), the #MeToo movement, the rise of streaming platforms, the widespread questioning of the mechanisms of cultural creation (Zafra, 2017), the establishment of new cinephile communities since the September 11 attacks (Rosenbaum, 2010) and, of course, cinema’s fall from the top of the list of the most widely consumed cultural products of our time. This last point, as described in Vicente Monroy’s happily polemical book *Contra la cinefilia: historia de un romance exagerado* (Monroy, 2020), is of special interest here, given how little it has been explored.

In the final section of his book, Monroy points matter-of-factly and convincingly to the displacement of cinema as the preferred cultural product of the masses. Eclipsed by video games and television series, cinema has suddenly been reformulated, transformed, and turned into a peripheral product that needs to face up to its own marginal status. Rather than the panic that this fact might arouse in the mind of any apparently film-loving reader (empty theatres, budget cuts to the umpteenth instalment of the latest epic saga or superhero series), what it should inspire is pure celebration: if cinema is becoming a reasonably marginal art form, it is obviously because it has reached its historical moment for embracing *marginal voices*, i.e., *voices not usually heard*—and it goes without

saying that the female voice is the most usual of voices not usually heard.

By embracing alterity, cinema gains a strange kind of freedom, a sort of sinister, unruly nature that is happily Other. This is something that was already occurring in the traditional dialectic between male and female in other perpetually suspect cultural fields, such as literature (Molines Galarza, 2021) and philosophy (Meloni, 2021a). To put it more clearly, ONSWC did not arise as a traditional cinematic—or even *cinephilic*—product. Marginal spaces, limited budgets, minimal distribution, and modest but fascinated audiences have served as the topsoil out of which the corpus studied here would have to grow and bloom. It is hardly surprising, for example, that many of the films analysed here are the first, or at most the second or third works of their directors. This is due not just to the youth of the creators concerned, but also, and especially, to the severe constraints associated with the marginal nature of many of their projects.

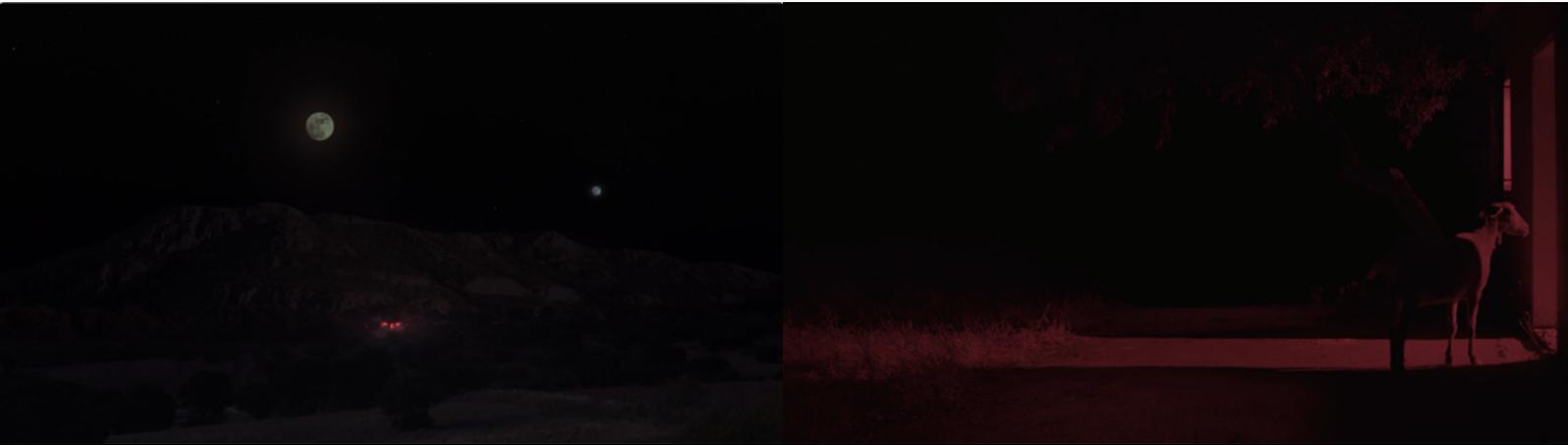
And yet, it is on this same discursive line that our first conundrum arises. The estranged, *Other-nature* of these film projects have little or nothing to do with the kind of experimental works—often lumped together under the “underground” heading (Mendik & Jay Schneider, 2002)—that were apparently demanded by the high-brow codes of reception. They are in no way related, at least in their formal essence, to the seminal works of Maya Deren or Laura Mulvey. On the contrary, what is extraordinary about many ONSWC films is precisely their capacity to draw on the most intimate elements—a recollection, memory, childhood—to emotionally engage spectators. Their commitment to what can be described as a *radical intimate realism* falls somewhere between confession, diary, riddle, childhood song, caresses, bites and howls. All this is brought together in an extraordinary formal cacophony that always returns to something of what was repressed in modernist cin-

ema (Font, 2002), in an open dialogue with the mechanisms of gender and genre.

It is true that autobiography—or, as it has all too often been labelled, *autofiction*—is a key element in many of these first films, although this is never to the exclusion of aspects inherited from genres such as experimental film, fantasy, melodrama, or comedy. To offer just a few examples, *Arima* (Jaione Camborda, 2019) is presented as a rural ghost story straddling the borders between folk horror, Gothic nightmare and children’s fairytale. *Most Beautiful Island* (Ana Asensio, 2017) is at once a social drama about immigration, an unhinged take on grief and, ultimately, a horrific cinematic game of global biopolitics. In a completely different register, the fantasy film *Paradise Hills* (Alice Waddington, 2019) plunges us into a futuristic dystopia about a group of girls locked up in a colourful reformatory, while the previously mentioned *Mighty Flash* offers a documentary-style portrait beneath a sky with two moons (Images 6 and 7). In the comedy genre, Neús Ballús explores the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of masculinity by following around three plumbers who portray themselves in *The Odd-Job Men* (Sis dies corrents, 2021).

Meanwhile, the field of documentary film steers between the most intimate of portraits, the question of roots and our connection to the land, and a concern with social issues in an era that

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Images 6 and 7. Two moons shine at night in *Mighty Flash* (Destello bravo, Ainhoa Rodríguez, 2021)

has been especially tumultuous for Spanish society. While Mercedes Álvarez introduced these three dimensions in *The Sky Turns* (*El cielo gira*, 2004), and again with *Mercado de futuros* [*Futures Market*] (2011), giving a voice to the village of Aldealseñor in the first and offering a devastating portrait of the dialectic between speculative discourses and the plight of the underprivileged in the second, the new generation of female filmmakers have continued to explore them. For example, in *The Silence that Remains* (*El silencio que queda*, 2019), the first documentary by the artist Amparo Garrido, the filmmaker draws on a personal experience to tell the story of a blind person's relationship with birds, depicting her own relationship with animals in the process. Dreaming and grieving over the landscape are present in Maddi Barber's gaze in *Above 592 Metres* (*592 metros goiti*, 2018) and *Urpean Lurra* (2019), while a profound connection with rural traditions is evident in Elena López Riera's *Los que desean* [*Those Who Desire*] (2018), and Diana Toucedo explores the magic and mystery of a village near Lugo in *Thirty Souls* (*Trinta Lumes*, 2017). The subjective gaze, privileging the diary form, based on found material, is constructed in discourses of the unspeakable, about suicide in films like *Ainhoa: yo no soy esa* [*Ainhoa: That's Not Me*] (Carolina Astudillo,² 2018), or desire in *My Mexican Bretzel* (Núria

Giménez, 2020). On the other hand, films like *El gran vuelo* [*The Great Flight*] (2015), also by Carolina Astudillo, seek to recover forgotten stories—in this case, the disappearance of Clara Pueyo Jornet in the early years of the Franco regime—in an effort to construct an *Other* memory, a non-hegemonic memory.

Herein lies the conundrum: a certain type of film—one that doesn't earn much at the box office—is suddenly pushed into a marginal position, and in response, the work of a new generation of female filmmakers takes a turn towards the most intimate, the realest, even though each new film explores new territories, avenues and nuances. What is referred to here as the Other New Spanish Women's Cinema has fortunately become simply an Other New Cinema—but one made by women who exhibit a degree of collective consciousness (Image 8).

5. NOT ONLY, NOT ENTIRELY, GENDER

It is worth making a few final clarifications. Our vindication of cinema made by women is based on a need to hear these filmmakers in all their heterogeneity, their otherness, never as a category or flawed label. We argue that cinema made by women is neither essentially feminine—because there is no ontology of the feminine—nor direct-



Image 8. Despite differences, the Other New Cinema made by women is characterised by a degree of collective consciousness: *Les amigues de l'Àgata* [Àgata's Friends] ((Marta Verheyen, Laia Alabart, Alba Cros, Laura Rius Arán, 2015)

ly or necessarily feminist. Women and sexual difference emerge as an enigma to be interpreted in the singular rather than to be understood as a predefined assertion. Probably nobody puts it better than the pioneer filmmaker Josefina Molina: "As people, and not as women, we dedicate ourselves to the audiovisual; we are filmmakers and therefore we have in our hands an essential tool for disseminating our ideas and changing all those clichés about women who work in cinema: for example, the worn-out notion of sensitivity" (Zurián, 2015: 13-14). Along these lines, we argue that ONSWC also understands cinema as a device for ideas and an artistic device that works on the subconscious, testing out a certain kind of writing of an intimacy presented as obstinate and strange.

It also troubles us, as male and female researchers, that when we analyse or critique a film made by women we are invariably asked (in fact, reviewers for academic journals require it) to include a reading from a gender studies perspective and a consideration of how the female protagonist has been represented in the text. And yet, surprisingly, we are never asked to include (and we are even sometimes penalised if we do) an analysis of

the enunciation of the voice that articulates the discourse, who is compromised in her own act of speaking. We believe it important to give some attention to this question, if only in an effort to broaden the discussion.

Of course, it is clear that cultural studies—and specifically the concept of *gender*—introduced many of the questions we want to ask here, although it would not cover them all completely. In this respect, the concept of the gaze developed by authors such as Laura Mulvey, for example, has been crucial. Noting that in contemporary feminist theory the psychoanalytical concepts "sexual difference", "desire" and "lack" are being replaced with sociological concepts such as "gender", "ethnicity", and "class", as well as the sociological constructions "man = masculine = active / woman = feminine = passive", Eva Parrondo Coppel and Tecla González-Hortigüela reconsidered the iconic status of Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Film", considered the cornerstone of film studies based on psychoanalysis and feminism. The two authors find that Mulvey's essay proposes a position that is not necessarily feminist-psychoanalytical, but

sociological, in which feminism is assumed with acritical fascination:

Although feminist film theory was initially established with the aim of “inventing strategies of social transformation”, it has been reduced to a discourse that condemns the male perspective on us (woman = object, woman = spectacle, woman = mother, etc.) while reproducing the idea that somewhere out there is another omnipotent male who inevitably oppresses us (with his gaze, with his language), thereby reinforcing the naturalisation of undesirable media equations such as woman = archetypal victim of our culture (Parrondo Coppel & González-Hortigüela, 2016: 20).

This trend in certain feminist discourses also poses many other challenges and risks for our approach to this cinema made by women. The first is the risk of getting bogged down in the identification of women as victims, which may promote discourses informed by a whistleblowing ethic that precludes any possibility of discussing responsibility or analysing violence as a subjective problem inherent in anybody capable of speech, rather than something exclusive to heterosexual males. Because violence, like madness, is not something limited to a single group. It cannot be alien to us because it speaks to—and even inhabits—our most radical subjectivity. The risk of relegating women to the place of victims can also lead to discourses of hostility, if not outright hatred, towards the masculine. *Promising Young Woman* (Emerald Fennell, 2020), winner of last year’s Oscar for Best Screenplay, is an example of a certain kind of feminist film that denounces misogynist violence while assuming that all men are violent (except the father). This is a point worthy of attention.

We believe, however that it could be much more interesting to encourage a conversation between the sexes, whatever gender they may identify with. It is therefore essential to consider the ambivalences of desire, violence, and the malaise of each individual’s modes of pleasure. Failing to

address these questions could have devastating consequences, and, by extension, could also have some inadvertent effects: we should not lose sight of the fact that many discourses established by men from that questionable and now widely caricatured position of “women’s ally” end up being no more than a kind of acritical acceptance of the role of executioner, of an innate guilt, essential to their masculinity, without in any way facilitating the stated objective of *listening to and conversing with women*.

Another of the dangers to consider is already well known in the field of film studies: prioritising content over form. As noted above, most approaches to research from a cultural studies perspective focus on content, demanding the representation of women based on a theory of the gaze, but in this process, they overlook the study of the filmic forms that are in fact responsible for constructing that content. Anyone who has taken the slightest interest in film historiography will know that even the clearest and most transparent enunciative position does not view cinema as a reflection of reality. Indeed, sometimes even the films that get closest to a naked gaze on the real require the most crafting and complex decisions in the creation process. This is why the documentary form cannot be explained without the imagination, or the truth without the device. Another hazard associated with analysing the content and intentions of male or female filmmakers is the danger of equating the subject of the enunciation with the subject of the statement, drawing equivalences between the subject in the act of speaking and what the subject says, pinning down the meaning and shutting out the subconscious. To do so would be to ignore the fact, postulated in Lacanian psychoanalysis, that there is always a distance between what we mean and what we say, and between what we say and what others understand. We always say more than what we say, we confess more than we can or say less than we know. This is even more pronounced in the

case of cinematic writing, where, however authorial the voice may be, a film is the result of a polyphony of voices that emerge from a collective creative process.

Moreover, it is through such filmic forms—the duration of a shot, the pulse of the camera, the composition or choice of a particular perspective that conceals a face—that the subject of the interpretation is also presented. It is therefore crucial to bear in mind that the spectator-subject does not decipher the intentions of the enunciation—or is not limited to this—as the film text touches the spectator's body, resounding in it and demanding its unconscious knowledge. The spectator actualises and gives meaning to what the film conveys. Just as the woman should not be victimised, the spectator should not be relegated to a passive position, as spectators are also responsible for what they conjure with their gaze. With this in mind, José Antonio Palao suggests:

It is undeniable that there is an element of modelling (of ideological reproduction) in this audiovisual design. However, the critical tradition has given it so much importance that I feel compelled to play devil's advocate. I believe that what we look at is more important than what we see; what we have learned is more important than what we have been taught, and by destroying (or deconstructing, or analysing, or denouncing) the visible as Laura Mulvey once proposed, attacking what has been shown, we do not always hit upon what has been shown or deny its libidinal investment in what we have looked at (Palao, 2003: 70).

The salvational and living quality of art lies precisely in the fact that it speaks to the spectator's individuality, transcending the creator's intentions. However, Eva Parrondo Coppel & Tecla González-Hortigüela (2016: 62) point out a fundamental political problem: "Is it possible to stop feminist filmmakers from focusing, like Mulvey, on 'men's fantasies about women', from reproducing in their discourses the *mythical-masculine* perspective of 'the woman', and turn instead to-

MOREOVER, IT IS THROUGH SUCH FILMIC FORMS—THE DURATION OF A SHOT, THE PULSE OF THE CAMERA, THE COMPOSITION OR CHOICE OF A PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE THAT CONCEALS A FACE—THAT THE SUBJECT OF THE INTERPRETATION IS ALSO PRESENTED

wards their own fantasies and 'the elaboration of desire' that inhabits them as women?" And they also suggest that "the debate should not revolve around identity; it should revolve around desire, given that it is desire, because it breaks with historical determinations and questions the successful consolidation of social identities, that always represents 'a problem' for and in patriarchal culture" (Parrondo Coppel & González-Hortigüela, 2016: 68). This is because desire is precisely the non-normative, the uncivilised. However, the hegemonic tone of our era demands self-knowledge, self-affirmation, the urgent need to affirm a sexual identity and even agency or empowerment. All these things have become imperatives founded on the notion of an excessively stable identity, that self that underpins the postulates of pragmatism, functionalism, the cognitive-behavioural paradigm, self-help and leadership, these last two being fields that feminist literature is becoming increasingly tied up with, as Maria Medina-Vicent (2021) warns. Yet the self knows nothing of the subject of desire, which is the split subject, the unconscious subject. Moreover, self-affirmation is an act that is as painful as it is impossible, as the ultimate signifier that would assert our identity and grant us a certain sense of existence is always missing.

Authors such as Katherine Angel (2021), acknowledging the *Foucauldian* tradition, are already pointing out the tyranny of self-knowledge as an imperative or positive expression—loud,



Images 9 and 10. *Ana by Day* (*Ana de día*, Andrea Jaurrieta, 2018) or liberation from the self in a shot/reverse shot.

clear and confident—of female desires, as these do not tend to be transparent; on the contrary, they are elusive, as psychoanalysis has also demonstrated. Angel calls for the discourse of desire to incorporate the notion of vulnerability, not just of women, but of men, deconstructing the supposedly powerful male gaze. Why can the male gaze not be vulnerable?

[T]he idea that men are not vulnerable in sex is absurd. They can be easily wounded, physically and psychologically. Their desire and pleasure are either terribly visible, or visibly absent. They have very clear measures by which they can be seen to fail: erection and ejaculation. And like everyo-

ne else, they have hopes, wishes, fears, fantasies, shames—all of which risk humiliation. To be a man is to be tremendously exposed. I don't say this to mock or humiliate men; on the contrary, I say it to welcome them to vulnerability. (Angel, 2021: 107)

With the above in mind, our hypothesis is that what underpins this Other New Spanish Women's Cinema is not identity—losing your identity ultimately proves to be a fantastical liberation in *Ana by Day* (Andrea Jaurrieta, 2018) (Images 9 and 10), for example—but the strangeness of desire. In many films of this movement, identities are blown apart, while symbolic positions are mobilised. This is where the experience of soli-

Images 11 and 12. Connections between classes in *Libertad* (Clara Roquet, 2021) and generation gaps in *Three Days with the Family* (*Tres días con la familia*, Mar Coll, 2009)



tude appears, together with an intense anxiety that claims responsibility for a desire, in a subjective process that nobody else can accompany you through—not even your friends (Image 11), as important as they are in many of these films.

There are also generation gaps and rifts with parents—exemplified in the composition of the scene of a conversation between mother and daughter on the swing in *Three Days with the Family* (Image 12) or the street festival march in *The Innocence* (*La innocència*, Lucía Alemany, 2019). Leaving the home is liberating, but it divides—*Journey to a Mother's Room* (*Viaje al cuarto de una madre*, Celia Rico, 2018)—and when you return, you may even be ashamed of your roots—*Girlfriends* (*Chavalas*, Carol Rodríguez, 2021)—or feel like a total stranger—*Facing the Wind* (*Con el viento*, Meritxell Colell, 2018). In any case, we find

ourselves compromised by those family members who are ageing, or even forgetting—*Libertad* (Clara Roquet, 2021)—and perhaps taking responsibility for those bodies and performing an act of memory is needed to be able to face the future.

Travelling abroad seems to allow us to untangle the family ties, but just when we think we are following our desire we find that we are writing a kind of repetition. In *Júlia ist* (Elena Martín, 2017), when the protagonist, who is on an Erasmus scholarship in Berlin, is told by other students in her architecture program that she is incapable of creating flexible structures and that she only thinks about families in her designs, her bewilderment speaks volumes (Images 13 and 14). Perhaps a certain constant in all these films is the desire to flee that fails to mitigate the feeling of alienation experienced by the subject faced with

her radical intimacy. It is a similar desire to flee written in Antoine Doinel's run at the end of *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups*, François Truffaut, 1959) (Images 15-17), which continues being written at the end of *Ojos negros* [*Dark Eyes*] (Marta Lallana, Ivet Castelo, Iván Alarcón, Sandra García, 2019), despite the fact that the town where the latter film is set is not by the sea (Images 18-20)

Arnau Vilaró, who has dedicated an article to some of these films (specifically concerned with what he refers to as the *Nova Escola de Barcelona*, or *New Barcelona School*), suggests that the “female directors clearly understand that point of view is not just a question of the relationship between the camera and the character, but of understanding the film as a space for exploring their character's psychology. In this sense, the film is viewed as a journey that begins with the actor's body and ends by offering a way out which, in most cases, takes the form of tears” (Vilaró, 2021: 109). Others

Images 13 and 14. *Júlia ist* (Elena Martín, 2017), or how to develop an architecture for people who live alone





Images 15-20. The desire to flee: encounters with anxiety. End of *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups*, François Truffaut, 1959) and *Ojos negros* [*Dark Eyes*] (Marta Lallana, Iveta Castelo, Iván Alarcón, Sandra García, 2019).

end with the moving articulation of a voice, as in *Schoolgirls* (*Las niñas*, Pilar Palomero, 2020), or with a lighter body, with another step. In *María (y los demás)*, after the poignant monologue with the teddy bear in the reverse shot, Maria falls asleep—another victory for the subconscious—on the day that her father is getting married. When she wakes up with a start, she heads off to the wedding. But first, she leaves her first novel with the publisher. The final run has all the liveliness of those leaping strides in *Frances Ha* (Noah Baumbach, 2012) (Image 21); Maria is now awake (Image 22) and knows that she cannot

keep standing around smoking in the shade of her father's tree (Image 1).

In view of the above, it is clear that this Other New Spanish Cinema made by women is not generally aligned with that style of contemporary feminist fiction that insists on calling things by their name—as suggested, conversely, in series like *Fleabag* (Phoebe Waller-Bridge, 2016) or *Perfect Life* (*Vida perfecta*, Leticia Dolera, 2019-). Instead, they point to what cannot be easily expressed in a word, because it is unspeakable or because it is one's own direct private experience. As Arnau Vilaró (2021: 111) suggests, “the gesture,



Images 21 and 22. Sometimes, the narrative trajectory leads to a change of pace: *Frances Ha* (Noah Baumbach, 2012) and *María (y los demás)* (Nely Reguera, 2016)

the gaze, silence and listening are tools that these characters use to posit a relationship with the world and to deal with loss or separation, subjects that all these filmmakers explore.” And in all of these journeys, opaqueness is a central focus. In agreement with Arnau Vilaró, we take note and celebrate the fact that opaqueness is the calling card of desire. ■

NOTES

- * This study has been conducted as part of the research project: *Emerging Female Voices in 21st Century Spanish Cinema: Writings of Intimacy* [VOZ-ES-FEMME] (Code UJI-A2021-12), under the direction of Dr. Shaila García Catalán, funded by Universitat Jaume I for the period 2022-2024.
- 1 On this point, it is worth mentioning two positions that are complementary rather than contradictory: the *best practice* in relations between the sciences and film studies proposed by Roberto Amaba (2019), and the brutal but highly lucid criticism of neuroscience applied to textual analysis put forward by Català Domènech (2017: 25).
 - 2 Carolina Astudillo is a Chilean filmmaker who works between her native country and Barcelona, which is why we have included her among this generation of Spanish filmmakers.

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A RADICAL INTIMATE REALISM: AN OTHER NEW SPANISH CINEMA MADE BY WOMEN

Abstract

This article reflects on the rise of a new generation of female directors in contemporary Spanish cinema, in which we can glimpse a kind of cinematic avalanche that presents us with problems, hopes and challenges, as it does for so many female creators and spectators. What we refer to here as the *Other New Spanish Women's Cinema* has fortunately become simply an *Other New Cinema*, but one made by women who exhibit a degree of collective consciousness. Our vindication of cinema made by women is based on a need to hear these filmmakers in all their heterogeneity, their otherness, never as a category or flawed label. We argue that cinema made by women is neither essentially feminine—because there is no ontology of the feminine—nor directly or necessarily feminist. Along these lines, we argue that ON-SWC also understands cinema as a device for ideas and an artistic device that works on the subconscious, testing out a certain kind of writing of an intimacy presented as obstinate and strange. We consider it essential to approach these films with attention to the details of the writing, the subtleties of the screenplay, and especially the filmic forms related to the body that invite interpretation.

Key words

Female director; Other New Spanish Cinema; Film analysis; Writing; Voice.

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DE UN RADICAL REALISMO ÍNTIMO: UN OTRO NUEVO CINE ESPAÑOL FIRMADO POR MUJERES

Resumen

El artículo reflexiona sobre el auge de nuevas directoras en el cine español contemporáneo en el que intuimos que se produce un corrimiento de tierras cinematográfico y que, como a tantas creadoras y espectadoras, nos problematiza, nos ilusiona y nos confronta. Eso que aquí llamamos el *Otro Nuevo Cine Español Femenino* deviene, afortunadamente, un *Otro Nuevo Cine* a secas, firmado, eso sí, por mujeres entre las que se traza cierta consciencia de colectivo. Nuestra reivindicación del cine firmado por mujeres parte de la necesidad de escucharlas en su heterogeneidad, en su otredad, nunca como una categoría o etiqueta fallida. Defendemos que el cine firmado por mujeres no es un cine esencialmente femenino—porque no hay una ontología de lo femenino—, ni directa u obligatoriamente feminista. En esta dirección, consideramos que el ONCEF también entiende el cine como dispositivo de pensamiento y como dispositivo artístico que trabaja con el inconsciente, ensayando cierta escritura de esa intimidad que se presenta tozuda y extraña. Consideramos fundamental una aproximación a estas películas desde los detalles de la escritura, las sutilezas de guion y, muy especialmente, desde las formas filmicas que tocan el cuerpo invitando a la interpretación.

Palabras clave

Directora; Otro Nuevo Cine Español; Análisis fílmico; Escritura; Voz.

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