WOMAN, SPANISH CINEMA, 2022

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I introduction

AARÓN RODRÍGUEZ SERRANO

As outlined in the introductory article, this issue of L'Atalante is intended to offer a kind of explicit exploration of the current relationship between cinema and women in the Spanish context. This is an open question that poses problems for critics, for creation, for exhibition and, of course, for audiences. As we all know, it is a question with many dimensions—many more than could ever be explored exhaustively, or even touched on—and it requires an approach that is active, constant and highly complex, balanced between the legacies of the past—with the shameful exclusion of women from positions in film creation, but also with the silence or complicity of a historiography and an academy often determined to look the other way—and a future that can be viewed as hopeful but nevertheless still fragile.

Indeed, until quite recently, it was quite possible to complete an official university program in audiovisual communication or read a film journal

without coming across more than a limited number of women. The same could be said of our own work as researchers in the field. It is therefore hoped that this modest proposal may serve as a simple attempt to reflect a little *more* and a little *better* on issues that frankly continue to look rather complex and challenging to delve into.

Of course, the exploration offered here might be accused of being inevitably contextual, a product of its time—sceptics and scoffers might even disparage it as an attempt to be *fashionable*—or a belated effort to embrace the seminal studies of cultural scholars and the latest reflections on cyberfeminism, gender fluidity and a long list of other phenomena. In any case, this study cannot possibly ignore the issues raised by events like the #Me Too movement or the questioning of traditional masculinities. The same could also be said of the rise of a group of female directors, critics and theorists who have shaken our culture's

foundations and invited us to ponder, for better or worse, the gender question, or, if you will, the gender in question. There seems to be a greater need than ever to find men and women to talk about this issue, to listen to them and consider their views. This is why this edition of the (Dis)Agreements section seemed to us to be absolutely necessary to take the pulse of our own institutions—and perhaps, with a little luck, the pulses of our readers as well.

Four especially important names in contemporary film and film studies have kindly agreed to take part in this discussion. The first is Mariona Borrull, a regular contributor to film journals such

as El Antepenúltimo Mohicano, Fotogramas, Serializados, Sensacine and Otros Cines Europa. Also taking part is the feminist theorist Mireia Iniesta, a regular lecturer at the Escuela Educa Tu Mirada film school, vice-president of the Catalan Federation of Film Clubs, programmer for the 39 Escalons film club and programming manager for the Barcelona Craft Film Festival. Our third participant is Ramón Alfonso, a film critic for the journal Dirigido por, co-director of the Quartmetratges film festival and the author of around a dozen books on cinema. And finally, Eva Rivera, director of the Dock of the Bay Music Documentary Film Festival, will also contribute to the discussion.

Arima (Jaione Camborda, 2019)

discussion

I. Do you believe it is possible to speak of a new generation of Spanish female creators? Could that label be expanded beyond directors to include other areas of filmmaking, such as production, distribution, criticism, etc.?

Mariona Borrull

The generational handover that has received the most attention in the last decade would perhaps have been Les amigues de l'Àgata [Àgata's Friends] (Laia Alabart, Alba Cros, Laura Rius, Marta Verheyen, 2015), the indie phenomenon that will be turning eight years old in a few months. It's an interesting exercise to examine the influence this film has had. On the one hand, there is still a need to assess how its production model expanded the possibilities for filmmaking then and now. It was a profoundly collective and unfinished film that nevertheless seems to expand and continue endlessly. On the other hand, there have been so many Àgata style films made at Pompeu [Fabra University, in Barcelona] since 2014... You inevitably have to ponder what we've carried on with from the original idea. Was it the stories of a bunch of preoccupied girls, or was it the irreverence of recording the blast of wind in the face and all those blurted-out, disjointed statements, packed to the gills with truth?

In any case, I do think that my own answer reflects the extent to which we have neglected, and still neglect, the older generations that have been making films in these years. It's not just millennial female directors who are now sitting with the men on the board of the Goya Awards, with all that that implies (I'm thinking particularly of Mar Coll). In our constant quest for something new, we also run the risk of overlooking some women who are doing great work promoting film culture in Spain today: people who have never posed and never will pose on the flashy pages of the annual round-up in *Fotogramas* magazine, but who work in the shadows where nobody praises them for

what they do. A few that come to mind are Núria Giménez Lorang, who organises the La Inesperada documentary festival of "rarities" with Miquel Martí Freixas, or Mar Canet and her idealistic municipal film theatre project, or even someone like Gloria Fernández, who works on breaking down the codes with Enrique Garcelán to ensure that Spanish film history is not just white. There will be a handover, I guess, but sometimes despite it all we leave the people who are still there very much alone.

Mireia Iniesta

A few years ago, an acclaimed Spanish director told me that in the 1990s he taught classes at a well-known film school. Apparently, there were a lot more girls than boys in the classes, and the final projects by the girls were of much better quality. The school, which would give out awards for the best projects, took the decision to systematically award male students who didn't deserve it in order to avoid a flagrant gender imbalance in favour of their female classmates. The same director explained to me that he was surprised after seeing so many young women studying cinema that there were so few that got into the film industry. It's obvious that fewer women get into the industry, and it is also obvious that this trend is changing. But it is important to remember that visibility has played a vital role in all this. There are more young women directing, and more female producers who are daring to back films directed by women, but this has been happening for a number of years now. I think what is increasing is the visibility. Spanish cinema and the other Spanish cinema directed by women is getting more attention thanks to vari-



Canto cósmico. Niño de Elche (Leire Apellaniz, Marc Sempere Moya, 2021)

ous factors: the impact of social media platforms and programming at festivals that are not specifically dedicated to films made by women, which are programming more of their films, and online platforms that give these films a much longer life than they get on the festival circuit; the work of women's associations that have been fighting for years to promote the work we do in every area of the Spanish audiovisual industry; and the sudden appearance of all kinds of magazines, blogs, workshops, podcasts, etc., in the context of the fourth wave of feminism, which help give visibility to cultural products made by women.

To answer your question, yes, in my opinion it is possible to speak of a generation of women filmmakers who have a voice of their own. We'll have to wait and see how many of them manage to get past their first feature film, how many reach a mass audience, like Pilar Palomero has, and how many keep working. That is the real challenge.

In terms of the other areas you refer to in your question, I know that there are some bril-

liant women working in production, like Beli Martínez, for example. But if I'm going to be honest, the area I know best out of all the ones you mentioned is criticism. And in that field, the panorama is heart-breaking. If you look at how many women are writing in film magazines, the number is extraordinarily low compared to the number of male critics who are writing. There are more female critics than there were twenty years ago, and a few are in senior positions at film magazines, of course, but they are still given a lot less space. There are women who write really well and hardly anyone knows them. Especially if they're feminists. A number of publications will just shut the door in their faces.

Ramón Alfonso

It's obvious that in the last few years women have finally managed to break down many of the barriers traditionally imposed by the industry as a clear reflection, or an extension, of what is happening in society at large, and to present their work as

filmmakers. It is an extraordinary advance, without doubt, and although I'm not sure that we can speak exactly of a generation, or even that it is necessary to do so, at least from an *artistic* point of view, it seems undeniable that there is a group of artists: the first group that doesn't constitute a kind of one-off case in a context inevitably dominated by the male gaze. Of course, the emergence of new female filmmakers is directly connected to the increasing prominence of women in numerous occupations in audiovisual production.

Eva Rivera

I think it is possible to speak of a new generation of Spanish female creators. Suddenly, we are seeing the work of new female filmmakers making it onto screens at different festivals. We're finding more women with a place in the industry, at festivals, like Elena Martín Gimeno, Elisa Celda, Claudia Negro, Ainhoa Rodríguez, Núria Giménez, Pilar Palomero... I can think of a lot of things I've seen recently. I think there have been different waves within this group of female directors, women so young who are suddenly telling stories and finding a place in Spanish cinema. In music documentaries, it has been hard until now to find women working in the genre. Some who come to mind are Leire Apellániz with Canto cósmico. Niño de Elche

[Cosmic Chant: Niño de Elche] (2021), and Marina Lameiro with *Dardara* (2021), which are extremely interesting films in my area. There is also a whole bunch of women directors like Meritxell Collel, Diana Toucedo, Carla Simón, Elena López, María Elorza, Carolina Astudillo... all these women who are suddenly creating a way of making films with themes and a point of view of their own as creators. I don't think it's possible to speak of "women's cinema"—I don't really agree with that label—but there is certainly "cinema made by women".

In production, I am seeing female producers (Leire Apellániz, again), and in Galicia we have inspirations like Beli Martínez. These women are committing to a new way of making films. Maybe in the area of exhibition there are fewer; I think it's a field that is going through a difficult time right now. It is true that there are new exhibition models (I'm thinking of Numax or Zumzeig), but I don't see that many women. As for critics, I don't know if there is a new generation writing about cinema. I think the ones who were there before are there now. I'm thinking of Eulália Iglesias, Desirée de Fez, Jara Yáñez... but after that I run out of names. I don't know whether we can speak of a generation of women in that area of analysis and interpretation of women in filmmaking and criticism.



2. In your experience as a viewer, and from a strictly personal, generational perspective, what have been the most significant Spanish films of recent years?

Mariona Borrull

I have to admit to feeling a momentary twinge of rejection when I see the inclusion of "generational" in the question. It's clear that my environment has shaped my tastes and interests, but I refuse to equate the strictly personal with a question of the sociocultural climate. I want to stress this point, although it doesn't mean that they have no correlation at all. In fact, I keep coming back to Magical Girl (Carlos Vermut, 2014) and The Sacred Spirit (Espíritu sagrado, Chema García Ibarra, 2021), two films that have managed to push the expressive limits of recent Spanish cinema to breaking point... One sublimates the filmmaking of Haneke and Bergman, placing them at the service of a little anime witch. The other recycles a very Spanish brand of absurdity based on the chaotic logic of the meme. Are they generational films? I don't think so. Do they sing the praises of any of the causes I support (feminist, queer, environmental)? No. they don't. In fact, there isn't even a trace of me in these films. Maybe it's for that very reason that they've survived so long in my head.

Mireia Iniesta

I find it hard to answer this question. There are so many, and it would be so easy to unfairly omit a few. I apologise to anyone I leave out whose work is as essential as the ones I mention here. I think the films of Virginia García del Pino, María Cañas, Pilar Monsell, Diana Toucedo, Pilar Palomero, Xiana do Teixero, Ingrid Guardiola, María Antón Cabot, Nuria Giménez, María Sanz, Emma Tusell, Blanca Camell, Laura Herrero, Mercedes Álvarez, Belén Funes, Elena Martín, Lucía Vasallo, and Ainhoa Rodríguez are all essential. And my beloved Carolina Astudillo, and Jaione Camborda, who left me shaking since her first short. And I'm still shaking.

Ramón Alfonso

I remember finding Elena Trapé's Distances (Les distàncies, 2018) very interesting, perhaps because I got the impression that it spoke very clearly and honestly, without artifice or smug verbiage, about certain idiosyncratic feelings of sorrow and emptiness of a particular generation that is now around forty years old. The film depicts the reunion of a group of friends in Berlin and offers a beautifully disillusioned gaze on an existential wandering that inevitably leads down a dead-end street.

Eva Rivera

Something that I've loved was, for example, My Mexican Bretzel (Núria Giménez, 2020), as well as Schoolgirls (Las niñas, Pilar Palomero, 2020), and more recently, Mighty Flash (Destello Bravío, Ainhoa Rodríguez, 2021). I would also include Clara Roquet's Libertad (2021), Júlia de Paz's Ama (2021) and Margarita Ledo's Nación (2020). They are things I've seen that I've loved. In the field of music documentaries. I'd like to mention Marina Lameiro and Leire Apellániz again, and also Mensese (2019) by Remedios Malvárez. Among international music documentaries, I'd like to highlight the work of Marie Losier (for example, Felix in Wonderland (2019) and The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye (2011)). However, I would love to be able to talk about more women making music documentaries.



Las distancias (Elena Trapé, 2018)

3. The debate over the feminine in contemporary cinema often confronts us with labels like "women's cinema". Do you think it is a useful approach, or conversely, should we opt for new approaches to exploring the relationships between gender and film?

Mariona Borrull

"Women's cinema" is in itself a harmless label that doesn't mean anything. It can therefore be used by institutions to conflate the feminist and the feminine, so that it only refers to women who can identify themselves with the collective. It's a self-serving niche, an emblem that can hide darker repressions based on purplewashing: the queer movement arose precisely to combat the decline of a struggle that no longer spoke of material conditions, but only of women (see Nancy Fraser, Avtar Brah). I do think it is productive to try to find words for the queer solution. According to Sara Ahmed, we can trace a queer perspective from the constant reorientation towards the

hegemonic. It's an impossible experience to master, in permanent otherness, always pushing us further. A double program on queer issues: from Orlando (Sally Potter, 1992) to We're All Going to the World's Fair (Jane Schoenbrun, 2021). Neither of these two films fits into the LGTB category.

Mireia Iniesta

The "women's cinema" concept seems to me to be obsolete, stale, binarist, hetero-cis, and outdated. And above all, unfairly marginalising. I think it's a monumental mistake for gender studies to take that perspective. As long ago as 1985, in her essay Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema, Teresa de Lauretis pointed to the need to

question this approach, warning of the danger implicit in the essentialism contained in the "women's cinema" label. At a time when feminism is more accepted among men and when the gender binary, although still solid, is not quite as monolithic as it used to be, it is imperative to work from other more inclusive perspectives with transfeminism, queer theory and other ideas that can pull apart the "women's cinema" label once and for all.

It is true that there are a number of themes that at any given time, due to the socio-political context, may affect and/or interest women more. Motherhood, for example. Motherhood was the final taboo associated with the female body and in the last few years that taboo has collapsed. The appearance of straightforward stories and books about remorseful mothers has given rise to a wave of "Mother Courage" figures in all film genres, especially in Spanish cinema. Women with unconventional lives who try to make amends to be good mothers who, like the spaghetti western heroes who can hit a target from half a mile away, have superhuman powers when it comes to protecting their offspring. The most recent example of this that occurs to me is the latest film by Manuel Martín Cuenca, The Daughter (La hija, 2.021).

Is it women's cinema? The answer is NO. It's a topic that affects women and that is directed at society as a whole.

Ramón Alfonso

I think that above all, those of us who have grown up reading and hearing certain simple solutions—or comfortable clichés—over and over again to describe all kinds of issues, even if only for a moment, inevitably tend to label things with meaningless names or headings. It's ridiculous, really. Luckily, many people of the generation after mine—I'm forty years old—seem to me to be liberated from certain bad habits and ideas. In a moment as important as the current context, full of transformations, advances and hybridisations of all kinds, it is essential to effectively reject labels in order to develop new approaches, contemporary perspectives and constructions, or at least try to.

Eva Rivera

The "women's cinema" label doesn't interest me much. I think we can talk about "women creators" when we're giving a point of view or talking about different themes and a way of looking at things as a woman, in terms of ways of doing, and in terms of the interpretation or the script. We're talking about a way of looking at the female subject through the interpretation to position the woman-subject at the centre as a new way of looking at the world and of interpreting the world, but also as a new way of making films. Of course, we come up against problems raised by feminist perspectives aimed at abolishing gender or finding ways to dilute the genders and to be able to speak of fluidity, and new approaches to storytelling. I think it is still relevant to talk about "cinema made by women" (with gender readings, women's issues when interpreting the film, etc.) but I feel it is really interesting to take into account the debates around gender abolition posed by feminism and that maybe they also offer new ways of exploring gender and audiovisual production together.



4. Do you believe that the acceptance and integration of women in Spanish audiovisual creation is stabilising, or does it require more effort from institutions, critics, or audience education? What do you think are its biggest challenges for the future?

Mariona Borrull

Positive discrimination to help the integration of disadvantaged groups is necessary, that is beyond question... However, until human and financial resources are directed at understanding and educating about the realities of the truly marginalised, it never be able to protect anyone beyond that established core of feminism that doesn't cause trouble (ergo, that oppresses). Put simply, only when trans people can enter a washroom without fear will feminism become more than just a big little fairytale.

Mireia Iniesta

No. it hasn't stabilised at all. As I said before, the hard part isn't making a first film, it's being able to move on from there. The same people who opened the doors for you can shut them in your face just as quickly. All it takes is a box office failure or a more negative or less welcoming critical response. The patriarchal system doesn't forgive even the tiniest hint of a female error. The foggy window of opportunity that we've managed to open is unfortunately very fragile. Feminisms have taken root in our culture as a result of years of tireless struggle. We are in the middle of a fourth wave of feminism. It's a double-edged sword: though right now the movement may seem to be in the spotlight, the advances move at a snail's pace. Added to the difficulties that have always been put in the way of our gender, we now have the rise of the far right promoting reactionary views and tremendous hostility, which unfortunately is seeping into progressive sectors, taking things from bad to worse. Another of my fears is that there are quite a few people out there who go in for the "have a feminist at your table" fad, which takes our struggle and all our work as a "trending topic" of the day that they feel they have to sign up for, but who will abandon ship as soon as the going gets tough.

Ramón Alfonso

The biggest challenges for this process are mostly related to the precarious conditions of the film industry itself. The profound, general disconnect with the audience, the need to repeatedly clone unnatural ideas that obviously don't work, the nepotism and the countless obstacles to getting a new project off the ground are some of the issues that have been evident features of the audiovisual industry in Spain for quite a few years now. In a context like this, it is complicated if not nearly impossible to direct a film, of course, but also to work in any of the different fields with an acceptable level of stability. Everything is so insecure and fragile that at times you get the impression that it could all collapse in a second like a house of cards.

Eva Rivera

In none of the last CIMA reports since 2018 is there any comparison made between women and men in the industry. It is still important for institutions, critics and spectators to take measures to ensure that women can reach a level of equality with men, in the film industry and in the world in general. It's a long road that we're walking, and there's still a way to go, and that's why it's important to keep talking about quotas, about the visibility of the jobs that women are doing, about cinema made by women and about women's issues in cinema.

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AARÓN RODRÍGUEZ SERRANO

A fascinating panorama spreads out before us—in theoretical and practical, academic and creative terms. On the one hand, there is the question of "cinema created by women" in relation—and in conflict—with the different feminisms and the complexity of their propositions. On the other is the constantly changing territory that serves as the foundation for any analysis: questions such as the (necessary) inclusion of trans identities. the reassessment of the very idea of gender, and the elimination of essentialist concepts are staring us in the face, and it would be disastrous—or simply mean-spirited—not to give each one the attention it deserves. Moreover, as has been pointed out by one of our participants, the presence of reactionary forces sympathetic to the discourses of the far right make it more important than ever to

take a clear, progressive and even daring position when rethinking the relationships between bodies, their emotional responses and their representations.

At a historic moment when "post-modern" and even "post-structuralist" labels are being used pejoratively in certain conservative—or more accurately, reactionary—circles, it seems that reasserting these labels may be a good idea. These are labels which, whatever many people may think, were decisive for opening the debate to LGTB+identities, and by extension, to the creation of much more pluralist, fair, inclusive and sensible frames for living and thinking. All these twisted reactions that we see today to certain fields of thought—feminisms, queer theories, non-binary genders, etc.—need to be understood as violent

manifestations that ultimately result directly in unjust policies and, most significantly, in specific harm to individuals who by now, in 2022, should be able to take it for granted that their rights are fully recognised. Whether we like it or not, denying the plural nature of bodies and continuing to argue for only one model of affectivity and of relating to the reality that inhabits us is the first step towards legislating explicitly against alterities rather than in favour of them.

In this debate, cinema emerges as a brilliant forum for the creation of possible identities and sites of resistance. We often forget (we should also resurrect the best of semiotics) that texts have more than merely a handful of interpretations, as they are mechanisms of *construction* that mould, construct, change impact and develop possible worlds that could in turn be inhabited by *real bodies*. The fact that a new generation of women are now behind the camera raises the possibility of changing these processes of signification, expanding them, turning them into *something else*. And

of course, this is not so much because it is plausible to argue for a kind of female essentialism—a supposed differential feature that arises naturally from the sex of the creator—but because the sense of belonging to the periphery itself, of being an exception, of having lived in other existential coordinates, can in turn result in other cinematic possibilities. And, of course, it is up to us to listen to them.

NOTES

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WOMAN, SPANISH CINEMA, 2022

Abstract

This issue's (Dis)Agreements section offers a dialogue reflecting on the current relationship between cinema and women in the Spanish context. This is an open question that poses problems for critics, for creation, for exhibition and, of course, for audiences. The participants are Mariona Borrull, critic; Mireia Iniesta, feminist theorist, programmer and lecturer; Ramón Alfonso, critic and Quartmetratges Film Festival co-director; Eva Rivera, director of the Dock of the Bay Music Documentary Film Festival; and Aarón Rodríguez Serrano, lecturer at UJI and critic.

Key words

Cinema; Woman; Creation; Criticism; Festival; Film.

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MUJER, CINE ESPAÑOL, 2022

Resumen

La sección de (des)encuentros propone un diálogo para reflexionar acerca de las relaciones actuales entre cine y mujer en el contexto español. Pregunta abierta que problema a la crítica, a la creación, la exhibición y, por supuesto, a las audiencias. Participan Mariona Borrull, crítica; Mireia Iniesta, teórica feminista, profesora y programadora; Ramón Alfonso, crítico y codirector del Festival de Cine Quartmetratges; Eva Rivera, directora del Festival de Cine Documental Musical Dock of the Bay; y Aarón Rodríguez Serrano, profesor de la UJI y crítico.

Palabras clave

Cine; Mujer; Creación; Crítica; Festival; Película.

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