L'ATALANTE
REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CINEMATOGRÁFICOS



WOMEN AND SPORT IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: BODIES, IMAGES, POLITICS

DIALOGUE
RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT: A CONVERSATION WITH NATALIA ARROYO

(DIS)AGREEMENTS
TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES IN DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN'S SPORT IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: PERSPECTIVES OF SPANISH SPORTSWOMEN

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TECHNICAL DETAILS (FICHA TÉCNICA)

Publisher (Edición): Asociación Cinefórum L'Atalante (CIF: G-97998355) y El camarote de Père Jules (CIF: G-98857402).

Place of publication (Lugar de edición): València (Spain).

E-mail (Dirección electrónica): info@revistaatalante.com.

Website (Página web): http://www.revistaatalante.com.

ISSN: 1885-3730 (edición impresa), 2340-6992 (edición digital).

Legal Deposit (Depósito Legal): V-5340-2003

Biannual journal (Publicación semestral).

* Père Jules is a pseudonym to represent a collective editorship formed by all the members of the Executive Editorial Board.

ISSUE 37 (NÚMERO 37)

Issue Editors (Coordinadores del número): Manuel Garin (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), María Aparisi Galán (Universitat de València).

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Translators (Traductores): Martin Boyd.

Aknowledgments (Agradecimientos): The present issue was completed within the framework of the FUCAV. Fútbol y cultura visual en el franquismo: discursos de clase, género y construcción nacional en el cine, la prensa y los noticiarios 1939-1975 research project (project code number PID2020-116277GA-I00).

Original design (Diseño): Carlos Planes Cortell.

Layout (Maquetación): Martín Gràfic.

Cover (Portada): Designed by Carlos Planes Cortell using a still frame from the film *Something different* (O necem jinem, Věra Chytilová 1963)

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WOMEN, SPORT AND IMAGES: FROM LITERARY EKPHRASIS TO AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

MANUEL GARIN

At this time, when both recreational and entertainment sports are being increasingly characterised by quantification and monetisation, it is difficult to separate sport from what Susan Sontag once described as the image market (1977: 178). Without attempting to appraise the positive or negative aspects of the phenomenon, which transcends any simplistically dualistic interpretation, it seems reasonable to assert that the most contemporary feature of sport today is the way that its (everyday) performance and (mass) consumption are determined by their value for audiovisual production and social exchange. Sport is not just played or watched, as it was before; now, it is also fragmented, quantified in clicks and mediatised. The special connection between sport and moving images was identified by two of the founding theorists of film aesthetics, Béla Balazs and Siegfried Kracauer. Balazs explored the act of moving and walking to distinguish between functional beauty in sport and truth (or soul) in cinema (1931: 137), while Kracauer highlighted its revolutionary and artistic potential, with reference to Bertolt Brecht and Slátan Dudow's film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), in which sport plays a key role (1947: 262). However, as Miriam Hansen points out (2012: 198), it was Walter Benjamin who most clearly characterised the ambivalent symbiosis between film and sport as two related forms of a "test performance" (2008: 30) that would shape the future of everyday life in capitalist societies. Nearly 100 years before any amateur athletes were able to go online to check their running time, generated instantly by a microchip and shared on social media, Benjamin had already discerned the intrinsic tendency towards quantification and evaluation shared by cinema and sport:

> This aspect of filmmaking is highly significant in social terms. For the intervention in a performance by a body of experts is also characteristic of sporting performances and, in a wider sense, of all test performances. The entire process of film produc-

> tion is determined, in fact, by such intervention. [...] These tests, unlike those in the world of sports, are incapable of being publicly exhibited to the degree one would desire. And this is precisely where film comes into play. Film makes test performances capable of being exhibited, by turning that ability itself into a test. The film actor performs not in front of an audience but in front of an apparatus. The film director occupies exactly the same position as the examiner in an aptitude test. To perform in the glare of arc lamps [...] is to preserve one's humanity in the face of the apparatus. (Benjamin [1936], 2008: 30-31)

In those days, this interweaving of technology and play, of capital and entertainment, did not have to be interpreted solely in the negative terms in which Theodor Adorno understood it (Hansen, 2012: 200); it could also be viewed as an agent for social change and political mobilisation, as Benjamin himself and Brecht suggested. However, today the relationship between the "apparatus" and the "test performance" has reached levels that make it difficult to separate the relatively spontaneous act of playing a sport from its viewing, statistical and monetisation systems, and therefore, to distinguish playing sport *per se* from its value as an audiovisual product. Without any intention of indulging in nostalgia, it is worth remembering that just a few years ago it would have been unthinkable to come across a person running on a mountain trail who, instead of slowing down to enjoy the landscape, looks obsessively at the screen of his watch to check his average running speed or heart rate. Not so long ago, before the rise of the mobile phone, the ratio of time spent actually playing a sport to time spent photographing ourselves playing one was very different: the image was an exceptional phenomenon (the team picture taken once a year, the blurry snapshot of a race), and taking a photo did not involve the complex network of economic, technological and sociological interactions brought into play by the mere fact of sharing an image on social media. It was only very recently that filming and broadcasting major sports like football turned into the mechanism of geopolitical control and corporate and institutional whitewashing that it is today, so utterly inextricable from its sources of funding and power structures. The problems were there in embryonic form decades ago (Rigauer, 1981), but images were not yet operating on a feedback loop that monetises everything. Sport was not so completely defined by its status as (or desire to be) an image:

> A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The camera's twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires the unlimited production and consumption of images. (Sontag, 1977: 178)

However, although the relationship between sport and audiovisual production today is so tied up in this image market, important changes to its underlying power structures are taking place, producing rifts and cracks in the heteropatriarchy at the top. In parallel with this age of mediatisation, we are living at a productive and promising moment for sport played by women. It is a period still marked by the sexist behaviour and authoritarian outbursts of those in charge (the events surrounding Spain's 2023 World Cup victory offering an obvious example), who take refuge in fake news

and conspiracy theories of false feminism because they can see the battles being won in the area of gender rights and are reluctant to relinquish the power they have always enjoyed. The notion of the "grass ceiling" posited by the historian Jean Williams (2007) is enlightening in this sense, as on the one hand it evokes the aspirations and constraints of the "glass ceiling" historically imposed on women in the business world, thus highlighting the connection between sport and economics mentioned above, while on the other it posits a larger context in which the fight for gender equality is characterised not as an upward climb, like ascending a hierarchical ladder, but as a level playing field: not a level to aspire to, like the glass barrier that women seek to smash (i.e., the *current* world of business), but a shared green space on which they can pass the ball to each other and play (the *utopian* world of sport). Navigating the tensions and ambivalences between these two worlds is of course no easy task.

DESIRE AND PROHIBITION: THE PATRIARCHAL GAZE

This issue of *L'Atalante*, titled *Women and Sport in Audiovisual Media: Bodies, Images, Politics*, is positioned precisely at this historical intersection between the market of images that surround us (as Sontag describes it) and the new prospects for sport played by women, with the aim of documenting and interpreting key visual icons (in the various articles) and giving a voice to different generations of sportswomen (in the interviews). But before presenting this issue's topics and contributions, it is worth taking a moment to consider a key issue that can help shed light on the origin or foundation of the historical tension between the sport imaginary and gender discourses: the ban imposed on women by a heteropatriarchal power fascinated with, yet at the same time fearful of, the visual and performative agency of the sportswoman's body. Or looking at it from the opposite perspective, the revolutionary, liberating potential of sport played by women and its depiction in images as a means of disrupting the male gaze and its scopophilic pleasures. Such images possess a transgressive power that Tatiana Sentamans identifies in her fascinating study *Amazonas mecánicas: engranajes visuales, políticos y culturales* (2010: 140), which analyses archival photographs of sportswomen in Spain, opening the images up to multiple interpretations that transcend the limiting yet omnipresent male/female binary. Indeed, as the football coach Natalia Arroyo points out in one of the interviews featured in this issue, it is outrageous that we continue to talk about "*women's* sport", an expression that implicitly assumes that the default version, requiring no modifying adjective, is men's sport.

One of the most oft-repeated fallacies in discussions about sport played by women today is its description as a "developing" field (a term borrowed from economic terminology) that does not receive more media or public attention because "it is still getting started" and therefore "cannot attract" the kind of audience that sport played by men is able to draw. This condescending language that feigns sensitivity to gender issues is commonplace on TV and radio talk shows and in conversations in the street. The problem is that this idea, so frequently repeated by those who seek to undervalue or undermine sport played by women, is historically false, as it is the bans imposed by men that have prevented sports played by women from reaching more people and receiving more attention in the public sphere: not a supposed *lack of public interest*, but a whole regime of male (in this case the qualifying adjective is worth including) restrictions and repressions that prevented women from playing certain sports, such as in 1921 when England's all-powerful Football Association officially banned women from playing the sport, with medical and eugenic excuses, but with the obvious objective of cutting short the stunning success (in terms of audiences and social impact)

THE COERCION AND CASTIGATION IMPOSED BY THE HETEROPATRIARCHY REFLECTED AN OBVIOUS DREAD AND DISTRUST OF THE AGENCY OF SPORTSWOMEN AND THE SOCIAL ADVANCES THAT AGENCY MIGHT ACHIEVE

that football played by women was enjoying at the time (Williams, 2003; Arroyo, 2022). Leaving aside the positivist and evolutionist assumptions of this conception of sport (as if it were something that has to *progress* in terms of economic power and media attention), it is important to stress that the coercion and castigation imposed by the heteropatriarchy reflected an obvious dread and distrust of the agency of sportswomen and the social advances that agency might achieve. It was a mixture of fear and fascination of female athletes that recalls an image from one of the greatest works in the history of literature *Journey to the West: The Monkey King's Amazing Adventures*, written in China in the 16th century:

> He had no choice, then, but to go on. Although it seemed wrong to do so, he crossed the bridge at last. After taking a few steps, he noticed a sandalwood pavilion in the middle of the compound of the house. In the compound, three girls were juggling a ball with their feet. These girls were completely different from the other four. Their bright turquoise sleeves waved rhythmically, revealing their delicate jade fingers like bamboo shoots. The swaying of their embroidered golden skirts offered glimpses of impossibly tiny slippered feet. Their every movement was vested with the most extraordinary perfection and smoothness as they passed the ball from one to another. To do so, they had to calculate the distance precisely and measure the amount of force needed to kick the ball. Each move had a name of its own. A turnaround kick was an "over-the-wall-flower", while a backward somersault was "crossing the sea". The game demanded the deftest of skill, particularly to stop the ball with the feet and attack without raising a single speck of dust from the ground. But one of the hardest moves of all was "the pearl that rises to the Buddha's head". To achieve it perfectly, the ball had to be caught between the toes and passed repeatedly from one foot to the other. But their repertoire was not limited to such a peculiar move. Indeed, the players would sometimes drop to the ground to strike the ball, or squat with bended knee while keeping the body most straight, or twist like fish out of the water and hit the ball off their heels to the far side of the field. With shouts and applause they would celebrate such magnificent footwork and then strive to outdo it. As if by magic, the ball would then roll up a player's legs with ease and stop at her tender neck, where it would spin around a few times before falling at last to the ground. (Wu Cheng'en, [1592] 1992: 1599-1600)

This description, which goes on in more detail, constitutes one of the earliest extant literary images of a sport being played by women, perhaps its first ekphrasis (a concept worth invoking here, as there appear to be no existing scholarly publications on the question). Although there are paintings pre-dating this work that depict women playing *cuju* (a traditional Chinese sport that was a precursor to football), such as a work by the artist Du Jin painted during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the passage from *Journey to the West* is significant and highly relevant to the subject of this monograph, not only for its precise and detailed descriptions of the sportswomen's movements, but especially for what happens immediately after the scene of the game. A few pages later, we discover that these same young women are in reality malevolent she-devils, who pretend to cook for the traveller who stumbled upon their game, serving him "a little salted human flesh fried in human fat" and "human brains, still covered in blood" ([1592] 1992: 1602). But the most emblematic moment comes when, after presenting

the women first as expert footballers and then as pitiless cannibals, the author sexualises them in an extensive passage marked by the voyeuristic gaze of another character who, having magically transformed himself into a fly, watches the women bathing in the nude—the very quintessence of a male gaze that sexualises women's sport:

> On seeing them, the Pilgrim smiled with delight and flew straight to one of the women and landed on her. When they saw how clear and warm the water was, the women wanted to swim in it at once. Without a moment to lose, they took off their clothes, tossed them carelessly onto the posts and dived into the pool. With eager eyes, the Pilgrim watched them unbutton their blouses, loosen their silk sashes and take off their skirts. Silvery white were their breasts, and their bodies had the unattainable perfection of snow. Their limbs wore that blue tone that makes ice so lovely, while their shoulders looked as if they had been crafted by hands at once expert and delicate. Their stomachs were as smooth and supple as would be expected of such beauties, a fleshy counterpoint to the tautness of their shapely backs. Their thighs and their knees were perfectly rounded, and their tiny feet were no more than three inches long. A flame of desire shone form their sweet caverns of love. Once in the water, they began to jump and splash one another, while the more daring swam to the middle of the pool (Wu Cheng'en, [1592] 1992: 1599-1600)

The purpose of citing the whole passage here is to highlight its historical importance as a precursor to many of the images analysed in this issue, and also to demonstrate the common features of the previous description of the women's bodies while playing *cuju* (a genuine sport description) and this description of the same women swimming in the pool (explicitly sexualised). This way of simultaneously praising, demonising and objectifying women through sport, beginning by extolling them, then eroticising and finally condemning and punishing them, is reflected in several articles in this issue, such as Elena Oroz's exploration of the depictions on film of the activities of the Franco regime's women's branch, Sección Femenina, or the analysis of the film *Las Ibéricas F. C.* (1971) by Elena Cordero and Asier Gil. *Journey to the West*, with its incomparable iconic force (and its ability to make us laugh), is light years away from the grim prudery of Francoist Spain that Carmen Martín Gaite analysed so insightfully in her novels and essays: the *cuju* she-devils are much more empowered than the women that the Franco regime sought to mould, as they fight, repeatedly beating the men they face, and using powerful magic techniques and martial arts. But what is significant in this case is how, as different as the contexts may be, many canonical patriarchal depictions of sport played by women share this double-edged sword of desire and interdic-

Figure 1. Scroll painting by Du Jin (circa 1465-1509) showing women playing cuju



tion, highlighting the significance of *men's fears and prohibitions* as a historical constant.

With this in mind, before turning to a consideration of sports images created by women that question and reverse such gender restrictions, it is worth highlighting the presence in the passage from *Journey to the West* of what Barbara Creed refers to as the "monstrous-feminine" (1993). The seven young women described in the story are not just extraordinary sportswomen but also powerful insect-cannibals with the power to shoot silken threads from their stomachs and trap men in their webs. This connects to a whole tradition of monstrous images of women that runs throughout the history of art, threatening the heteropatriarchal power structures, as Pilar Pedraza (1991) has shown. In the identification of this idea of female *otherness* in sport, it is highly revealing that the chapter of *Journey to the West* in which these she-devils appear also presents them as mothers, with a menacing and monstrous image of motherhood: "Each of them had adopted a child, to whom they had given the names Bee, Hornet, Cockroach, Centipede, Grasshopper, Worm and Dragonfly. At one time, the women who were now their mothers had woven an enormous web and all these unlucky children had suffered the misfortune of falling into it" ([1592] 1992: 1615). As Miriam Sánchez and Alan Salvadó point out in their article exploring the connections between menstruation and the sport imaginary, the patriarchy's fears, prohibitions and propaganda regarding women's agency in sport give considerable attention to menstruation and motherhood. The question of controlling bodies connects with the constraints imposed by the canons of beauty, normativity and gender binaries, as several of the sportswomen interviewed by Nuria Cancela, Laia Puig and Ariadna Cordal in this issue's *(Dis)Agreements* section observe.

READING ON THE DIVING BOARD: SWIMMERS AND FEMINISTS

Fortunately, these othering and sexualising gazes are gradually giving way to spaces of reconstruction and sisterhood that place sport played by women—and not the voyeuristic gaze on it—at the heart of the matter. Returning to the example of the menstrual education films analysed by Sánchez and Salvadó in their article, it is reassuring to see that finally, after decades of silencing or explicit stigmatising of menstruation in sport (consider, for example, the infamous white dress code imposed on tennis players at Wimbledon), some institutions and clubs are beginning to naturalise or even analyse the influence of menstrual cycles on sports performance and injuries (Bonals, 2022). However, as Tatiana Sentamans demonstrates in her aforementioned research (2010), the performative and political agency of the sportswoman's body is not a recent or contemporary "achievement", as over the course of the 20th century (in parallel with the exponential rise in popularity of sport in capitalist societies) there were numerous female athletes who acted as important forerunners in audiovisual media, opening up new possibilities for women with their sporting careers and images. For example, this issue includes two articles that explore the imaginary of women's sport at two key moments in history: Weimar Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in Albert Elduque's article about the well-known genre of the mountain film or *Bergfilm* (which provided Leni Riefenstahl with a platform to launch her career, first as an actress and then as a director); and the Czechoslovakian New Wave of the 1960s, in Nora Barathova's analysis of Věra Chytilová's first feature film, *Something Different* (O něčem jiné, 1963), which juxtaposes the patterns and emotions of the day-to-day lives of a professional gymnast and a housewife. Far from offering a monolithic view, these two articles underscore the complexity and ambiguities

(especially notable in the case of the *Bergfilme*) reflected in different films and characters.

Having cited the ekphrasis of the she-devils in *Journey to the West* as an example of the spaces of mystification and castigation that the patriarchy imposed—and still imposes—on sport played by women, this introduction would not be complete without balancing it out with an image that has the same iconic power but is articulated from a female and feminist perspective. Given that the final passage cited above portrayed the girls swimming in a pool, it seems fitting to invert the male gaze of that scene with images of female swimmers who short-circuited the sexualised charge of the female swimmer motif (present in iconic images from the birth of Venus right up to the bikini-clad women in James Bond films) to invoke gender identities, body politics and articulations of desire produced (rather than merely embodied) by women. The image of the female swimmer has had a particularly potent force in contemporary European cinema, from the unforgettable images of Juliette Binoche letting herself go as she swims laps in a pool in *Three Colours: Blue* (Tres couleurs: Bleu, Krysztof Kieslowski, 1993) to Céline Sciamma's first film, *Water Lilies* (Naissance des Pieuvres, 2007), about two teenage girls on a synchronised swim team, whose protagonists subvert heteronormative canons through an ambivalent haptic and biopolitical experimentation that empowers the actors' bodies and complicates the filmmaker's (desiring, but collective and feminist) gaze. To reappropriate the motif of the female swimmer and historicise its literary forerunners, the origins of its images, it is impossible to overlook Concha Méndez, who in addition to being a poet and editor was also a champion swimmer in the 1920s:

> On one of my last summers in San Sebastián, I won the Las Vascongadas swimming competition. I had already published my first books, *Inquietudes, Surtidor* amd *El ángel cartero*, and I had just sold a film script. The newspapers mentioned that the swimming champion was a poet and a filmmaker, and they published my picture. When my father saw me in the papers, he said to me: "That picture makes you look like a common criminal." That was what my family was like, but I imagine that deep down my father would have been proud that I was a writer. The day of the awards ceremony, I gave my second poetry recital. Over the sea they had set up two diving boards against a rock, one for women and the other for men, both more than twenty feet high. I arrived at the bay in a swimsuit with the poems wrapped in oilcloth. I climbed up to the diving board, unfurled the roll of poems and began reciting. When I had finished, to get the applause and so they could see that I was daring, I had to dive off, despite my vertigo, and I plunged into the sea and swam away with the poems wrapped around me. (Méndez, quoted in Ulacia, 2018: 52)

Here, in contrast to *Journey to the West*, it is the voice of a sportswoman that controls the pacing, direction and nuances of the narrative, without ever submitting to the *rules of the game* of an objectifying gaze. It is hard to imagine a richer and more powerful scene: the swimmer's body is charged with desire and intensity on its own, in contact—literally—with the poems she wrote and reads. It is the woman writer's words that clothe her, instead of stripping naked like the she-devils to satisfy some man's desire (Méndez spent her summers in San Sebastián with her partner at that time, Luis Buñuel). The only small concession to the patriarchy, if it can be so described, is her wistful recollection of her father offered as evidence of family pride; as Carrie Dunn points out (2014), the father-daughter connection is a recurring theme in oral histories of professional and amateur sportswomen, which are often characterised by strong parent-child relationships. But beyond this minor detail, the passage possesses an extraordinary iconic power, while at the same time being open to a certain playful irony much like the burlesque films that Méndez so adored (inevitably recalling Buster Keaton standing on a

high diving board preparing to jump off in *Hard Luck* (1921), as if she were seeking to balance the ordinary and powerfully feminist seriousness of the scene with a hesitant humour that points to suspense, doubt and vertigo as experiences common to both art and sport. It is a clinical, deadpan gaze that is also evident in her poems:

Female Swimmer

My arms:
the oars.

The keel:
my body.

The rudder:
my thought.

(If I were a mermaid,
my songs
would be my verses).

Swimming

(No mermaids.
No Tritons).

On high, the diving boards.
And the water, bathing in the white
pool
—a bath of transparencies.

In the stands,
expectation, murmurs.
And the Olympic loudspeaker
firing out words:

"Standing back flip with momentum!"

Agile shapes fly
silhouetted against the spacious blue.

Emotion drowned in
voices, voices, voices.

The crowd
—polychrome jerseys.
And the muscle
in athletic contractions.

Rhythm; rhythm of
arms and spirals.
Now,
the winner, the winners
—laurels without laurels.

And the anonymous hearts
throwing (javelins?) at the sublime afternoon.

(Méndez, [1928] 2018: 43, 110)

For a monograph like this one, focusing on images of women and sport, Concha Méndez's poems are of huge historical value, as they connect not only to contemporary productions that place sportswomen in the leading role, such as the Norwegian series *Home Ground* (Heimebane, 2018-2019, NRK1), which is analysed in one of this issue's articles, but also very especially to the testimonies and experiences of the six sportswomen interviewed for this issue: the former footballer and current coach Natalia Arroyo, the basketball player and Olympic medallist Laia Palau, the Alpinist and mountain runner Núria Picas, the volleyball player Omaira Perdomo, the para athletics player Adiaratou Iglesias, and the boxer Tania Álvarez. Both the collective perspectives contained in the *(Dis)Agreements* section and the extensive interview with Arroyo evoke the relationships between sport and image woven into Méndez's poems. It is a form of self-conception and self-representation as a sportswoman that is reaffirmed in the first person, juxtaposing three parallel lines: the physicality of the sporting act itself ("my arms,



Figure 2. *The Cyclist* (1927), a painting by Maruja Mallo inspired by her athlete friend, Concha Méndez, along with a photograph of Méndez herself reading

the oars"); the control over her direction and *telos* ("the keel, my body"); and the ethical and philosophical consciousness that underpins both ("the rudder, my thought"). Thus, while reading the sportswomen's answers to our questions about role models in audiovisual productions (films or series), visual motifs (during sports broadcasts), media bias (in the press and in public forums), canonical narratives (such as success or individualism) and forms of self-representation (on social media), it is exciting to think of how a century earlier other women, like Concha Méndez, were tackling similar possibilities and barriers, on the edge of the diving board, questioning themselves and us through sport. This may be why only someone who knows and loves the energies and rhythms of sport in the first person (like Pasolini [2015]) can reflect on it in a way that is both intimate and critical, free of prejudices.

With this in mind, to conclude this introductory article it is worth returning to the two concepts invoked at the beginning, Sontag's image market (1977:178) and Benjamin's "test performance" (2003: 75), to bring them into the much larger battlefield that is sport played by women today. It can hardly be coincidental that several of the women interviewed for this issue, such as Natalia Arroyo with her discussion of the salaries and lifestyles of women footballers, or Omaira Perdomo with her reflection on how her image as a trans sportswoman is aestheticised and monetised, stress the socioeconomic intersection that conditions (and sometimes endangers or limits) the achievements and gains they are leading in the area of gender equality. One thing that this monograph has sought to avoid is to offer a superficial or depoliticised tribute to sport played by women as if it were a phenomenon unrelated to the (nearly always economic) problems and contradictions that characterise the contemporary world. It is an individualist, monetising spiral which, as David Graeber points out in his compelling anthropological and historical analysis of debt (2011), always sacrifices human interests at the altar of financial interests, using the sport imaginary both as a vehicle and as a distraction. The demands by sportswomen for better salaries and working conditions (such as the recent case of the US women's football team) are not merely "success stories" that can be isolated from their historical or class context and packaged for any corporate motivational talk; on the contrary, they are complex economic and gender signifiers that often end up perpetuating the narrative of capitalist effort and the cult of individual success. As Sara Ahmed explains in her thoughtful analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002), they also perpetuate a whole range of deceits and expectations, associated with *the promise of happiness*:

> The freedom to be happy is thus directive: it involves an act of identification in Jacques Lacan's sense of "the transformation that takes place in the subject" when assuming an image. The freedom to be

> happy is premised on not only the freedom from family or tradition but also the freedom to identify with the nation as the bearer of the promise of happiness. To identify with the nation, you become an individual: you acquire the body of an individual, a body that can move out and move up. This is how happiness becomes a forward motion: almost like a propeller, happiness is imagined as what allows subjects to embrace futurity, to leave the past behind them. (Ahmed, 2010: 137)

The intersections of race, class and gender explored by Ahmed in the chapter of her book (the fourth chapter, "Melancholic Migrants") that analyses this undervalued British film provide enough material for a whole article, or even a whole monograph. But what is of particular interest here is how, after praising its success in expanding the horizons and imaginaries for young sportswomen and its power to evoke the contagious dynamism of team sports, Ahmed shifts the focus onto the pressures imposed by the very concept of "happiness" on racialised women, migrant families and non-heteronormative identities. And most importantly, she does so by pointing to the very heart of that image market defined by Sontag, to *the promise of happiness* as a form of cultural assimilation (the migrant who "adapts" to the national English sport), globalised commodification (the female footballer who "progresses" by being selected by a US team) and sex-affective domestication (the teenage girl who "redirects" her desire towards the clever, handsome white coach of the women's team). None of this detracts from the pioneering nature of this film, directed by an Indian woman, or its powerful impact and legacy: Ahmed highlights, for example, how the director was forced to give in on aspects such as the female protagonist's gender identity in order to receive funding, underscoring the force of the ideas and stances that underpinned the project. These are, of course, the same types of pressures and economic seductions that many sportswomen face today.

ONE THING THAT THIS MONOGRAPH HAS SOUGHT TO AVOID IS TO OFFER A SUPERFICIAL OR DEPOLITICISED TRIBUTE TO SPORT PLAYED BY WOMEN AS IF IT WERE A PHENOMENON UNRELATED TO THE (NEARLY ALWAYS ECONOMIC) PROBLEMS AND CONTRADICTIONS THAT CHARACTERISE THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In short, what this issue of *L'Atalante* seeks to do, albeit in only a partial and introductory way, is to compile historical evidence and professional experiences of sport played by women that have photography, cinema or other audiovisual formats as a common denominator. But rather than appeasing and depoliticising in the style of motivational speeches or institutional whitewashing (like the politicians and bankers of the day cheering on *women's* sport), these experiences preserve the complex ambivalence of a sport imaginary which, although increasingly centred around and conceived of by women, is still subject to the homogenising supply and voracious demand of the image market. By highlighting them here, it is hoped that professional or amateur sportswomen will be able to look the heteropatriarchal monster in the eyes, reverse its historical prohibitions, and aspire to construct a common project on the sports field. ■

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WOMEN, SPORT AND IMAGES: FROM LITERARY EKPHRASIS TO AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

Abstract

This article situates and prologues the special issue *Women and sport in audiovisual media: bodies, images, politics*, contextualizing its main themes and case studies as well as relating them, comparatively, with key visual precedents in the history of literature. By using two examples of literary ekphrasis where the practice of sport by women is central: on the one hand the heteropatriarchal, sexualized and objectifying portrayal of the woman's sporting body (exemplified by a chapter from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*), on the other, the liberatory views and gazes of sportswomen that, like the poet Concha Méndez, defied the limits and impositions of the male gaze with their own explorations of sport and images. Moreover, the article rethinks Walter Benjamin's comments on the link between cinema and sport, and Susan Sontag's concept of the "market of images", reading both of them from the perspective of affect theory and Sara Ahmed's analysis of the class, race and gender signifiers of women-practiced sport in her book *The Promise of Happiness*.

Key words

Images; Sport; Women; Media; Literature; Feminism.

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Article reference

Garin, M. (2024). Women, sport and images: from literary ekphrasis to audiovisual media. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 7-18.

MUJERES, DEPORTE E IMÁGENES: DE LA ÉCFRASIS LITERARIA A LOS MEDIOS AUDIOVISUALES

Resumen

El presente artículo abre y prologa el número monográfico *Mujeres y deporte en los medios audiovisuales: cuerpos, imágenes, políticas*, presentando los casos y temas abordados en el mismo y relacionándolos, comparativamente, con antecedentes clave de la historia de la literatura. Acudiendo a dos ejemplos de écfrasis en los que el deporte practicado por mujeres tiene un papel central, se contrapone una visión heteropatriarcal, cosificante y sexualizada del cuerpo deportivo femenino (representada por un capítulo de *Viaje al Oeste. Las aventuras del Rey Mono*), frente a las miradas de diversas deportistas mujeres que, como la poeta Concha Méndez, desafiaron las imposiciones de la *male gaze* a través de sus propias exploraciones de la imagen deportiva. Asimismo, se actualizan las ideas de Walter Benjamin sobre la relación cine / deporte, y el concepto de «mercado de las imágenes» de Susan Sontag, releyéndolos desde la teoría de los afectos de Sara Ahmed y su análisis sobre los condicionantes de clase, raza y género del deporte practicado por mujeres, en su libro *The Promise of Happiness*.

Palabras clave

Imagen; Deporte; Mujeres; Audiovisual; Literatura; feminismo.

Autor

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Referencia de este artículo

Garin, M. (2024). Mujeres, deporte e imágenes: de la écfrasis literaria a los medios audiovisuales. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 7-18.

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

NOTEBOOK

WOMEN AND SPORT IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: BODIES, IMAGES, POLITICS

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"OF COURSE, I CAN GO SWIMMING": SPORTS IMAGINARIES IN US MENSTRUAL EDUCATION FILMS*

MIRIAM SÁNCHEZ-MANZANO
ALAN SALVADÓ-ROMERO

INTRODUCTION

Is menstruation in sport a taboo subject? In recent years, the obvious fact of its existence in women's sports has received heightened attention in news stories circulating both in conventional media and on social media platforms. Take, for example, Kiran Gandhi, the 26-year-old American woman who ran the London Marathon in 2015 while on her period, without wearing a pad or tampon.[1] The images showing her bloodstained pants after finishing the race went viral, firstly, because they brought something traditionally associated with the private domestic sphere into the public realm (Delaney, Lupton & Toth, 1976), and secondly, because they took place in the traditionally masculinised context of competitive sports, calling into question some of the prejudices that exist around menstruation and physical activity. On the other hand, this unexpected display of menstrual flow in a sporting environment, where other bodily fluids (sweat, saliva, blood, tears) are commonplace, provoked numerous comments condemning Gandhi as "disgusting" and "unladylike", thereby exposing the persistence "of a stigma around menstruation of which women all over the world are victims" (Thiébaut, 2018: 110). The bloodstain on Gandhi's sports gear became an image of civil activism that called out this representation of menstrual blood as abject[2] and tied in with the tradition of what could be described as prosocial visual motifs, referring to "iconographic patterns that protest against injustice and promote social change, eliciting responses understood as other-oriented emotions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours" (Canet, 2023: 166). Taking a step beyond the protests made by other sportswomen on this issue, such as the calls for the elimination of white sports outfits made at Wimbledon or by the English football team,[3] Gandhi's action was an attack on a social taboo and on sporting policies designed mainly by men.

In *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*, Iris Young (2005) reflects on sexual difference in sport, arguing that physical exercise and bodily movement in our sex-gender system have been historically associated with masculinity, while bodies constructed as feminine have occupied a social position of fixity, weakness and immobility of reaction. On this point, Young observes:

> For the most part, girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys to develop specific bodily skills. Girls' play is often more sedentary and enclosing than the play of boys. In school and after-school activities girls are not encouraged to engage in sport, in the controlled use of their bodies in achieving well-defined goals. Girls, moreover, get little practice at "tinkering" with things and thus at developing spatial skills. Finally, girls are not often asked to perform tasks demanding physical effort and strength, while as the boys grow older they are asked to do so more and more. (2005: 43)

For Young, girls' and women's sporting activities are dictated by the menstrual condition of their reproductive bodies. In contemporary societies, the "good functioning" of the body is based on the implicit male bias in medicine's conception of health. While periods and menstrual flows are viewed as a pathological condition, apparently linear bodies with no cycle of hormonal alterations as noticeable as those of menstruation are established as the norm for social behaviour and, therefore, for sporting behaviour as well. Menstruation and sport are thus linked to science and medicine as a means of controlling the body, because, in accordance with the perspective posited in 1976 by Foucault (2019), the dominance of capitalism in the West gives rise to a series of strategies and mechanisms aimed at keeping individuals' bodies useful and productive. The period, however, stands in opposition to this question of physical productivity, belonging to the private realm of reproduction. The media impact of the image of Gandhi's bloodstained pants at the end of the London Marathon can thus be understood in terms of a logic of menstrual *decensorship* that exposes the control and oppression of reproductive bodies in sport. In this sense, it is worth asking where, apart from the image of Gandhi, imaginaries that relate menstruation with sport should be located and identified in Western audiovisual culture.

US MENSTRUAL EDUCATION FILMS (1946-1980)

Given the under-representation of menstruation in Western audiovisual culture, it is necessary to turn to film genres that are ostensibly marginal—due mainly to their unusual distribution channels—such as productions made for the purposes of menstrual education. These productions can be traced back to the 1940s, when the International Cellucotton Products Company, a branch of the Kimberly-Clark Corporation, collaborated with Walt Disney Productions to produce *The Story of Menstruation* (1946), for distribution to US schools to be shown in sex education classes.[4] This first educational cartoon illustrates the operation of the menstrual cycle and informs its adolescent audience about basic menstrual care practices, all with the aim of promoting and marketing Kotex sanitary pads to adolescent girls (Schaefer, 2020). Just over ten minutes in length, the film is an obvious successor to the silent films on sexual hygiene distributed during and after the First World War by US public health services to warn people (specifically, women) about the risks of contracting venereal diseases (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018), such as *Personal Hygiene of Young Women* (1924), supervised by the US Public Health Service and produced by Bray Studios. On the other hand, *The Story of Menstruation* also has its roots in the brochures on menstruation created by Kimberly-Clark, after selling its first Kotex sanitary pads in 1921. These brochures, aimed primarily at gir-

ls and young women, illustrated the operation of the menstrual cycle while presenting the usefulness of these sanitary pads for containing the flow. Menstrual education films thus intertwined the different concerns of their co-producers: the community service objectives of US public health authorities on the one hand, and the commercial interests of companies manufacturing menstrual hygiene products on the other (Vostral, 2011). After the "success" of *The Story of Menstruation*, menstrual education productions continued to be distributed in schools until the 1980s, when sanitary pad companies turned to television as a more effective way of marketing their products to young women.

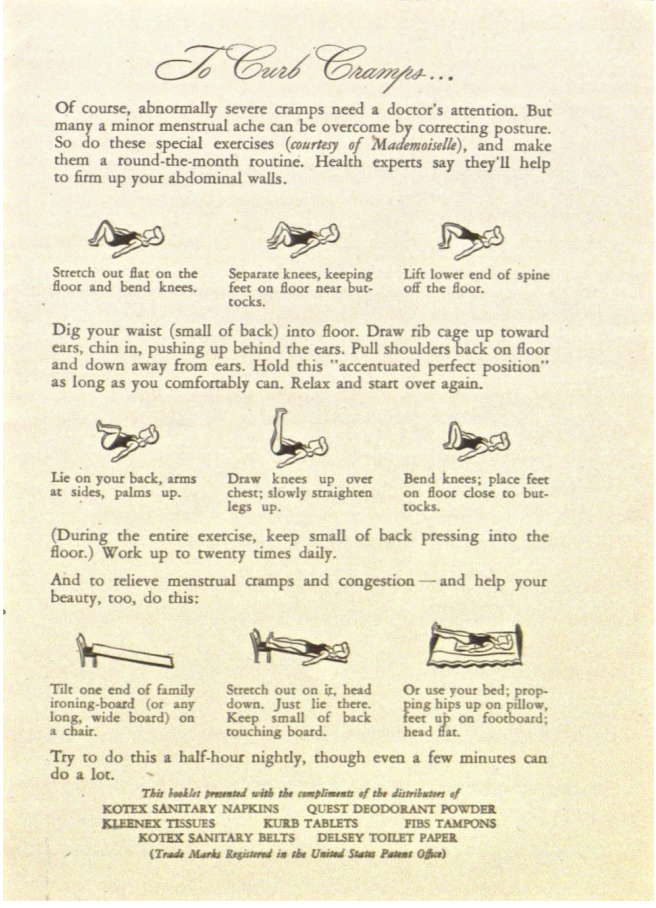
What makes these productions of interest to this research is the pioneering connection between periods and sport that can be identified in them. This study takes an archaeological perspective involving a thematic and visual analysis of menstrual education films produced between the 1940s and the 1980s in the United States. Specifically, it offers an analysis and comparison of six such films: the aforementioned *The Story of Menstruation* (1946); *Personal Health for Girls* (1952), funded by Coronet Instructional Films; the films *Molly Grows Up* (1953), *It's Wonderful Being a Girl* (1968) and *Naturally A Girl* (1973), all made by Johnson & Johnson; and *The Facts for Girls* (1980), produced by Tomorrow Entertainment, which is the only production in the sample that was broadcast on television. The aim of this analysis is to identify the visual and narrative motifs of menstrual education in relation to sport in this corpus of films, with a view to determining how biomedical discourses have underpinned the relationship between menstruation and sport in Western audiovisual culture. This analysis is based on the study by Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter in *Health Education Films in the Twentieth Century* (2018), which establishes a methodological framework for analysing health education films of this kind.[5] These authors also stress the importance of comparing productions to each other: "Serial analysis of many films [...] provides insight into strategies and styles of public health communication and what changes and what does not over time. It is a form of comparative history that is not possible to undertake with only one film" (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018: 4). This research is also guided by the theoretical propositions of Iris Young (2005) on the question of how biomedical discourse has conditioned the imaginary constructed around menstruation in Western societies in relation to physical activity and sport.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE AS MENSTRUAL CARE

According to Vostral (2011), all menstrual education films follow the same narrative pattern. On the one hand, films produced by public health authorities stress bodily care, a healthy diet and the importance of bathing. On the other, films made by menstrual product manufacturers emphasise these same points but also highlight the importance of controlling menstruation with sanitary pads. The narrative always revolves around an adolescent girl who has not yet had—or has only just had—her first period, and who is being offered advice or warnings about proper menstrual care. On the visual level, these productions also have a similar aesthetic, recognisable for the use of anatomical diagrams that illustrate the ovaries, uterus and vagina, which serve to explain the menstrual cycle to the protagonist, and thus to the audience as well. Anatomical diagrams are common in these health education productions (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018), although it is curious to note that in none of these images is there ever any trace of the red colour of menstrual blood (Sánchez-Manzano, 2021). As part of the narrative revolving around bodily care and the aesthetic of anatomical descriptions, all of the films in the corpus depict different sports and physical activities engaged in by the girls appearing on screen.

In *The Story of Menstruation*, the film's narrator explains that "exercise is good for you during menstruation," while the protagonist is shown on a bicycle, on horseback, and dancing. The brochure "Very Personally Yours" that was distributed with the film also introduces the point that taking good care of your body during menstruation involves being physically active. In particular, one page of the brochure presents recommendations of abdominal exercises to reduce menstrual pain (Image 1). It is worth highlighting the fact that although this first film recommends physical exercise, it advises girls against swimming or immersing themselves in water due to the changes in body temperature that this could provoke, which many medical experts of the time supposedly considered potentially harmful for menstrual health (Heinrich & Batchelor, 2004). This point is stressed in a scene of *The Story of Menstruation* where the narrator recommends bathing during your period, but with caution to avoid catching cold. Similarly, the British educational film *Growing Girls* (1949) produced by the Film Producers Guild and the National Committee for Visual Aids in Education, stresses that swimming during your period is not beneficial to your health. This film lists a series of physical activities that can be engaged in during menstruation ("You can dance, you can cycle as usual [...], you can play hockey or any other game, provided you feel like it"), and then concludes by showing the protagonist dressed in a bathing suit jumping into the water for a swim, while the narrator clarifies that she is now "at the end of the period". On this question, the film *Molly Grows Up* creates an interesting dialectic, beginning with a scene where Molly is talking on the phone to a friend who is trying to persuade her to go swimming. Her mother tells her that it would be better for her to stay home, because "it's not a good idea [to swim in] the first two or three days of your period." In response to her mother's advice, Molly tells her friend: "Of course I can't go swimming; you know I've got the curse."[6] In contrast to this scene, at the end of the film Molly appears dressed in a bathing suit, swimming in the pool with her friends, just after a scene in which her teacher goes over a list with the students of physical activities that they can engage in during their periods: they can swim (but only after the first few days), dance, skate, ride on horseback and play "fast games". The films *It's Wonderful Being a Girl*, *Naturally a Girl* and *The Facts for Girls* all feature similar scenes: in a classroom, one of a group of adolescent girls asks her teacher if it is all right to play sports during menstruation, to which the teacher replies that it is, and that it is not merely all right but recommended. In *It's Wonderful Being a Girl*, the teacher even encourages the protagonist to

Image 1. Sequence of still frames from the film *Naturally a Girl* (1973), showing the tampon as a menstrual hygiene technology that can be helpful for engaging in sports like swimming



To Curb Cramps...

Of course, abnormally severe cramps need a doctor's attention. But many a minor menstrual ache can be overcome by correcting posture. So do these special exercises (*courtesy of Mademoiselle*), and make them a round-the-month routine. Health experts say they'll help to firm up your abdominal walls.

Stretch out flat on the floor and bend knees.

Separate knees, keeping feet on floor near buttocks.

Lift lower end of spine off the floor.

Dig your waist (small of back) into floor. Draw rib cage up toward ears, chin in, pushing up behind the ears. Pull shoulders back on floor and down away from ears. Hold this "accentuated perfect position" as long as you comfortably can. Relax and start over again.

Lie on your back, arms at sides, palms up.

Draw knees up over chest; slowly straighten legs up.

Bend knees; place feet on floor close to buttocks.

(During the entire exercise, keep small of back pressing into the floor.) Work up to twenty times daily.

And to relieve menstrual cramps and congestion — and help your beauty, too, do this:

Tilt one end of family ironing-board (or any long, wide board) on a chair.

Stretch out on it, head down. Just lie there. Keep small of back touching board.

Or use your bed; propping hips up on pillow, feet up on footboard; head flat.

Try to do this a half-hour nightly, though even a few minutes can do a lot.

This booklet presented with the compliments of the distributors of
KOTEX SANITARY NAPKINS QUEST DEODORANT POWDER
KLEENEX TISSUES KURB TABLETS FIBS TAMPONS
KOTEX SANITARY BELTS DELSEY TOILET PAPER
(Trade Marks Registered in the United States Patent Office)

go skating with her classmates, while in *The Facts for Girls*, the film's presenter tells a group of girls that they should engage in athletics while on their period. All of these films include scenes showing girls riding bicycles, skating, dancing, swimming or playing other sports. And in *Personal Health for Girls*, the protagonist is shown playing volleyball, while in a voice-over she tells the audience that they should get some kind of physical exercise every day: "Exercise keeps my muscles from getting flabby," she explains.

These menstrual education films introduce sport and physical exercise as positive actions for taking good care of the body during menstruation, an idea that is already identifiable in the sexual hygiene productions made earlier in the 20th century. These include the silent film *Personal Hygiene of Young Women*, already mentioned above, which describes physical exercise as the most effective way of protecting the body against menstrual and sexual pains, and for preventing venereal diseases. One of the film's intertitles reads: "Menstruation is a perfectly normal occurrence and not an illness. In case of pain or discomfort a physician should be consulted. Light exercise should be taken; also daily baths, but *not* with cold water." In the corpus of films analysed here, playing sports is also presented as a way of taking good care of your body. This would appear to contradict Young's theory (2005) about the "implicit male bias" in the Western conception of health and sport. In this sense, these films represent the introduction of a new imaginary in Western audiovisual culture that associates femininity (represented by the menstrual bodies of the protagonists) with physical exercise and bodily movement. However, in these menstrual education films the association between sport and menstruation is still founded on an assumption of "good ladylike behaviour" on the part of their adolescent characters. According to Ghanoui (2020: 933), these films enact a "menstrual performance"[7] in their narratives by presenting their protagonists' menarche (the first period) as an embodiment of female roles and behaviours. As Tarzibachi (2017a) suggests, by becoming a menstruating body in adolescence girls begin a process of gender socialisation whereby, paradoxically, menstrual bleeding must be addressed privately and discreetly, while at the same time "becoming a woman" should be publicly proclaimed. This idea is made obvious in the titles of the films *It's Wonderful Being a Girl* and *Naturally a Girl*, which replace the noun "menstruation" with the verb "being" or the adverb "naturally", in a linguistic shift that reveals the performative function of the period as a gender generator. The scenes in these menstrual education films that focus on physical exercise and sport thus conform to a logic of instruction about these "new" menstrual bodies. The instruction is personified in the figure of the mentor who advises the girls about which activities they should and should not engage in when they are on their period. This is an idea that evolved over the years and was represented in various characters (chiefly in the narrator, the mother, and the teacher), but always playing the same role of instructing young girls in how to "become" women. The authority figure is common in educational films on any aspect of personal health (in other types of educational films, it is often represented by a doctor), as it is one of the most widely used narrative devices for legitimising a health education film (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018).

In the corpus studied here, the sports that appear most frequently are cycling, dancing and swimming. All of these are individual sports that came to be imbued with this "feminine" view of physical activity that always places the focus on the benefits they offer for women's physical and menstrual health. In their book on women and sport, Clemente and Silva (2022) link the question of health to a whole feminine tradition of understanding physical exercise in terms of its benefits for bodily care rather than in the competitive terms identifiable in the male sporting tradition.

This distinction is even clearer in these menstrual education films when compared to other health education films: specifically, the sexual education films aimed at adolescent boys, which focus on issues related to men's sexual health rather than on women's reproductive health (Ghanoui, 2020). Examples of this can be found in *Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescence* (1953), which forms part of the Adolescent Development series produced by Crawley Films, and *As Boys Grow* (1957), made by Medical Arts Productions. In both films, adolescent boys are shown in sporting environments: in numerous scenes they are wearing sports uniforms or holding basketballs or baseballs, even when they are not actually playing any of these sports. We also see them socialising with each other by playing contact or competitive sports. *As Boys Grow* includes a particularly noteworthy scene in which a group of boys ask questions of their coach, who shows them an anatomical diagram with the shape of the ovaries, the uterus and the vagina to illustrate the menstrual process—a key feature of menstrual education productions, although here it appears only as a visual motif of the "tactical talk". In this film, the classroom is replaced with the locker room, while the authority figure is changed from a narrator/mother/teacher to a coach. This change places us inside a male imaginary that revolves around the trainer, a very common image in contemporary sports culture. In contrast, menstrual education films for adolescents do not place the focus on gender socialisation by means of sports imagery, but instead use such imagery to explain the codes of good gender behaviour. One scene in *Personal Health for Girls* illustrates this perfectly when the protagonist is shown playing volleyball with a group of girls and two boys walk past the court, look at the girls and wave to them. While the boys pass by, the protagonist's voice-over narration continues to extol the virtues of playing sports everyday: "I meet a lot of new boys that way, because everyone my age is interested in sports." This reflects how good female behaviour includes caring for the body, and in doing so, obtaining approval from the male gaze. The scene culminates with a close-up of the protagonist smiling because exercise "makes [her] feel good".

PHYSICAL EXERCISE AS MENSTRUAL LIBERATION

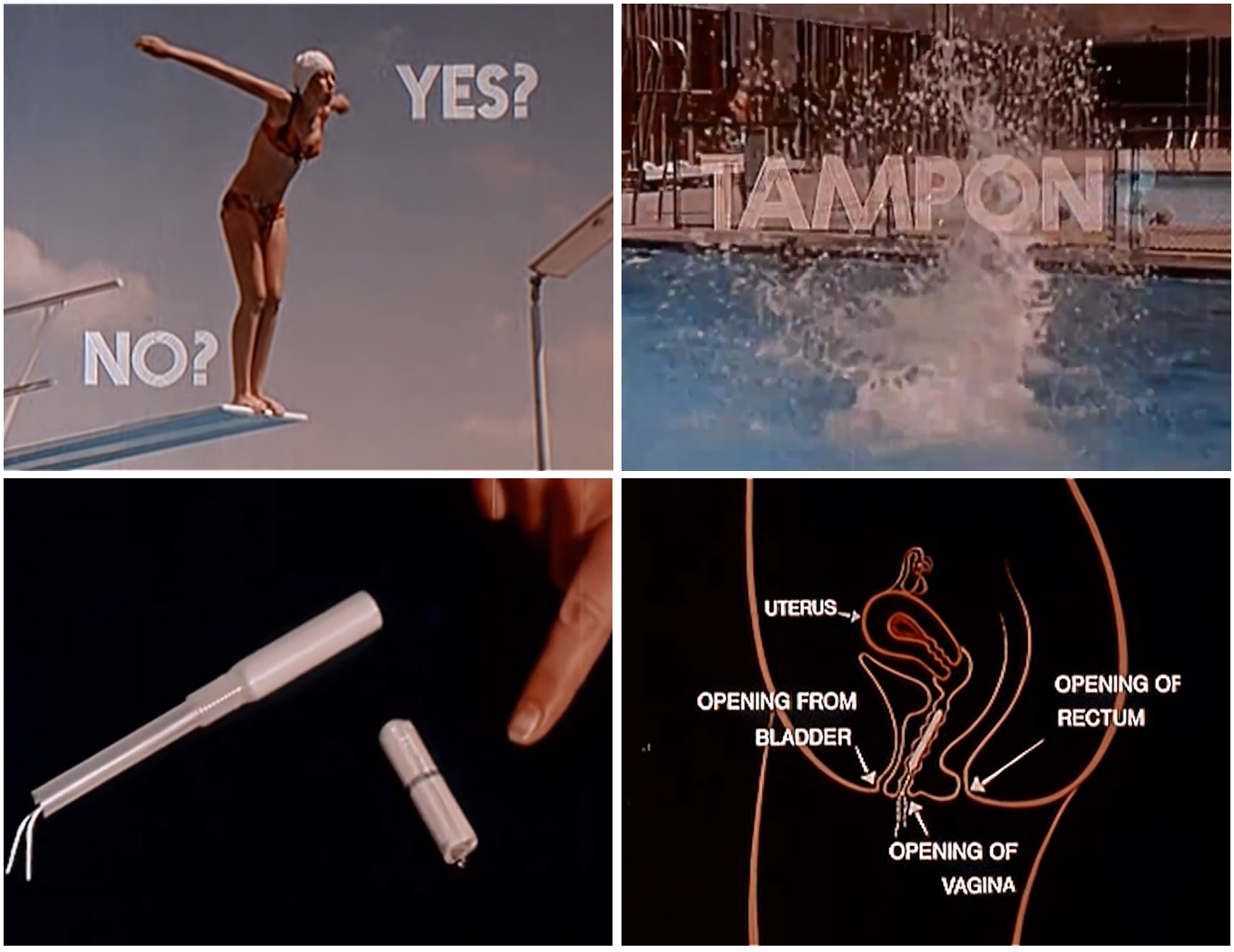
Perhaps the clearest point made to the audience in these menstrual education productions is that the period is something "positive" and that engaging in physical activities and sports is beneficial for the health of menstruating bodies. This is reinforced in all the films analysed with images showing "happy" girls exercising while on their first period. Particularly notable in this respect is a scene in the bowling alley in *It's Wonderful Being a Girl*, when the protagonist, Libby, tells her friend that she has had her first period and the narrator remarks: "To her, any sport was a challenge." We then see Libby running, jumping and smiling while she plays a round of bowling. However, it is important to recognise that in these films the apparent "menstrual liberation" offered by sport is dependent on the use of technologies that can contain and conceal the bleeding. According to Vostral (2011), both the educational films produced by US public health authorities and those made by sanitary pad manufacturers introduce menstrual management technologies in their narratives as the method of dealing with menstruation. In *Molly Grows Up*, the teacher explains to her students: "When you do [start menstruating] you will want to use a sanitary napkin to absorb the flow." And she adds: "Some girls prefer to use tampons," while she shows her students how to use these products. First, she explains how they work using her hands, and then she uses an anatomical diagram on the blackboard. A similar scene is featured in *The Facts for Girls*, when the teacher explains to her students how to use menstrual care products. In *The Story of Menstruation*,

Personal Health for Girls and *Naturally a Girl*, it is the narrator who explains the benefits of using sanitary pads during menstruation, in similar terms. On the other hand, in *It's Wonderful Being a Girl*, the protagonist's mother gives her a box of pads and shows her how to use them, before she has her first period.

Presenting technologies that place the focus on bodily health is common in health education films like these (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018), although in the case of menstrual education films, such presentations necessarily involve suitable instructions about the body, offered once again by the mentor figure. Although these films challenge the biased use of the male as the standard for good health (Young, 2005) by making menstruating bodies the focus of bodily care, the way they naturalise menstrual management technologies on screen continues to reduce menstruating bodies to a biomedical issue. In medicine, menstruation has historically been understood as a "condition" with "symptoms" that requires "treatment". As Mandziuk suggests, "[m]edical theories of the body as an economic system or a factory led to a metaphoric understanding of menstruation as an indication of 'the diseased factory' or 'the machine in disrepair'" (2010: 44). In such cases, menstrual management technologies are presented in these films as the solution to the "problem", providing a false assurance of control over the body thanks to the "clean" sensation resulting from neutralising the menstrual flow and concealing it from the public, especially in the context of playing sports. In contrast to the image of Gandhi's bloodstained pants after running in the London Marathon in 2015, these menstrual education films show no trace of blood. Instead, physical exercise serves as a means of demonstrating the effectiveness of menstrual care products in containing the flow. At the end of *It's Wonderful Being a Girl*, the protagonist asks her teacher whether she can play any sport while menstruating. The teacher replies: "The pad absorbs the menstrual fluid completely; you have nothing to worry about." In *Naturally a Girl*, the students ask the question: "What happens to the menstrual flow when it leaves the body?" To answer this question, the benefits of sanitary pads are shown on screen while the voice-over explains how to put one on correctly to obtain best results in terms of absorption. Later, the question of swimming during menstruation is raised, with a girl in a bathing suit shown about to jump off a diving board. The image freezes and the captions "YES?" and "NO?" appear on screen. (Image 2). Then the voice-over provides the answer: "You can go swimming during menstruation if you wear a tampon." The image begins moving again and the girl jumps into the water. Then the caption "TAMPON?" appears (Image 3), while a young girl's voice exclaims the word. The narrator then details the advantages of using this menstrual management technology (Image 4), while an image of a tampon is shown being inserted in one of the usual anatomical diagrams (Image 5).

However, the focus in these scenes seems to be more related to hygiene than to health. As Vostral (2008) suggests, the use of these technologies designed to conceal the menstrual flow conveys an understanding of them as gender control technologies, as they are associated with the production and consumption of a "feminine ideal" that involves maintaining a clean, stain-free body. At the same time, in these films the concealment of bleeding by means of such products is associated with the theories about hygiene and cleanliness identified by Kane (1990), citing Douglas (2007), in

THESE MENSTRUAL EDUCATION FILMS SHOW NO TRACE OF BLOOD. INSTEAD, PHYSICAL EXERCISE SERVES AS A MEANS OF DEMONSTRATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MENSTRUAL CARE PRODUCTS IN CONTAINING THE FLOW



From left to right and from top to bottom. Images 2, 3, 4, 5. Sequence of still frames from the film *Naturally a Girl* (1973), showing the tampon as a menstrual hygiene technology that can be helpful for engaging in sports like swimming

the first advertisements for menstrual care products based on the concept of *freshness*: "'Freshness' is the way the subject/consumer (coded more often than not as female) attains/maintains a position in the social order, whether by satisfying her family or the standards of female attractiveness. The very existence of a special category, feminine hygiene, indicates that female bodies require specific cleansing rituals" (Kane, 1990: 85). Although these educational films are not technically advertisements, the close relationship that menstrual care product companies had with them cannot be overlooked, as their role in the production of these films is key to understanding how these menstrual "cleansing rituals" are articulated in the films' narratives.

According to Mandziuk (2010), these stories about hygiene and menstruation are based on combining modern advertising strategies with the social and economic circumstances of industrialisation and the consumer society. It is no mere coincidence that these films appeared in the years after the Second World War, when, on the one hand, public health became a key political and social concern,[9] and, on the other, the hegemony of the capitalist economic model was consolida-

ted. Health education films were produced with the intention of correcting or reinforcing beliefs and practices in the area of personal health and were designed to serve specific instrumental purposes (Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter, 2018). The productions analysed here, which cover a period of 40 years, clearly engage in a complex discourse on health that reflects a range of political and economic efforts to control reproductive bodies in the second half of the 20th century in the United States. For example, the menstrual education films of the 1940s and 1950s tend to depict sport in domestic terms, as a way of caring for the body and preparing it for motherhood. However, this narrative around health begins to change in the films made in the 1960s, when sport, in addition to being a way of keeping the body in shape, becomes a form of physical "liberation", thanks to the development of menstrual products that allow women to lead a "normal life" even when they are on their period. A scene in *Naturally a Girl* provides an example of this evolution: just after the narrator has explained the correct way of using a tampon, a girl asks: "Does everyone know when you're menstruating?" The narrator replies: "No, if you don't tell, there's no way anyone can know." This is immediately followed by a sequence of images presenting different women engaging in various everyday physical activities, such as walking, working in different jobs, driving or playing sports like tennis. This 1973 film reflects a paradigm shift in the understanding of menstruation and sport: women's bodies are no longer depicted as domestic objects, but instead are recognised as economic capital in a system of physical productivity. The biomedical discourse thus ultimately becomes intertwined with the needs of capitalism, giving rise to a need among its adolescent audience to consume pads and tampons. As Tarzibachi (2017b) suggests, the menstrual management industry has leveraged the biomedical institution to construct the image we have today of menstruation in our consumer society:

> It is important to contextualise a key process that occurred relatively quickly over the course of the 20th century. A new practice of disciplining the body of biological women was established and consolidated, at different times and to varying degrees between countries and within each country, thanks to the global spread of the disposable pad and tampon production industry. This new practice for controlling menstruating bodies was lauded as the modern way of menstruating. And the shame associated with menstruation seemed to disappear as this process became consolidated, when in reality what happened was that it remained active and productive in the shadows. (2017b: 36-37)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the aesthetic and narrative codes of health education films in the early 20th century explored by Bonah, Cantor & Laukötter (2018), these menstrual education productions pioneered the association of menstruation with sport in Western audiovisual culture. Physical activity is depicted in these films to provide visual examples of the potential benefits of menstrual care products, which would be consolidated in the US market between the 1940s and the 1980s. Produced by public health authorities and by the companies that manufactured these products, these films construct a whole discourse around menstrual health and hygiene that involves proper care of the body through physical activity and playing sports. Underpinned by biomedical discourse, sport in these films becomes an advertising strategy for selling pads and tampons to adolescent girls of the era by generating a need for these products. From a gender perspective, sport is constructed in feminine terms, effectively demystifying the taboos against physical activity and movement during menstruation (Young, 2005) as a result of its integration into the capitalist system of production and productivity for the purpose of promoting menstrual care products.

Due to their nature as public health productions, these menstrual education films follow a logic of instruction imposed on menstrual bodies. On the one hand, the representation of menstruation and sport is positioned at an intersection between medicine, capitalism and patriarchy in all the productions analysed. On the other, educating the menstrual body is depicted as the responsibility of public institutions through the recurring depiction of the classroom and the figure of the mentor—represented in the character of the narrator, mother or teacher—who instructs the girls in good female (and therefore menstrual) behaviour. At the same time, the fact that these menstrual education films were produced after the Second World War in the United States—in the period beginning with the development of the consumer society and ending with the victory of neoliberalism under the Reagan administration—explains why their themes and narratives serve to convey a discourse of control over women's bodies, which would be appropriated and redefined by the menstrual care product manufacturers that produced them. These films thus turned menstruation into a technical process while naturalising the use of menstrual care products (Vostral, 2011). In this sense, these films can be understood as direct precursors to contemporary advertising for menstrual care products, playing an influential role in the consolidation of the femcare industry in Western societies. This advertising continues to perpetuate the same imagery used in these menstrual education films: women doing acrobatics, dancing and striking impossible poses, representing physical exercise and movement as a "liberation" or even as "empowerment" for the menstrual body.

It is clear that the representation of the menstrual body in sport needs to be contextualised in broader theoretical, political and iconographic debates over how the menstrual body is rendered visible or invisible in the public sphere. However, by identifying these films as pioneers in the audiovisual representation of an imaginary that associates menstruation with sporting activity, this study, based on visual archaeology, paves the way for a new understanding of the history of bodily fluids in depictions of sport. An interesting politico-visual arc thus emerges between the discourse on health and hygiene in the physical activity portrayed in *The Story of Menstruation* in 1946 and the menstrual stain on Kiran Gandhi's pants during the London Marathon in 2015, we find an interesting politico-visual arc.

THESE FILMS CONSTRUCT A WHOLE DISCOURSE AROUND MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE THAT INVOLVES PROPER CARE OF THE BODY THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAYING SPORTS

NOTES

* This study was funded by the European Union-NextGenerationEU, Ministry of Universities and Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, through a call for submissions by Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona).

1. Kiran Gandhi's personal experience is detailed in the article "Going with the Flow" (2015).
2. As Kristeva (1982) suggests, menstrual fluid has been understood as a threat which, by transgressing the limits of the body itself, is coded as abject, as a dirty, disgusting and contaminating liquid. According to Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "[m]enstrual rituals and hygiene practices imply that, like other bodily fluids, menstrual blood is considered an abomination. Some have argued that menstrual blood is viewed as more disgusting or aversive than other bodily fluids such as breastmilk and semen" (2020: 182).
3. See the news story on #AddressTheDressCode in Mouro (2022).
4. In fact, as Schaefer (2020) points out, the film was distributed together with an educational package to be shown in class, which included a menstrual chart, a

guide, and a brochure titled "Very Personally Yours" that illustrated issues related to menstruation and menstrual care.

5. It is worth noting that although it focuses mainly on films made in industry, Elsaesser's *Archives and Archaeologies: The Place of Non-fiction Film in Contemporary Media* (2009) also outlines a methodology for the analysis of films of this kind, based on three criteria: 1) who commissioned the film; 2) what it was made for; and 3) what it was used for or the audience it targeted. Nevertheless, the methodological approach for this article is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Bonah, Cantor and Laukötter (2018), whose study focuses specifically on educational films dealing with health issues.
6. The term "curse" was used popularly in the mid-20th century to refer to menstruation, and it can be heard in several of the menstrual education films analysed here.
7. For Ghanoui (2020), "menstrual performance" is based on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (1999) but applied to the menstrual body.
8. The World Health Organisation (WHO) was created in 1948, resulting in the establishment of new global policies related to the body focusing on disease control and the promotion of health and social welfare.

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"OF COURSE, I CAN GO SWIMMING": SPORTS IMAGINARIES IN US MENSTRUAL EDUCATION FILMS

Abstract
Menstrual education films made in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s played a pioneering role in the creation of an imaginary that related menstruation and sports in the audiovisual medium. This article offers a thematic and visual analysis of seven of these educational films to explore how biomedical discourses have underpinned the relationship between menstruation and sport in Western audiovisual culture. The findings suggest that these productions contributed to the establishment of a narrative that helped introduce a female perspective on physical exercise, while at the same time naturalising the use of menstrual hygiene technologies in sport.

Key words
Menstrual education films; Sport; Physical activity; Health; Hygiene; Menstruation.

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Article reference
Sánchez Manzano, M., Salvadó-Romero, A. (2024). "Of course, I can go swimming": Sports Imaginaries in US Menstrual Education Films. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 21-34.

«OF COURSE, I CAN GO SWIMMING». IMAGINARIOS DEPORTIVOS EN LAS PELÍCULAS DE EDUCACIÓN MENSTRUAL ESTADOUNIDENSES

Resumen
Las películas de educación menstrual que se desarrollan entre los años cuarenta y cincuenta en Estados Unidos intervienen en la creación de un imaginario que relaciona de manera pionera la menstruación y el deporte en el medio audiovisual. Este artículo parte del análisis temático y visual de siete de estas películas educativas con el objetivo de comprobar cómo los discursos biomédicos han acompañado la relación entre menstruación y deporte en nuestra cultura audiovisual occidental. Finalmente, se concluye que estas producciones contribuyen a la constitución de un relato que si bien, por un lado, favorece la incursión de una mirada femenina sobre el ejercicio físico, por otro lado, naturalizan el uso de tecnologías de control menstrual dentro del deporte.

Palabras clave
Películas de educación menstrual; Deporte; Ejercicio físico; Salud; Higiene; Menstruación.

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Referencia de este artículo
Sánchez Manzano, M., Salvadó-Romero, A. (2024). «Of course, I can go swimming». Imaginarios deportivos en las películas de educación menstrual estadounidenses. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 21-34.

recibido/received: 31.05.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 25.09.2023

Edita / Published by

Licencia / License

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

THE FEMALE SPORTING BODY IN VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ'S *SOMETHING DIFFERENT*

NORA BARATHOVA

> In an email to Nadia I mention the punctuation in the articles written about her comeback a year after Montreal, exclamation points that compete with ellipses: "50 kg!!!" "Nadia is now a real woman....." She confirms, "It's true, it shouldn't be called female gymnastics, the spectators don't come to see women... You know, if competition leotards are always long-sleeved, it's to hide the girls' arms. Our biceps, our veins. Because above all we mustn't look too masculine either!"
>
> (LAFON, 2015: 110)

In her book *The Little Communist Who Never Smiled*, Lola Lafon constructs a fictionalised account of the life of the famous Romanian gymnast Nadia Comăneci. For the development of the novel, Lafon exchanged a series of emails and phone conversations with Comăneci, who shared various details about the events of her life. Based on this information, the author puts together a story that explores various issues shaping Comăneci's career, including of course the context in which this young girl became famous (Ceaușescu's Romania and the gradual shift from Cold War to globalisation, as she herself became a worldwide sports star) and perceptions of the female body (both her own and those of an international audience). These two issues underpin the novel, the whole life of the gymnast and even the life of the writer, who although born in France lived part of her childhood in Romania during the dictatorship and who includes some of her own experiences in the book.

The historical context of a communist regime and the conception of the female body—of sportswomen and others—are also key issues in *Something Different* (O něčem jiném, 1963), the first feature film by the Czech filmmaker Věra Chytilová, a key figure in the Czechoslovak New Wave. With none of the lush aesthetics that would characterise her later films (*Daisies* [Sedmikrásky, 1966] being the most obvious example), *Something Different* breaks down the boundaries between fiction and documentary with its presentation of two parallel stories about two women who are very different yet share certain life experiences in common. One is the world champion gymnast Eva Bosáková, and the other is a housewife named Věra. Bosáková's story is told in a docu-

THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHYTILOVÁ'S AND LAFON'S STORIES BEAR CERTAIN SIMILARITIES, AS THEY BOTH TAKE ELEMENTS FROM REALITY AND FICTIONALISE THEM

mentary style, with details typical of *cinema verité*, such as the use of non-professional actors and improvisations, while Věra's story purely fictitious. Chytilová's leanings towards feminist discourse and the documentary style were already evident in her two previous films, the shorts *Ceiling* (Strop, 1962) and *A Bagful of Fleas* (Pytel blech, 1962), and these two impulses converge in *Something Different* (Hames, 2005: 185).

The constructions of Chytilová's and Lafon's stories bear certain similarities, as they both take elements from reality and fictionalise them. Although Bosáková's story uses documentary footage, its juxtaposition with the fictitious story of a housewife, much like the short quotes by Comăneci that Lafon scatters throughout her novel, turns it into part of the fictional tale. In this way, both the novelist and the filmmaker play with the line between reality and fiction, documentary and construction, to recreate fragments of the gymnasts' lives. However, the weight of reality, the sociopolitical context in which each story takes place, becomes essential to both the construction and the comprehension of the narratives. It is only through an appreciation of each context that the treatment of the key questions—a central one in both cases being the female sporting body—can be understood.

The concept of the female sporting body is defined by Tatiana Sentamans as an initial attempt to invert the domains traditionally associated with each gender: the invariable identification of the public sphere with masculinity and the domestic sphere with femininity. Professional sport would challenge this logic by positioning the woman in the public sphere and contravening the female norm not only in relation to social roles but also in terms of the body (Sentamans, 2010: 15-16).

These women established a new imaginary (visuality and visibility) through a series of changes to their behaviour (attitudinal changes) and their image (formal changes), [...] in relation to their integration into the development of sporting practice [...]. These changes of appearance and attitude, however, would be marked in this sense by two general tendencies, a schizophrenia suffered by the sportswoman, who would be torn between doing (action) and appearing (passiveness). (Sentamans, 2010: 15)

This article explores *Something Different* in terms of this notion of the female sporting body, which arises out of the comparison—and the identification of similarities—established in the film itself between the lives of the elite sportswoman and the housewife. The aim is to analyse this representation of the female sporting body in relation to *traditional norms of femininity* and the implications of the comparison made between the two in this film. The interplay between fiction and documentary established in the film and the sociopolitical context in which it was made are also aspects that need to be considered in this analysis. As a kind of culmination of the other ideas explored here, the article will conclude by returning to the comparison initially established between the film and the book about Comăneci, examining the different conceptions of the body in female gymnastics, based on Natalia Barker-Ruchti's article "Ballerinas and Pixies: A Genealogy of the Changing Female Gymnastics Body" (2009).

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The story begins with the gymnast Eva Bosaková, who is training for various major competitions, after which she plans to end her career as a top-level sportswoman. Meanwhile, Věra is a housewife looking after her husband and four-



Image 1. Věra telling her husband that she never has time to rest



Image 2. Eva telling her trainer that if she doesn't read the newspaper during her training session, she will have no time to do it

year-old son. The two women never meet, and yet they have a lot in common: they belong to the same generation, both being in their thirties, and they are both victims of the usual stereotypes that tire and frustrate them. Věra attempts to overcome her dissatisfaction with life in an extramarital affair, while Eva is forced by her trainer to keep up her constant training for her competition routine. Věra eventually realises that she and her lover don't get along and she ends the relationship. Eva wins the competition and thinks that at last she will have time to spend on her hobbies and on making her dreams a reality, but she is unable to give up gymnastics and ends up becoming a trainer. Věra is also unable to change her life, even when fate offers her a way out: her husband tells her he wants a divorce, confessing to her that he has been unfaithful (Věra herself never manages to confess her own infidelity to him). Instead, at this point she begins fighting for her marriage and convinces her husband to stay with her and their child.

The similarities between the lives of these two women are reinforced over the course of the film in the dialogues, the respective plotlines, the decisions they make and various formal elements. For example, there are various references to the fact that despite their completely different lifestyles, both women are constantly working and never even have time to engage in an activity as ordinary as reading a newspaper (see Images 1 and 2). Notable among the formal devices used is the simple alternation of scenes between the two women, which, although there is no narrative continuity between the two stories, serves a comparative and structural function. The main aim of this juxtaposition is to provoke reflection, although it is also used for purely formalist purposes (Hames, 2009: 185). In addition, it serves as a way of establishing a parallel between the *real* story and the *fictitious* one. Eva's story is constructed with shots that seem as if they are being filmed *at random* (her rigorous training sessions in the gym, where she is subjected to the strict instructions and abusive behaviour of her trainers) and others that suggest a certain degree of intervention on the part of

THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE LIVES OF THESE TWO WOMEN ARE REINFORCED OVER THE COURSE OF THE FILM IN THE DIALOGUES, THE RESPECTIVE PLOTLINES, THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE AND VARIOUS FORMAL ELEMENTS

the filmmaker (her interview with a journalist or when she and her husband decide what song she will use in the championship), while Věra's story may seem comparatively artificial and purely fictitious. The mise-en-scène is thus mainly comprised of techniques characteristic of *cinéma vérité* while always maintaining a somewhat stylised quality. The transitions between the two plotlines are often made using close-ups. To underscore the authenticity of the interaction between gymnast and trainer and between mother and son, the film includes several long scenes with no cuts, and some images are emphasised by means of freeze frames (Čulík, 2018: 205). This technique elicits a vague sensation of suspense from the viewer, as suddenly it seems that the film is going to turn into a video essay with the filmmaker commenting on the production, although this never actually happens. This is a very common technique in the video essay format that is used to accentuate the tension in the story, surprising and unsettling the viewer. Some of these editing techniques may be applied for strictly stylistic reasons—perhaps influenced by the editor, Miroslav Hájek, and his approach to editing the film—but others have a profound relationship with the ideas underpinning both stories; just as in a video essay where a fragment is frozen to draw attention to it, these moments intrigue the viewer and highlight the reflexive tone of the narrative.

SPACES AND BODIES

The pure fiction sequences following the life of Věra the housewife show us her everyday routine, confined to the prison of her home (except when she attempts to *liberate* herself through her infidelity), in a way that could even be described as a forerunner to what Chantal Akerman would do a decade later in her films, such as *Je, tu, il, elle* [I, You, He, She] (1974) and *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* [Meetings with Anna] (1978), which would redefine the idea of home in an effort to move beyond the context of the family. Akerman seeks out interior spaces that function in opposition to the family hearth. Irene Valle Corpas argues that the filmmaker effectively presents "'anonymous rooms' where time and the norms governing society are suspended, where Akerman herself, or other characters who serve as her alter ego, move from one bodily state to another, carrying out the basic activities of the body: eating, sleeping, or engaging in sexual relations" (Valle Corpas, 2021: 1). In *Something Different,* Chytilová not only presents a rejection of the traditional domestic space, but also depicts the reality of an elite sportswoman who, despite having managed to *liberate* herself from domesticity by entering the public sphere, can also feel repressed, confined in a different space that also functions as a prison: the gym where her abusive trainers subject her to hours of physical preparation for the championships. The opposition of *prison* spaces posited by Chytilová thus prove interesting for reflecting on the notion of a space free from "the norms governing society" proposed by Valle Corpas in her analysis of Akerman's films (ibid., 2021: 1).

Image 3. Eva at home, telling her partner that the song they are listening to would work perfectly with her free routine



IN *SOMETHING DIFFERENT*, CHYTILOVÁ NOT ONLY PRESENTS A REJECTION OF THE TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC SPACE, BUT ALSO DEPICTS THE REALITY OF AN ELITE SPORTSWOMAN WHO, DESPITE HAVING MANAGED TO *LIBERATE* HERSELF FROM DOMESTICITY BY ENTERING THE PUBLIC SPHERE, CAN ALSO FEEL REPRESSED

Private spaces are not limited to the domestic sphere, as the gymnasium meets the requirements to be considered one and the gymnast never really escapes from it—when she is at home with her partner, she talks to him about how perfect the music they are listening to would be for her sports routine (see Image 3), and when she competes she is reproducing what she has learned in training—just as the housewife never manages to escape her domestic life despite her attempt to do so with a love affair. What connects the two protagonists is their dissatisfaction with their respective routines. In her interview, Eva says that after her last championship she would like to try "something different" (an allusion to the film's title, whose literal translation from Czech, "about something different", could also be considered to refer to the film's *different* topic, i.e., the lives of two women), while Věra directly seeks "something different" in an extramarital affair. But both women prove unable to give up the very thing that makes them unhappy: in the end, Eva continues working as a gymnastics trainer after her last championship, and Věra chooses to fight to keep her marriage and her family, even though her husband has also been unfaithful to her. Neither of them ultimately chooses *something different*; both stay in their comfort zone. The message of women's liberation and emancipation that the premise of escaping unhappiness and rebelling might be supposed to convey is ultimately crushed by the fear of change. This could be understood as a snapshot of the era in which the two stories take place and of the general situation of women in that era; the woman's absolute dedication to the sphere in which she has specialised or to which she is accustomed: the domestic world in Věra's case and the world of gymnastics in Eva's.

In this context, it is interesting to explore how the protagonists' bodies inhabit these spaces, and the way the film is constantly comparing them and identifying similarities between them. This is repeatedly reinforced through the editing, which alternates between sequences following the life of each protagonist. Particularly revealing in this respect is the moment in the second half of the film where sequences of one of Eva's intensive training sessions are interspersed with sequences of Věra's dates with her lover. This parallel editing underscores the idea discussed here: the representation of the sportswoman's body in opposition to the traditional representation of the female body. Music plays an important role in this juxtaposition of sequences, with the use of a jaunty, upbeat piano melody almost suited to a comedy cartoon while showing the gymnast in training, and a slower, more sensual tune accompanied by the vocalising of a female singer during the sequence of the housewife with her lover.

As would be expected in rhythmic gymnastics, Eva's training consists of repeating her movements over and over with one of her trainers (who is also her partner) guiding her. However, the music vests this repetition or loop with a comic quality, as if it were a kind of slapstick sketch. The subsequent sequences showing her training do not feature this extra-diegetic music; all we hear is a diegetic piano when the song chosen by the gymnast for her free routine is played.

Meanwhile, Věra's sequences show her meetings with her lover in a café, sketching a chronology of her dates that presents the various stages of their relationship. In the first stage, we see them locked in passionate embraces, but gradually the fire goes

out and Věra looks increasingly disappointed. She wants her lover to be someone she can talk to, as it is impossible to talk to her husband because every time she tries he ignores her or talks about his own worries while showing no interest in hers. But now she realises that her lover is just another selfish man who only cares about his own problems, just like her husband. The emotional void she feels with her husband ends up defining her relationship with her lover as well; despite his caring words ("I really love you," he tells her), what she wants is someone who will listen to her and with whom she can engage in two-way conversations. When she makes the decision to end their relationship, she tells him: "I'm just sorry that I was wrong about you. Sorry that we don't understand each other." In response, he says nothing but simply walks away. However, they meet one more time; at this meeting, Věra is overwhelmed by a fit of giggles and her lover thinks she is laughing at him and at his love for her. At one point he shakes her in an effort to make her stop laughing, and she reacts to his aggression with outrage. She is a married woman, she reminds him, and apart from her duty to her family, she is free to do as she likes. And with that she leaves him. Her lover tries to chase after her, but finally gives up. The following sequences show her back with her husband and son; she has given up on her quest to find an escape from her life as a housewife.

To fully understand the way the female body is represented in this film, it is important to consider the circumstances in which the two women are portrayed. A comparison of the fragmented sequences of Eva's training with those of Věra's love affair reveals various aspects in relation to the body. Returning to the definition of the female sporting body offered by Sentamans (2010), in terms of public and private spheres, a kind of basic opposition is discernible. As noted above, the idea of a boundary between the sportswoman in the public sphere and the housewife in the private sphere becomes somewhat blurred in this film. Although her work as a professional athlete makes her a public figure, Eva's life as depicted in the film belongs more to a private realm, as the gymnasium is established as a space that confines her in much the same way that the family home confines the housewife. The housewife's body in the family home represents motherhood, a role

Image 4. Věra touching up her make-up while on a date with her lover



Image 5. Eva in one of her training sessions, with her trainer telling her that after several repetitions she has got the routine right



that Věra attempts to escape from. In the socialist context of the Eastern bloc countries in this era, despite having the obligation to contribute to the construction of the new socialist state on equal terms with men, motherhood was a "social obligation" for women (Kollontai, 1977: 149, quoted in Sywenky 2016: 1). Although it was much more common for a woman to work while looking after her children than it was in the West, there were still many Eastern European women who spent years of their lives dedicated exclusively to the home. Věra's body is an example of this submission to the social obligation of motherhood; her husband no longer desires her, as he only sees her as his child's mother and as the person responsible for looking after his home. This is why she goes searching for desire and for an identity beyond her status as a housewife in an extramarital affair.

Věra represents the contradiction between the maternal figure and the young woman compelled by the patriarchy to seek male approval. In Jungian psychology (and in society in general), the mother archetype is associated with qualities such as nurturing, love, compassion and protection. In the first half of the film, Věra seems to surrender her body to the work of looking after her home and child (albeit with apathy and aversion), while in the second half she tries to rebel against the maternal archetype with her efforts to make herself attractive again to the male gaze. Her marriage makes her feel empty and unwanted, so she looks elsewhere to find what is missing from her life. However, her attempt to escape from traditional motherhood proves unsuccessful, as she understands that it is not enough to have a lover who desires her; she also needs him to listen to her. Unable to find outside the family home what she was missing inside it, Věra resigns herself to her fate, even forgiving her husband for his confessed infidelity (without ever revealing her own) and resuming her role of housewife. She thus surrenders her body to her *social obligation*.

The gymnast might seem to be the antithesis of the traditional notion of the woman's role, contravening the female norm not only in social terms but also in relation to the body, as Sentamans (2010: 15-16) suggests. However, as noted above, the portrayal of both women's bodies as confined in equally oppressive spaces blurs the distinction between private and public spheres in this film. Eva's subjection to long hours of training and the abuse of her trainers reinforces the idea of a similarity between her life and the housewife's.

In any case, to better understand how this question is dealt with in *Something Different*, it is important to reflect on the notion of the female sporting body in the historical context of the film. In her article, Natalia Barker-Ruchti offers a genealogy of the changes to the bodies and styles of gymnasts in Eastern bloc countries during the Cold War, based on Foucault's conception of the body as "*wholly* constituted by discourse" and his idea that "[c]ontextual discursive forces [...] are inscribed on the body and thus shape a person's being and conduct" (Barker-Ruchti, 2009: 46). She thus constructs a notion of the body as playing a part in the reflexive cycle of social change. Barker-Ruchti focuses her analysis on the shift from a form of rhythmic gymnastics closer to dance, which dominated the sport in the 1960s with the Czechoslovakian gymnast Věra Časlávská recognised as its greatest exponent (Eva Bosaková was the second most successful Czechoslovak gymnast of the period), towards an "acrobatization of women's gymnastics" that took place in the 1970s, of course with Nadia Comăneci as its biggest star. Barker-Ruchti notes that before this "acrobatization" the sport was associated with a "mature gymnastics body performing graceful ballet-type routines" like Časlávská's, which "typified the model of mature femininity in this sport" (Barker-Ruchti, 2009: 47). She defines these two types of gymnasts as "ballerinas" and "pixies", the former represented by the graceful female bodies of Časlávská and Bosaková, and the latter by the sex-

LIKE BARKER-RUCHTI'S GENEALOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE SPORTING BODY, THE FILM CONCLUDES THAT DESPITE THE PROTAGONISTS' DESIRE FOR EMANCIPATION, THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY LIVE PREVENTS THEM FROM ACHIEVING IT, AS THEIR PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY REDUCES THEM TO "OBJECTS OF GAZE, PROTECTION AND DEPENDENCE," JUST AS THE WORLD'S EQUALLY PATRIARCHAL MASS MEDIA DOES TO FEMALE GYMNASTS

ually undeveloped body and quasi-programmed movements of Comăneci. Female gymnastics became popular in Eastern Europe as part of the quest of the USSR and the countries under its influence for supremacy over the West in the world of sport. In pursuit of that quest, these countries promoted the participation of women in sports by providing infrastructures, funding and top salaries for athletes and trainers. Elite athletes were thus afforded advantages and privileges that included cultural capital (recognition), prestige and better living conditions. The international success of these gymnasts was glamorised by the mass media, turning female gymnastics into a dramatic spectacle. The new trend took off definitively after Comăneci's success and the standardisation of pre-pubescent bodies as the *ideal* body type for the performance of complex exercises that a mature female body was not suited for.[1] However, this media attention actually began before the rise of the acrobatic model of gymnastics, as even in Časlávská and Bosaková's time, sports coverage was already presenting female gymnastics with a focus on the athletes' sex appeal, emotional reactions, and the "paternal care" they received from their predominantly male trainers (Barker-Ruchti, 2009: 56). Barker-Ruchti cites the German sociologist Michael Klein, noting that "television's focus on femininity underpinned women's social status as objects of gaze, protection and dependence" (Klein, 1980: 4-21, cited in Barker-Ruchti, 2009: 56). This observation is easily applicable to *Something Different*, as it is this social status that the film's two protagonists ultimately succumb to, despite their attempts to escape it. Like Barker-Ruchti's genealogical analysis of the female sporting body, the film concludes that despite the protagonists' desire for emancipation, the context in which they live prevents them from achieving it, as their patriarchal society reduces them to "objects of gaze, protection and dependence," just as the world's equally patriarchal mass media does to female gymnasts.

CONCLUSION

Something Different offers a highly interesting portrait that is the product of its context, using experimental and avant-garde techniques such as mixing styles and filming methods. By presenting the female sporting body in opposition to traditional representations of the female, the film allows us to reflect on Sentamans' definition, while also questioning it and proposing new readings of it. While it is true that the female athlete challenges the patriarchal order through the transformation of her body (acquiring a musculature, strength or elasticity that contravenes the female norm) and her activity in the public sphere (her participation in international sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games), this article has sought to question this notion, accepting its base meaning but highlighting alternative definitions suggested in Chytilová's film. What happens when the female sporting body is placed on the same level as the traditional female body and confined to spaces that are in fact just as oppressive, with men as the chief oppressors in both cases? This is the underlying question of the ideas explored in this article, pointing to the conclusion that in the context of the 1960s when the film was

made—and still today—the emancipation of women is undermined by the patriarchal social structure that maintains these inequalities. It is clear that even in the countries of the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, which in theory sought to create a wholly egalitarian society, this patriarchal framework was difficult to dismantle, although this was given somewhat less attention than it is in the West today. ■

NOTES

1. It was at this time when media coverage began a process of sexualisation of the bodies of these underage gymnasts, even verging on paedophilia.

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THE FEMALE SPORTING BODY IN VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ'S *SOMETHING DIFFERENT*

Abstract

The female sporting body is a concept defined by Tatiana Sentamans as a first step away from the patriarchal conception of the public sphere as masculine and the private sphere as feminine. By making changes to their bodies that depart from the traditional canon of female beauty and entering public spaces traditionally deemed male, female athletes challenge this logic. In *Something Different* (O něčem jiném, 1963), Věra Chytilová, a key figure in the Czechoslovak New Wave, plays with blurring the line between fiction and reality by combining what could be a documentary about the elite gymnast Eva Bosaková with a fictional story about a housewife named Věra. What at first appears to be an opposition between the two very different lives portrayed alternately on screen turns out to be a comparison of two woman who have more in common than expected. Taking into account the sociopolitical context of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, this article aims to explore these similarities and to identify how Chytilová reflects on and reconstructs the notion of the female sporting body, placing it in opposition against—and on a par with—the canonical body of the traditional housewife.

Key words

Film; Czechoslovak New Wave; Female gymnastics; Representation of women; Věra Chytilov

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Article reference

Barathova Unzurrunzaga, N. (2024). The Female Sporting Body in Věra Chytilová's Something Different. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 35-44.

EL CUERPO DEPORTIVO FEMENINO EN *HABLEMOS DE OTRA COSA* DE VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ

Resumen

El cuerpo deportivo femenino es un concepto definido por Tatiana Sentamans como un primer acercamiento a la ruptura con la concepción patriarcal de la esfera pública como masculina y la privada como femenina. Mediante cambios en sus cuerpos que se salen del canon de belleza tradicional femenino y la ocupación de espacios públicos tradicionalmente masculinos, las atletas desafían esta lógica. En *Hablemos de otra cosa* (O něčem jiném, 1963) de la cineasta clave de la Nueva Ola Checoslovaca, Věra Chytilová, la directora juega con el desdibujamiento entre ficción y realidad y combina lo que podría ser un documental acerca de la gimnasta de élite Eva Bosaková con una historia de ficción sobre un ama de casa llama Věra. Lo que en un principio parece una oposición entre las dos vidas tan diferentes que se van intercalando en la pantalla acaba siendo un símil, pues las dos protagonistas tienen más en común de lo que parecía. Este ensayo pretende observar estas similitudes y ver cómo Chytilová refleja y reconstruye la noción del cuerpo deportivo femenino, enfrentándolo —e igualándolo— al cuerpo canónico del tradicional ama de casa, teniendo en cuenta el contexto sociopolítico de Checoslovaquia en la década de los sesenta.

Palabras clave

Cine; Nueva Ola Checoslovaca; Gimnasia femenina; Representación femenina; Věra Chytilová.

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Referencia de este artículo

Barathova Unzurrunzaga, N. (2024). El cuerpo deportivo femenino en *Hablemos de otra cosa* de Věra Chytilová. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 35-44.

recibido/received: 26.06.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 16.10.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cineforum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

INTREPID MOUNTAINEERS AND DAMSELS IN DISTRESS: THE SPORTSWOMAN IN THE *BERGFILM*

ALBERT ELDUQUE

INTRODUCTION

The municipal museum in the Tyrolean city of Kitzbühel, one of the cradles of mountain sports tourism, contains an extensive collection of works by the artist Alfons Walde (1891-1958), who dedicated much of his art to portraying the world of Alpine sport. Notable among the pieces on display is a drawing titled *Winterträume* ("Winter Dreams", circa 1925), which shows a skier contemplating snow-covered mountains whose slopes appear to form the shapes of nude women lying side by side as if floating in a white cloud. This picture is surrounded by other works of Walde's, many depicting skiers. The vast majority are of men, but there are exceptions, such as the oil painting *Zwei Skifahrerinnen* ("Two Female Skiers", 1914). However, in the same room of the museum there is also a diverse collection of Walde's photographs and drawings of women, completely naked or exposing their thighs or breasts, constituting a sample of erotic portraits that reflect the relaxed customs and the sexualisation of the female body that characterised the interwar period. All in all, this room of the Kitzbühel museum offers both sides of the artist: his

Image 1. *Winterträume* (Alfons Walde, ca. 1925). Pencil on paper. Das Museum Kitzbühel - Sammlung Alfons Walde. Photograph by author





Image 2. Bucolic contemplation and extreme adventure in *The Holy Mountain* (Arnold Fanck, 1926)

passion for mountains and his passion for women, which are combined in *Winterträume* in a fusion of the living landscape and the erotic in the eyes of a sportsman.

In the same period that Walde drew his erotic Alpine daydream, the German filmmaker Arnold Fanck was using the same landscapes to develop the genre of the *Bergfilm*, mountain films in which a spectacular display of sporting activities, especially mountain climbing and skiing, along with footage of weather phenomena, would come into tension with plotlines constructed within the parameters of melodrama and the love triangle story. In the 1920s and early 1930s, during the transition from silent films to talkies, Fanck made documentaries and fiction films with the support of a stable team of athletes who were willing, like him, to turn a film shoot into an adventure, or vice versa. Notable among his collaborators were Leni Riefenstahl, Luis Trenker (who had Alfons Walde illustrate some of the covers of his novels) and the cinematographers Sepp Allgeier and Hans Schneeberger. The main corpus of *Bergfilme* directed by Fanck is comprised of six titles starring Leni Riefenstahl: *The Holy Mountain* (Der heilige Berg, 1926), *The Great Leap* (Der große Sprung, 1927), *The White Hell of Piz Palu* (Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü, co-directed with Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1929), *Storm over Mont Blanc* (Stürme über dem Mont Blanc, 1930), *The White Ecstasy* (Der weiße Rausch, 1931) and *S.O.S. Iceberg* (S.O.S Eisberg, 1933). Also worthy of inclusion in the corpus are two other films that help define and delimit the genre: *Mountain of Destiny* (Berg des Schicksals, 1924), directed by Fanck but without Riefenstahl, as it contains numerous narrative and aesthetic elements that are similar to the other films, and was in fact what led Riefenstahl, who at the time was a dancer, to seek out the opportunity to work with Fanck; and *The Blue Light* (Das blaue Licht, 1932), Riefenstahl's directorial debut.

The *Bergfilm* enjoyed its heyday in the years of the Weimar Republic, coinciding chronologically with the progressive rise of National Socialism that would bring Hitler to power in 1933. For this reason, it receives special attention in Sigfried Kracauer's landmark work *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1985), originally published in 1947. For Kracauer, with its exaltation of nature the *Bergfilm* represented a hymn to irrationality and anti-modernity that paved the way for the reactionary sentiments of Nazism. Kracauer's theory

is supported by the prominence in the corpus of Riefenstahl, who would go onto make *Triumph of the Will* (Triumph des Willens, 1935). For decades, this perspective was taken as the guiding principle for the analysis of the *Bergfilm*, until Eric Rentschler (1990), based on both historical archive sources and the analysis of the films themselves, questioned Kracauer's assertions and explored the complexity of the production, text and reception of these films.[1]

According to Rentschler, one of the most important issues that Kracauer overlooked in his analysis was the question of sexual difference and the roles assigned to women: "Female players figure keenly in the generic economy of the mountain film; above all, they represent and embody a spirit potentially inimical to male images, be they Fanck's imposing vistas or the inner landscapes of his heroes" (Rentschler, 1990: 153). This potential for harm is expressed in ominous female characters whose sexuality is equivalent to the dangerous and devastating forces of nature: "both mountains and women are objects of a projective anxiety, a formative will, an instrumental zeal, properties men revel in and at the same time fear, essences that arrest gazes and threaten lives, elements therefore that one tries to contain and control with the modern means at man's disposal—with mixed success" (1990: 156). This identification of women with mountains recalls Walde's eroticised landscape and the connection it makes between female sexuality and the mysteries of nature. Later in his analysis, however, Rentschler nuances the identification of the woman with a pristine nature when he also identifies a force of modernity in the depiction of Fanck's female characters, especially in *Storm over Mont Blanc*.

This article offers an analysis of the *Bergfilm* based on a feature of the genre that defines gender roles in similar terms: mountain sports. Athletic activities in nature always played a central role in Fanck's filmography, whether in their dimensions as mystic experience, adventure or sport, thereby documenting a historical process of capitalist development that saw a shift in the human relationship with mountains from a religious experience to their use as a setting for sports and tourism, without these ever completely replacing the earlier dimension. In this way, a productive relationship was established between nature and technology, tradition and modernity, which Rentschler uses to argue against the perspective of Kracauer, who dismisses these films as anti-modern (1990: 145-148).[2]

ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES IN NATURE ALWAYS PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN FANCK'S FILMOGRAPHY, WHETHER IN THEIR DIMENSIONS AS MYSTIC EXPERIENCE, ADVENTURE OR SPORT, THEREBY DOCUMENTING A HISTORICAL PROCESS OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT THAT SAW A SHIFT IN THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP WITH MOUNTAINS FROM A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE TO THEIR USE AS A SETTING FOR SPORTS AND TOURISM

The purpose of this article is to analyse the *Bergfilm* from a gender perspective in order to explore the role played by female characters in the skiing and mountaineering world depicted in this genre. To this end, it focuses on the figure of the sportswoman in all six films directed by Arnold Fanck that feature Leni Riefenstahl, in addition to the films *Mountain of Destiny* (in which the female character is played by Hertha von Walther) and *The Blue Light* (directed and starring Riefenstahl). The next section offers a brief outline of the gender conflict provoked by Riefenstahl's entry into the male-dominated world of Arnold Fanck's films. This is followed by an exploration of the films from a narrative perspective that considers the role and agency of each female character in relation to sport.

LENI RIEFENSTAHL'S ARRIVAL

In Fanck's book *Wunder des Schneeschuhs ein System des richtigen Skilaufens und seine Anwendung im alpinen Geländelauf*, which he co-wrote with the skier Hans Schneider in 1925 and which was subsequently translated into French under the title *Les Merveilles du ski* (The Wonders of Skiing), the authors dedicate only one section to women in this sport, titled "Le vêtement féminin" (Women's Attire). Arguing that their outfits should be both pretty and practical, they suggest that "in general, women should seek a compromise between the demands of pure practicality and those of aesthetics. But the latter should not be neglected. Because, and this is simply true of all that they do, women only ski for men; they need to have an elegant appearance while skiing, in order to please men" (Fanck & Schneider, 1931: 36-37).

Fanck and Schneider wrote these observations around the same time that Leni Riefenstahl, who was taking a break in her career as a dancer due to an injury, discovered *Mountain of Destiny* and got in touch with its director (Fanck) and its star (Trenker) in the hope of working with them. According to Steven Bach's biography of Riefenstahl, sport had permeated every aspect of her life since her teenage years, including her performance at school, her training as a dancer, the way she expressed her sexuality in social interactions and, most notably, in the fact that her first performance in a film was in a small role in the documentary *Ways to Strength and Beauty* (Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit, Wilhelm Prager, 1925). A clear precursor to Riefenstahl's own film *Olympia* (1938), *Ways to Strength and Beauty* presented sport as an activity inherited from Greco-Latin culture that could help strengthen the race (Bach, 2008: 43-44). But although Riefenstahl was quite familiar with playing sports, she had no experience in the mountains. She worked hard to correct this shortcoming so that she could take part in Fanck's films. She was thus able to join the director's select group of collaborators, a male-dominated community in which she developed some rocky romantic and professional relationships. Her efforts to learn mountaineering and skiing gave her professional legitimacy despite the reservations of others in the group who had been doing these sports since childhood, who saw her as an intrusive upstart trying to move up in the film world and become a star (Bach, 2008: 75).

This conflict needs to be understood in the context of the Weimar Republic, which was characterised by a relaxation of social norms, especially in the cities, and by greater freedom for women in the public sphere. Riefenstahl was representative of this phenomenon, which was seen as a threat by certain social groups that would subsequently play a key role in the rise of Nazism.[3] Moreover, her participation in Fanck's films had consequences for the film text. Rebecca Prime locates Fanck's work in what Paul Rotha referred to in 1935 as "the naturalist (romantic) tradition" of documentary, which also included Robert J. Flaherty and the duo of Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Like these directors, Fanck was an explorer who used filmmaking technology to capture the eternal struggle of Man against Nature, and who was fascinated with heroism, both in the finished film and in its production process. According to Prime,

> explorers traded on their masculine authority, using their cameras as tools of conquest and control. They also reaffirmed traditional notions of masculinity, satisfying the public's need for "an antidote to anxieties about the depletion of agency and virility in consumer and machine culture" (Shapiro, 1999: 59). With a few rare exceptions, expeditions were male endeavors. (2007: 59)

In the particular case of Fanck, this kind of masculine authority encapsulated the symbolic significance of the Alps, a place where the German man could recover his identity after the disaster of the First World War (Prime, 2007: 59). Prime argues that Riefenstahl's arrival not only consti-

tuted an intrusion by a woman into this male-dominated professional world, but also consolidated the *Bergfilm* genre's shift from documentary to melodrama, a shift that Fanck had initiated with *Mountain of Destiny*.

How was Riefenstahl's integration and rejection in this cinematic community of mountaineers and skiers reflected in the fiction films? How did Fanck's camera document this intrusion by a sportswoman into a sportsman's world? Fanck and Schneider's assertions about skiing attire mentioned at the beginning of this section, together with the Alfons Walde drawing discussed at the beginning of this article, might lead us to assume that Riefenstahl was admitted to Fanck's films as a decorative athlete, with an emphasis placed on the eroticisation of her body. This would tie in with the concept of "expected femininity" posited by Tatiana Sentamans in her fascinating text *Amazonas mecánicas*, which analyses photographic representations of sportswomen in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. Sentamans uses "expected femininity", a term associated with Pierre Bourdieu's *pose*, to refer to photographs in which women in sporting gear are presented in repose, passive, never playing the sport, sometimes lined up in rows like choirgirls, or in artificial poses, with no trace of fatigue and more interested in smiling for the camera than breaking a record (Sentamans, 2010: 171-191).[4]

Riefenstahl is hardly representative of this docile, submissive "expected femininity". In fact, she would be more suited to another concept used by Sentamans, "unexpected masculinity", referring to cases where the sportswoman is photographed apparently spontaneously, at a moment of "strain" or "action" in which the absence of a pose effectively strips away the mask of "expected femininity" to reveal another construction: the masculinity of female athletes, constructed here on the basis of the idea of "naturalness", normally associated with the male (Sentamans 2010: 192-213). Although cinema is quite a different medium from photography, this concept, whereby the line between the sexes is presumably blurred, is quite fitting for Riefenstahl's visual presence in Fanck's films: from *The Holy Mountain* to *S.O.S. Iceberg*, it is hard to identify a clear distinction between the way Fanck films sportsmen and the way he films this woman, whether in terms of the attention given to particular parts of the body, the choice of clothing or the mise-en-scène in general. Moreover, although, as Rebecca Prime suggests, Riefenstahl's background as a dancer introduced a certain artificiality to Fanck's films (2007: 62), in the climbing and skiing sequences her actions appear as real as those of the men, with the priority always on the "naturalness" analysed by Sentamans, and with a clear intention to imitate the male. Riefenstahl therefore does not seem to bring about any visual shift in the representation of mountain sports in Fanck's films.

However, this does not mean that Fanck's female characters go unnoticed. On the contrary, there is always a woman in his films whose relationship with the mountain is different from that of the male characters, and that relationship is often revealed to be central to the plot. It is always a single character, played by Riefenstahl in all her appearances and by Hertha von Walter in *Mountain of Destiny*. If there are other female characters, they are invariably associated with the do-

THERE IS ALWAYS A WOMAN IN FANCK'S FILMS WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MOUNTAIN IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE MALE CHARACTERS, AND THAT RELATIONSHIP IS OFTEN REVEALED TO BE CENTRAL TO THE PLOT. IT IS ALWAYS A SINGLE CHARACTER, PLAYED BY RIEFENSTAHL IN ALL HER APPEARANCES AND BY HERTHA VON WALTER IN *MOUNTAIN OF DESTINY*

mestic space, such as Bergsteier's mother and wife (played by Frida Richard and Erna Morena, respectively) in the same film. For the male characters, the mountain is a beloved world, but it is also a rival to be beaten, as well as an encapsulation of or trigger for a father-son relationship (*Mountain of Destiny*) or brotherly loyalty and camaraderie (*The Holy Mountain*). Conversely, the woman's relationship with this world is nearly always one of estrangement. The storylines of these films and the specific role played by the female character in her relationship with mountaineering, skiing and aviation will be explored below, with the aim of identifying some constants that can shed light on how these films construct gender roles and relationships through sport.

ADMIRERS AND PUPILS

The female characters in Fanck's films are first and foremost spectators, either of nature or of the athletic feats of the men, whom they admire and from whom they are keen to learn. In *Mountain of Destiny*, Hella (Hertha von Walther) uses a pair of binoculars to catch a glimpse of her boyfriend, Bergsteier's son (Luis Trenker), on the mountain summit. Then she decides to go to him: she removes her skirt to reveal a pair of trousers; she kisses her father goodbye and begins climbing up the mountain. Sport thus simultaneously produces a logic of admiration for the male and a desire to ascend. At this moment, the man becomes her teacher, not only in mountain climbing but also in life: as his mother remarks, her son is the only one capable of taming this wild woman. When Hella asks him to scale the Guglia del Diavolo as proof of his love and he refuses, she attempts the climb it herself, but she fails: when she witnesses the accidental death of another climber on her way up, she lets out a scream of terror. She then decides to go back down but ends up trapped on the mountain. She sends a distress signal that is received by her father, who asks her boyfriend to rescue her. Sport thus turns into an operation to save a damsel in distress, and the liminal experience of the mountain is what tames the woman, who in the end will hang up her adventurers' boots and become a wife.

THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN FANCK'S FILMS ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST SPECTATORS, EITHER OF NATURE OR OF THE ATHLETIC FEATS OF THE MEN, WHOM THEY ADMIRE AND FROM WHOM THEY ARE KEEN TO LEARN

The Holy Mountain, Fanck's first film featuring Riefenstahl, takes the idea of the woman as a stranger to nature and a spectator to the extreme. At the beginning of the film, Diotima (Riefenstahl), a dancer, is associated with the sea: she lives there beside the crashing waves; the sea is her great love, and she is able to alter its movements with her dances. In this way, a powerful dichotomy is established: on one side, the sea, dance and the feminine; and on the other, the mountain, sport (skiing or climbing) and the masculine, a world that fascinates Diotima.[5] In his detailed analysis of the film's opening sequence, Eric Rentschler notes that the first images of mountains shown in the film are the product of Diotima's imagination (1990: 154), and he stresses her status as a dreamer, arguing that the film is "a male fantasy, a dream about a woman whose sole occupation becomes dreaming about men" (1990: 155). This admiration is reinforced when she arrives in the country, opens the window and is overtaken by ecstasy, while the mountains are visually enhanced by means of a spectacular framing device, and completed with a bucolic scene in which she gathers flowers that she will subsequently wear on her head. Later, during the skiing competition, Diotima becomes a spectator of the men's mastery of the sport, while the skiers, as one of the in-

tertitles tells us, no longer appreciate the "fairy tale beauty" of the mountains, as they are more concerned with racing down the slopes to finish first. Her love story with the mountaineer, Karl (Luis Trenker), will bring her closer to this dreamworld as he teaches her how to ski, but in the end she will prove unable to enter that world because, as Karl's mother foretells: "The Sea and the Stone can never be wed." In a dialogue between Diotima and Karl, her understanding of nature, based on beauty, clashes explicitly with his, based on transcendence and risk. In another sequence, an intertitle with the word "Fear" expresses her reaction to the rugged peaks.

Distanced from nature, Diotima seems to be trapped in her role as a dancer and *femme fatale* who spreads corruption across the lowlands while men find purity on the mountain summits. However, this will change when her performance in a theatre is interrupted by the announcement that Karl and Vigo (Ernst Petersen), both of whom have had amorous exchanges with her, have not returned from their expedition, and someone must climb up to the skiers' cottage to raise the alarm so that a rescue squad can go in search of them. The men in the audience are all too cowardly and it is left up to Diotima to strap on her skis and embark on the adventure herself.

Image 3. Imitation and learning to ski in *The White Ecstasy* (Arnold Fanck, 1931)



In this way, after her admiration for the sporting feats of the men, and after her phase as a pupil, the woman now takes the step of going out on her own; and unlike Hella in *Mountain of Destiny*, this time she achieves her goal. However, when she reaches the skiers' cottage, it is the men there who will take over and set out on the rescue mission, which will prove a failure because Karl ultimately jumps from the peak with Vigo's dead body, in a leap of faith (Garin & Elduque, 2013). Diotima waits in the cottage, like a long-suffering Penelope. At the end of the film, she will return to her beloved sea, far from the mountain peaks of the sporting world. Although the hero's role is reserved for men, Diotima in *The Holy Mountain* is a much more athletically capable character than the damsel in distress in *Mountain of Destiny*; Riefenstahl's entry into Fanck's world thus also represents the entry of a sportswoman who can achieve what she sets out to do.

The female athlete who learns from the man is a key figure in Fanck's films. As Tatiana Sentamans points out, in depictions of women in sport the women are generally shown as individuals who want to discipline their bodies in line with masculine standards: "*ludus* (training to develop a particular skill; greater intensity ≈ masculinity) would supersede the *paidia* (improvisation, disorder, merriment, etc.; greater intensity ≈ femininity) of women's physical exercise, pursuing greater discipline in order to improve physical performance (*agon*) and to neutralise the potential risks of vertigo (*ilinx*)" (2010: 201). Sentamans associates this vertigo with high-risk sports such as skiing, mountaineering and aviation, the very same sports that Riefenstahl plays in Fanck's films, and many of his female characters follow a similar path. It is thanks to a man that these characters learn a sport, disciplining their bodies and their lives and abandoning dissoluteness to embrace (albeit only partially) the higher values of the mountain men. This is clearly the case of Diotima.

Another significant example can be found in *The White Ecstasy*, an entertaining story about the world of skiing that takes the formula of the female pupil to the extreme. The film revolves mainly around young Leni (Leni Riefenstahl) learning to do ski jumps under the expert guidance of Hannes (Hannes Schneider). Leni is introduced as a spectator, with a close-up showing her excitement as she watches a skiing competition; she is then shown in her bedroom, standing on the edge of her bed imitating the pose on a skiing poster hanging on the wall behind her. She simulates a ski jump, shown in slow motion, landing on a feather-filled mattress. In the course of her learning process, Leni simulates jumps on a small scale, takes children's classes (inspiring a mixture of admiration, curiosity and ridicule from the children), and finally decides to train with the ski expert Hannes Schneider. Clumsy both with and without skis, but with a laudable degree of determination that gives her character an appealing charm, she proves that she has learned the lesson with a triumphant descent in the second half of the film, and the ridiculous aspects of her skiing are mitigated by the presence of two carpenters who are trying to learn how to ski with the help of a couple of books. However, the teacher-student model is invariable: it is always the woman who learns from the man, even displaying moments of recklessness, particularly in the scene where she gets drunk and needs Hannes to help her to get skiing again.

EQUALITY, SPECTACLE AND TECHNOLOGY

In other films by Fanck, the formula of the female pupil gives way to more active characters who are given equal agency with the man in relation to the sport, although often reasserting the patriarchal models that relegate the woman to a subaltern role. In this respect, the films *The White Hell of Piz Palu* and *Storm over Mont Blanc* are two very interesting cases. In the first, Maria (Leni



Image 4. Gender swapping in *Storm over Mont Blanc* (Arnold Fanck, 1930)

Riefenstahl) is a spectator of masculinity, an active adventurer, a caregiver, and finally, a damsel in distress. In this case, there are not one but two female adventurers, with one replacing the other during the film. In the first part of the film, Professor Johannes Krafft's wife (Mizzi Götzel) is a reckless adventurer. She accompanies her husband (Gustav Diessl) on an expedition to a glacier, but she is depicted as a distraction to Johannes, who at one point on their descent grabs her to give her a kiss, momentarily forgetting the dangers of the mountain; a moment later, she falls to her death. This character is then conceptually replaced by Maria, who stays with her husband, Hans (Ernst Petersen) in the same hut where Johannes and his wife had stayed; Johannes himself is now a kind of lost soul, wandering the mountains like an almost mythical figure. The connection between the two women is revealed in the editing of their close-ups, especially from the perspective of Johannes, who sees in Maria the ghost of his lost wife and attempts some romantic overtures, thereby creating a love triangle. When the men set out for the glacier, Maria decides to join them, despite the reservations of Johannes, who tells her that this is no place for women. And yet on the climb she is as much a mountaineer as her two companions, just as skilled as her husband, al-

IN OTHER FILMS BY FANCK, THE FORMULA OF THE FEMALE PUPIL GIVES WAY TO MORE ACTIVE CHARACTERS WHO ARE GIVEN EQUAL AGENCY WITH THE MAN IN RELATION TO THE SPORT, ALTHOUGH OFTEN REASSERTING THE PATRIARCHAL MODELS THAT RELEGATE THE WOMAN TO A SUBALTERN ROLE

though when things get tough and the three find themselves trapped on a mountain ledge, her role will change.

In addition to being a mountain climber, Maria is a spectator of masculinity. She witnesses the debate between the two men over who should lead the expedition. Hans ultimately takes the lead, only to be swept down the slope and have to be saved by Johannes, who rescues him with a rope. She is also a witness to Hans's fit of madness later on, when Johannes restrains him to keep him from tumbling down the mountain. On Johannes's orders, Maria takes an active role to save her husband on both occasions: by holding onto the rope in the first case, and by tying him down in the second. There is no hint here of the damsel in distress, as she is an active woman whose presence is key to Hans's survival and to the consolidation of the friendship between the two men, eliminating the previous suggestion of a love triangle. However, on both occasions she is acting on the instructions of Johannes, whose wisdom and experience with the mountains is ultimately what keeps them alive. In fact, after these key moments of action, along with a few moments where she cares for both men, Maria will end up as frozen and helpless as her husband, and it will be Johannes who looks after the couple, and who in the end will sacrifice himself for them. When Hans and Maria are rescued, their stiff bodies must be gradually brought back to life. What this film depicts is thus not a damsel in distress but a couple in distress, both dependent on the rugged masculinity of the traditional mountaineer.

On the other hand, Hella (Leni Riefenstahl) in *Storm over Mont Blanc* does not need any lessons from anybody. As in the case of the other two films, she will begin engaging in the sport out of desire: from the window, she sees men skiing and decides that she wants to do the same, although in this film she is by no means a novice. The film highlights her skills while placing an emphasis precisely on the fact that she is a woman: in the same sequence, when she comes across a skier who is apparently being chased by a team of skiers, they swap clothing so that she looks like a man while he looks like a woman. This provides the opportunity to play with transgressing while at the same reaffirming gender roles: on the one hand, she can ski as well as a man would and can therefore deceive the others; and on the other, he pretends to be an inexperienced skier so that he looks more like a woman, enabling him to go by unnoticed.

Hella skis and climbs throughout the film, and in the final sequence she joins the group of skiers who go to the weather station to rescue the meteorologist, Hannes (Sepp Rist), who is on the verge of freezing to death. Although the film stresses Hella's subordination to the male characters, such as her close bond with her father (Friedrich Kayßler), her patient waiting at the weather station and her love story with Hannes, in whose lap she will finally lay her head, she is depicted throughout as an active woman and a good athlete, and never as a damsel in distress. Eric Rentschler highlights this agency in relation to her mastery of technology (in her first appearance she is shown operating a telescope at an astronomical observatory), which, apart from her skiing, is the only thing that matters to her, and what ultimately turns her into a character who takes control of both the mountain and the narrative (1990: 157).

The association of this character with technology foreshadows Riefenstahl's last collaboration with Fanck, *S.O.S. Iceberg*, which tells the story of a rescue mission in the Arctic. The film had two versions: Fanck's German version, and an English-language version directed by Tay Garnett for Universal Pictures, with a different cast of actors in each one but with Riefenstahl in both casts. In this film, Hella Lorenz (Leni Riefenstahl) is not the protagonist, but she is depicted as an active, modern woman capable of flying a plane all the way to Greenland without a problem. However, her sporting prowess soon comes undone, when she accidentally crashes her plane and then turns into a woman unfit for the adventure she has been caught up in: she recoils at the fish she is offered to survive in the Arctic; she screams in terror and clings to her husband when she sees a man fighting a polar bear; and when it seems that the rescue plane will save the expedition, her gestures on top of the mountain of ice look like those of the prototypical damsel in distress. Fanck and Riefenstahl thus concluded their partnership with a female character who was helpless against the forces of nature.

Image 5. Athletic feats in a wide shot and in close-up in *The Great Leap* (Arnold Fanck, 1927)



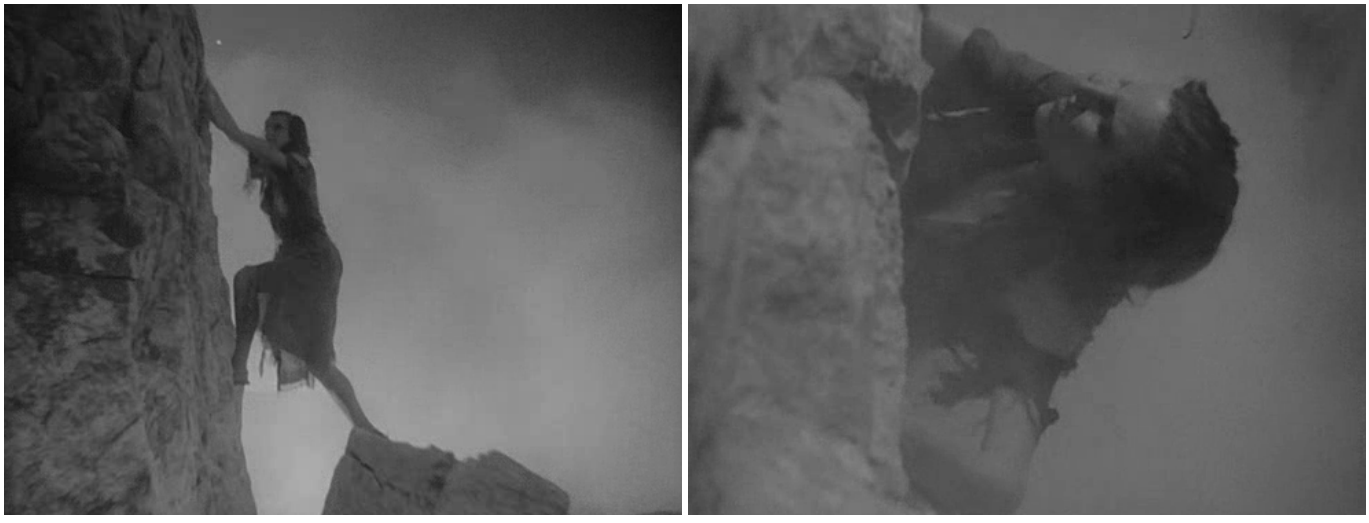
THE MOUNTAIN WOMAN

While most of Fanck's female characters are strangers to nature, in two films Riefenstahl portrayed native mountain women. One was *The Great Leap*, her second collaboration with Fanck, and the other was *The Blue Light*, her directorial debut. In contrast to the female characters in other films, women from other climes who want to learn to ski or climb in order to win a man's love, these two films feature characters who have grown up in nature and are expert climbers, who are visited by men who are strangers to their world.

The Great Leap is a comedy influenced by the slapstick genre, which, from Buster Keaton to Harold Lloyd, often linked displays of athleticism to success in a romantic relationship.[6] In this case, Riefenstahl is a shepherdess named Gita, who lives in the Italian Alps, in full communion with nature, caring for her numerous brothers and sisters and her goat. She is a woman who belongs to the domestic world, but she is also a wild creature, able to climb great slabs of stone and to cut rope with her teeth as easily as others might tie their shoes. Fanck shows this with wide shots that can capture her displaying her athletic skills, while also including closer shots that show her proud and defiant expression, and detail shots of her limbs. Michel (Hans Schneeberger), an inveterate city-dweller, comes to the mountains on his doctor's recommendation, to play sport in the great outdoors with his faithful servant, Paule (Paul Graetz). He tries to win Gita over by becoming a proficient mountain climber and skier under the tutelage of the rugged Toni (Luis Trenker), whose flirtations with Gita turn him into both Michel's trainer and his rival. Playing with the dichotomies of nature vs. city and sporting skill vs. ineptness, *The Great Leap* proposes a radical inversion of Fanck's other stories. Paradoxically, a role that was apparently inspired by a derogatory remark made about Riefenstahl by Trenker, who once referred to her in the press as a "greasy goat" (Bach, 2008: 63-65) and seemed to dismiss her erotic appeal in *The Holy Mountain*, resulted in a character with real athletic agency.

However, halfway through the film the plot takes a 180-degree turn. When she sees an advertisement for a skiing competition, Gita offers herself as the prize for the winner, along with her goat, and Michel works hard to learn how to ski so that he can take first place and win her love. Although on a few occasions Gita straps on her skis and displays her skills, in this second part of

Image 6. The final climb in *The Blue Light* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1932)



the film she is essentially a spectator of Michel's learning process, while also obviously becoming a trophy wife. In this way, *The Great Leap* takes a great leap backwards in terms of the sportswoman's agency, as it takes her from female expert who inspires the man's admiration with her skill to female spectator and a prize for the winner.

A few years later, *The Blue Light*, Riefenstahl's first feature film as director, would return to the character of the wild woman, but with numerous variations. Although it also belongs to the *Bergfilm* genre and is clearly influenced by Fanck, who assisted with the editing and at times came into conflict with the director (Bach, 2008: 95-96), *The Blue Light* is quite different from the films discussed above in a number of ways. According to Rentschler, "Riefenstahl's film mines the romantic legacy with the tools of modernity, merging nature worship and instrumental reason, a pre-industrial world and the ways and means of the present" (1990: 158). It is presented not as a sports film set in the 1930s but as a *Berglegende*, which, despite its contemporary framing device, is set in a past age, in which the physical relationship with nature is characterised not by play or competition, but by everyday necessity and heroic feats. Riefenstahl plays Junta, a shepherdess in the Dolomitas who lives in the shelter of the rocks with only a shepherd boy, Guzzi (Frank Maldacea), for company. She climbs with ease over Mount Cristallo, whose summit emanates a mesmerising blue light, yet every time one of the young men of the village try to scale the mountain he falls to his death. This sparks rage amongst the villagers, who accuse Junta of witchcraft. However, a painter from the city named Vigo (Mathias Wieman) will get to know Junta, establishing a friendship with her and ultimately discovering her secret.

Compared to Fanck's films, *The Blue Light* is very sparing in its use of sporting footage. Although the story focuses on Junta, there are barely any scenes of her acrobatics or displays of her physical dexterity. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the character's body: not an athletic body, but an eroticised body, frozen in an ecstatic dimension that is taken to the extreme when Vigo paints her. Paradoxically, in none of Fanck's films does Riefenstahl appear as eroticised, distant and spiritual as she does in *The Blue Light*; according to Rentschler, "in *The Blue Light*, she is no longer just an actress who incarnates Fanck's distortions, but a filmmaker who engenders, indeed enshrines them. With a gaze as intuitive and unconscious as it is radical, she fashions ineffably beautiful images of female abandon made to the measure of male desire" (1990: 160).

Riefenstahl's memoires repeatedly suggest that while she learned filmmaking techniques from Fanck, her work with him hardly served at all to improve her acting skills (Riefenstahl, 1991: 68). The transformation of her character in *The Blue Light* might therefore have been aimed at shifting the emphasis away from displays of athletic ability in order to change her star image, which until then had been too closely associated with sports films. On the other hand, the fact that the ending to Riefenstahl's film does include footage of Junta scaling Mount Cristallo suggests another possible reason, related to the storyline, for the absence of such images until then. By leaving her ascents up the mountain off screen, the film maintains the mystery surrounding her character: instead of explicitly showing her athletic prowess or her ability to climb the mountain via a certain route, spectators have the same limited knowledge as the villagers, who believe her to be a witch with mystical powers. The athletic realism of Fanck's films, their genuinely masculine "naturalism" (to use the term proposed by Tatiana Sentamans), is replaced here with the magic of legend. The absence of sports thus marks the tone of the story. In the end, however, when Vigo discovers the route Junta takes to scale the mountain, we do get a glimpse of Riefenstahl the athlete, who climbs up a mountainside with ease. But when she discovers that the cave of crystals that emit the blue light has been pillaged,

her strength falters and she falls to her death. In this way, the luminous power of the mountain and her athletic skills are fused, confirming that in this film she belongs to a world to which she was almost always depicted as a stranger in Fanck's work.

CONCLUSIONS

Alfons Walde's *Winterträume*, exhibited at the Kitzbühel municipal museum, was cited at the beginning of this article for the opposition it presents between a male sporting body and a fantasised female body drawn into the mountains by the male gaze. In the *Bergfilm*, on the other hand, the woman was always a dissonant element in a male-dominated world, a disruption reflecting the context of women's emancipation that characterised the Weimar Republic. In the six films that Arnold Fanck and Leni Riefenstahl made together, and in *Mountain of Destiny* and *The Blue Light*, the female character was always essential, with the power of the story revolving around her. That power was more narrative than visual: the *Bergfilm* did not usually emphasise the eroticisation of the female characters and generally placed them visually on an equal footing with the men, probably due to their skill as athletes. However, the gender tensions that this "unexpected masculinity" (Sentamans, 2010) could provoke were channelled elsewhere by means of conservative storylines that depicted women as strangers to nature, admirers of beauty, dedicated pupils or damsels in distress.

In this context, the formula of the woman as pupil was especially important: thanks to the man, the woman was able to enter the world of nature and perhaps even achieve the odd athletic feat, once the man had trained her potentially dissolute energies and subjected her to a conservative order. Thus, just as Fanck's films combined the innovations of technology and sport with the tradition of the Alps, the characterisation of women's bodies in his films ranged from modern independence to submissive obedience to the traditional patriarchy, while making women's sport a key factor for understanding the historical value of these films and the constant tension they establish between what was presumably timeless and what was truly modern.

FOOTNOTES

1 In the Spanish context, in *Sombras de Weimar: contribución a la historia del cine alemán 1918-1933*, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca also expresses reservations about what he considers to be "the allegorical—even racist—excesses that Kracauer is often keen to uncover in every corner" (1990: 336) of Fanck's films.

2 A more recent discussion of the *Bergfilm* and its complex relationship with historicism can be found in "Natural History: Rethinking the Bergfilm" (Baer, 2016). I am grateful to one of the reviewers of this article for this reference.

3 See *Männerphantasien, Volume 1. Frauen, Fluten, Körper, Geschichte* by Klaus Theweleit (1977), which analyses the murderous sexual fantasies of the Freikorps in the interwar period. As Barbara Ehrenreich suggests in her prologue to the English version, the Freikorps believed that all images of women could be reduced to three kinds: the absent woman, the white nurse and the red woman. The last of these three is sexually active and poses a mortal threat to the Freikorpsman, who must therefore try to kill her (Ehrenreich, quoted in Theweleit, 1987: xiii-xiv). I am grateful to one of the reviewers of this article for the reference to this key book.

4 From a different perspective, in her analysis of erotic photography in early 20th-century Spain, Maite Zubiaurre studies cases of female cyclists in impossible poses, giving rise to an eroticised motionlessness that she posits in opposition to the dynamism of modernity, which is expected of these women's bodies but is ultimately absent (2012: 261-283).

5 A detailed discussion of the gendered nature of the landscape in *The Holy Mountain* can be found in Nicholas Baer's text, based on the division between mountain and sea in Georg Simmel's philosophy (2016: 289-293).

6 I am grateful to one of the reviewers of this article for the reference to the connection between sport and romance in the slapstick genre.

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INTREPID MOUNTAINEERS AND DAMSELS IN DISTRESS: THE SPORTSWOMAN IN THE *BERGFILM*

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse the German *Bergfilm* of the 1920s and 1930s from a gender perspective in order to explore the role played by female characters in the skiing and mountaineering world depicted in this genre. To this end, it focuses on the figure of the sportswoman in all six films directed by Arnold Fanck that feature Leni Riefenstahl, in addition to *Mountain of Destiny*, in which the female character is played by Hertha von Walther, and *The Blue Light*, directed by and starring Riefenstahl. The article begins with a brief outline of the gender conflict provoked by Riefenstahl's entry into the male-dominated world of Arnold Fanck's films, followed by an exploration of the films themselves from a narrative perspective that considers the role and agency of each female character in relation to sport. While the visual representation of the sportswoman in these films is similar to that of the sportsman, the storylines position these characters as strangers to mountain sports and often as pupils of men.

Key words

Bergfilm; Leni Riefenstahl; Arnold Fanck; Women's Sport; Skiing; Mountain climbing.

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Article reference

Elduque, A. (2024). Intrepid Mountaineers and Damsels in Distress: The Sportswoman in the *Bergfilm*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 45-60.

ALPINISTAS INTRÉPIDAS Y DAMAS EN APUROS. LA MUJER DEPORTISTA EN EL *BERGFILM*

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es abordar el *Bergfilm* alemán de las décadas de 1920 y 1930 desde una perspectiva de género para estudiar el rol que juegan los personajes femeninos en el universo deportivo del esquí y el alpinismo. Para ello, nos centraremos en la figura de la mujer deportista en las seis películas en las que Arnold Fanck dirigió a Leni Riefenstahl, sumándoles *La montaña del destino*, en la que el papel femenino lo interpreta Hertha von Walther, y *La luz azul*, dirigida y protagonizada por Riefenstahl. En primer lugar, presentaremos brevemente el conflicto de género que produjo la llegada de Riefenstahl al mundo masculino de Arnold Fanck y sus películas, y, a continuación, abordaremos las obras desde una perspectiva narrativa que se pregunte qué roles y agencia juega el personaje femenino en relación con el deporte. Si bien la representación visual de la mujer deportista no reviste grandes diferencias respecto a la del hombre, las tramas narrativas sitúan a estos personajes en una relación extranjera respecto al deporte de montaña y con frecuencia los convierten en alumnos del hombre.

Palabras clave

Bergfilm; Leni Riefenstahl; Arnold Fanck; Deporte Femenino; Esquí; Escalada.

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Referencia de este artículo

Elduque, A. (2024). Alpinistas intrépidas y damas en apuros. La mujer deportista en el *Bergfilm*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 45-60.

recibido/received: 16.10.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 21.11.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

BALANCE AND PRUDENCE (OR DIPLOMACY AND MODESTY): THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SECCIÓN FEMENINA'S SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN THE NEWSREELS OF EARLY FRANCOIST SPAIN (1938–1949)

ELENA OROZ

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the representation of the sporting activities promoted by the Sección Femenina (SF) in film newsreels produced in Francoist Spain from 1938 to 1949. Founded in 1934 as the female branch of the fascist Falange party and active until Spain's transition to democracy in 1977, the SF received official status in 1939 as the government agency responsible for the indoctrination of Spanish women by means of initiatives including home economics schools (*Escuelas del Hogar*), mobile propaganda teams (*Cátedras Ambulantes*) and community services (*Servicio Social de la Mujer*). Thanks to support and training initiatives like these, the SF acquired considerable political influence during the dictatorship and established itself as an important state apparatus, providing the regime with a cheap, rudimentary social system (Graham, 1995) that facilitated public surveillance (Blasco Herranz, 2003), while also taking part in promoting the policies developed and publicised by the regime to gain the approval of broad sectors of the population (Molinero, 2005).

Among the many areas in which the SF was involved, the promotion of sports constituted an important recruitment strategy and a project over which it had practically exclusive control in the education system and as a leisure activity (Ofer, 2009). In 1941, the organisation managed to add physical education (along with political science and home economics) to the public and private school programs, although in practice the subject would not be offered until 1948 (Richmond, 2004: 67). The power the women of the Falange thus acquired was viewed as interference by the Catholic Church and sparked a rivalry between the two institutions. Moreover, the ecclesiastical authorities proved extremely determined to put a stop

to some of the SF's more progressive initiatives, including its sports training and summer camps for girls (Richmond, 2004; Ofer, 2009). Indeed, the mere idea of physical education for girls was considered "scandalous and lascivious", to quote the Archbishop of Seville, Cardinal Segura (quoted in Ofer 2006: 990).

In the context of the many Francoist policies related to the regulation of women, sport became a key issue due to the criticisms it incited from various sectors of the regime. An analysis of the role played by the SF in the promotion of sports can thus shed light on important debates over gender, politics and religion that marked the first years of the dictatorship (Ofer, 2006; Richmond, 2004). This area also offers an illuminating perspective from which to study the modernising dimension of the SF in relation to gender[1] and the rhetorical somersaults and concessions it needed to make in order to overcome what was referred to in a 1945 report by its Sports Council as "a pre-existing collective mentality based on backward ideas, mistaken notions [and] entirely theoretical concepts [...]", as well as "an attitude of women, the consequence of the old ideas that kept them in isolation [...] [and] an age-old attitude of Celtiberian man" (ANA, Serie Azul, folder 41, doc. 3).

An examination of the representation of the SF in newsreels can thus facilitate an evaluation of the level of agency and visibility that this Falangist women's organisation had as a promoter of physical activity for women in the medium that best embodied modern mass culture in the first half of the 20th century, as well as the political values and ideas about gender expressed on screen. This study, which covers the end of the Spanish Civil War and the decade of the 1940s, involves the identification of the SF's presence in newsreels and a textual analysis of their sports stories, drawing on key historical sources in order to properly contextualise and interpret the organisation's view of sport and its representation on film. The study period chosen reveals a substantial variation of discourses and images, as a result of the SF's gradual shift from what was initially quite a radical Falangism towards a self-imposed conservatism over the course of the 1940s (Ofer, 2009; Richmond, 2004), and also of the changes to the regime's film production policy, given that the evolution of both over this period reflected the process of *defascistisation* of Francoist ideology (beginning in 1941 and becoming especially apparent after 1945) and its redefinition as National Catholicism (Saz Campos, 2004).

The sources analysed are *El Noticiario Español* (1938-1940) and the NO-DO newsreels. The first was the most important propaganda initiative of the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (DNC, 1938-1941), the self-styled Nationalist faction's main project for organising and controlling all the reins of the Spanish filmmaking industry (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2011), in parallel with another, bigger project: the establishment of the first government under Franco's rule in January 1938 and the enactment of the State Administration Act. *El Noticiario Español* consisted of 32 newsreels that were notable for their function as propaganda rather than information, with a relatively bold formal approach and an extremely virulent tone (ibid.). The NO-DO newsreels began production in 1943. All Spanish cinemas were required to screen these newsreels, which thus became the official mouthpiece of the Franco regime and one of its main mechanisms of public indoctrination (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2006; Rodríguez Mateos, 2008).

Although this study is limited to newsreels, it is worth noting that the sporting events organised by the SF in this period were also featured in documentaries about the organisation's political activities, which were filmed at its request. These included *La Concentración de la Sección Femenina en Medina del Campo* (1939), produced by the DNC, and *Tarea y Misión. Segunda Concentración de la Sección Femenina en El Escorial* (1944), produced by NO-DO, a summary of which was included in one

of its newsreels (81B, 1944). These two documentaries reveal a shift in the kind of physical activity encouraged for women to conform with acceptable gender norms (Oroz, 2013). This same idea is observable in the newsreels, although there are no references in the latter to the eugenic benefits of sport (as a means of strengthening the Spanish "race"), a notion that was so central to fascism (Coronado, 2013; de Grazia, 1992) and so explicit in the documentary *Tarea y Misión* (Oroz, 2013).

THE SF AND THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S SPORT: TENSIONS AND CONCESSIONS

Even during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the SF was already taking an interest in sport as an important part of its mission to educate well-rounded women. When the war ended, a restructuring of the organisation resulted in the creation of the Physical Education Council, directed by María de Miranda. In 1939, de Miranda published a document that outlined the council's objectives in ambitious and monopolistic terms:

> We strive to reorganise this central department whose work must produce strong and healthy women capable of forging a race of Titans [...]. The physical education of women must be entirely in our hands. We want to be the official authority and to create a national school (quoted in Ofer, 2009: 993).

That same year, on the occasion of the Spanish University Union's First National Sports Championship, the SF's national representative Pilar Primo de Rivera summed up the guiding principles of women's sport in the New Francoist State: "perfection of the body, necessary for the balance of the human person; spiritual health, which in turn requires this balance as part of religious education; [and] a competitive spirit that teaches women to participate in all tasks" (quoted in Suárez Fernández, 1993: 115).

However, these ideas positing a relatively equitable conception of women, calling for their personal development and autonomy, were ultimately short-lived as their implementation proved complicated. In the years after the war, the debates over women's physical activity acquired a markedly moralistic tone, and to legitimise its power and institutional status, the SF was constantly forced to renegotiate its principles and practices with reference to the values espoused by the Catholic Church. Thanks to its diplomatic approach, it was able to promote innovation in this area while at the same time dodging any accusations of feminism (Richmond, 2004: 60).

This is reflected in an account of the impact of women's sport in the early 1940s offered by the ideologically sympathetic historian Luis Suárez Fernández, who notes that the press began "to be filled with images of girls in sporting outfits, with new colours, in hitherto unheard-of numbers. The importance of sport, which the Sección Femenina had been highlighting since the beginning of the war, was steadily growing" (1993: 124). Suárez Fernández goes onto to point out the consequences of this unprecedented public display of the female body: "It is difficult to appreciate the outrage caused by the appearance of these short-skirted youths, as [Falange leader] José Antonio [Primo de Rivera] would call them, competing in sports stadiums. The leaders had to find a balance, to progress without compromising anything essential

IN THE YEARS AFTER THE WAR, THE DEBATES OVER WOMEN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ACQUIRED A MARKEDLY MORALISTIC TONE, AND TO LEGITIMISE ITS POWER AND INSTITUTIONAL STATUS, THE SF WAS CONSTANTLY FORCED TO RENEGOTIATE ITS PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES WITH REFERENCE TO THE VALUES ESPOUSED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

and to do so prudently to avoid unfair criticism" (Suárez Fernández, 1993: 149).

This prudence crystallised into the official position of the SF on physical exercise, which was conceptualised as an activity consistent with the Christian spirit, and consequently as a moral duty. In 1941, the Councillor of Sports declared: "while we women may not be called to be preachers of morals, we have the duty to facilitate the fulfilment of Catholic obligations. The spirit of the Falange: religion and military service, spirituality and discipline" (quoted in Ofer, 2006: 995). By 1952, this conciliatory vision had been fully assimilated, as the Council declared that while "it was obvious that women should enjoy the benefits that Physical Education offers the individual" in terms of health and personal well-being, this had to be combined with moral, religious and intellectual education, and "we must not lose sight of the fact that these three activities must complement rather than obstruct one another" so that ultimately, the "perfection of the body" could be a vehicle to "best serve the interests of the soul housed within it" (*La Sección Femenina*, 1952: pp. 87-88). Falangist women thus confirmed their loyalty to the National Catholic cause: "Spain has always placed the interests of the spirit above all others, and we have remained faithful to this principle" (ibid.). In short, over these ten years, the SF always proceeded with extreme caution, taking special care to stress that sport was not an end unto itself, that the organisation's guiding principles were in line with Catholic tenets and, just as importantly, that women's exercise had nothing to do with mere entertainment or the frivolous bourgeois obsession with beauty, despite the fact that some of its documents and activities may have contradicted this claim.

This caution in turn had consequences for the implementation of the SF's sports program. First of all, it affected the activities deemed appropriate for female instructors, and by extension for women in general. While in 1938 and 1939 these activities included gymnastics, athletics, swimming, tennis, hockey, basketball, mountaineering, skiing, and traditional and contemporary dance (Ofer, 2006: 996), the list was very quickly reduced to include only those that did not compromise femininity. Wrestling, football, cycling and rowing were all ruled out from the start (Richmond, 2004: 67), while athletics was deemed too masculine and was barred until 1961 (Ofer, 2006: 996), although the study plans for SF instructors allowed running and somersaults (Zagalaz & Martínez, 2006: 94). Secondly, it had an impact on the way the sports were played, as to avoid the "unfair criticisms" mentioned by Suárez Fernández (1993: 49) and accusations of ostentation, the SF channelled most of its funds and efforts towards the creation of a national training system rather than competitive activities (Ofer, 2006: 994), while also eliminating any individual competitive sport (Richmond, 2004: 67).

Nevertheless, the tournaments received particular attention in the newsreels due to their spectacular, colourful and dynamic appearance, their value as propaganda, and of course the fact that they took place outdoors, making them easier to film. Moreover, the SF promoted these events actively, conscious of the persuasive power of the media (Gallego, 1983; Oroz, 2016). Viuda-Serrano (2014) documents the many letters to the National Press Office requesting maximum exposure in the press and on radio of the reports issued by the SF about the national championships in gymnastics, basketball, swimming, handball and hockey. In the case of cinema, the propaganda was disseminated via two channels. The first was through the SF's own Department of Cinema, created in 1940 at a particularly unproductive moment for the DNC (Oroz, 2016), which drew attention to the need to produce films documenting the organisation's work in this area. Thus, in 1942, it was reported that a series of handball, basketball, swimming, skiing and gymnastics competitions were being filmed for the documentary *Juventud Sana* [Healthy Youth] (AGA, Cultura: 3/51.41, Box 629),

although no record of the completion of this film has been found in this research. The second channel was NO-DO, which the SF Press and Propaganda Council—with the mediation of the National Propaganda Office—asked to film specific events, including sporting events, for their inclusion in its newsreels (AGA, Cultura: 3/49.1 21, Box 649).

SF SPORTING ACTIVITIES ON *EL NOTICIARIO ESPAÑOL:* PROUD YOUNG BODIES AT THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERLAND

The physical education and training of young women with the first sporting activities organised by the SF during the Civil War and the period immediately after it are featured in three of the nine newsreels of the DNC's *El Noticiario Español* dedicated to the organisation. The newsreel titled "Campamentos de nuestras Organizaciones Juveniles" [Camps of Our Youth Organisations] (No. 5, September/October 1938) shows young women of the Falangist forces training and working in images explained by a voice-over narration:

> The young women enlisted in the Spanish Falange hone their bodies and spirits for the greater glory of the fatherland. These girls [...] are helping the country's peasants with their gruelling tasks, taking classes in manual labour, attending talks and engaging in constant organised gymnastics exercises.

The footage in this newsreel conveys the essence of Falangist values, albeit with less intensity than what is suggested by the stern tone of the voice-over: effort and service (women harvesting in the fields), respect for tradition and rural life (girls in regional dress taking part in traditional dances) and, above all, order and discipline (the shots of girls marching, the female officers commanding them and the Swedish gymnastics exercises that take up much of the footage and which are shown during the voice-over's concluding statement: "In short, they are preparing to serve their nation."

The next newsreel (No. 7, October 1938) presents the first course for female physical education instructors organised in Santander late in the Civil War. This initiative was also covered by a revealing account published in *Y* magazine titled "Carta de una cursillista" [Letter from a Trainee], written by Lula de Lara (Figure 1). In the letter, the future instructor stresses the emancipating quality of Falangist discipline and exercise while challenging prejudices about sport's masculinising effects and vehemently criticising bourgeois women, whom she describes as "eternally weary [and] spiritless". In Lula's words, physical education is:

> Something wonderful that absolutely every woman should learn and engage in. There is nothing lovelier, in the hours we dedicate to games, gymnastics and sports, than seeing a group of girls—there are just over thirty of us—on the field, dressed in short, bright coveralls, their young bodies standing proudly and attentively to the grace of the movements [...]. And all the girls [...] get to learn about the supreme beauty of physical action, of the trained and flexible figure, charm and the science of the posture (Lula, 1938: 54).

Figure 1. Photographs accompanying the article "Carta de una cursillista" by Lula de Lara, published in *Y* magazine (No. 6-7, 1938)


quitar polvo, a sacar brillo, a hacer, en suma, todas las faenas domésticas, o bien, si estoy en otro turno de trabajo, a cuidar el jardín, a regar las plantas, a cortar flores para el adorno de la casa. Esto cuando no me toca secar los cacharros, y hacer todo el servicio del comedor... Ya supondrás lo que me acuerdo de mi madre; si me ve, se desmaya de emoción. ¡Ella que ya desesperaba de verme algun a vez hecha una mujercita de mi casa!... Cuando le hablé de venir al Cursillo recuerdo que refunfuñó: —«Sí, ya sé... Tú, todo lo que sean deportes, y juegos, y cosas de chicos...» No imaginaba ella que aquí la disciplina y la orientación de Falange habían de lograr lo que no consiguiera nunca el peso, demasiado dulce, de su autoridad maternal.

nemos la cena, y después la reunión de hogar. Este es acaso uno de los momentos más agradables: la hora de sobremesa, en el hall, reunidas todas las camaradas en torno a Cándida y a la Subjef .

Pero observo que aún no te he hablado de ellas. ¡Son tantas las cosas que te quiero contar!

De nuestras Jefes te diré que son magníficas. Todo lo notan, todo lo vigilan, nada se escapa a su atención; el menor incidente les sirve para enseñarnos algo nuevo, para hablarnos de alguna cosa interesante, para darnos una pequeña lección... Y si Cándida se hace a un tiempo respetar y querer, si su autoridad se impone a nosotras sin violencia ninguna, como cosa perfectamente natu al, la Subjefe es la amiga cercana, a quien se confían las menudas pesadumbres íntimas, que nunca faltan en la inquietud dolorosa de la juventud y que en algunos instantes llegarían tal vez a oprimirnos excesivamente, lejos de nuestras casas, si no encontrásemos oído amigo en que verde la carta que no llega, del novio que se en-

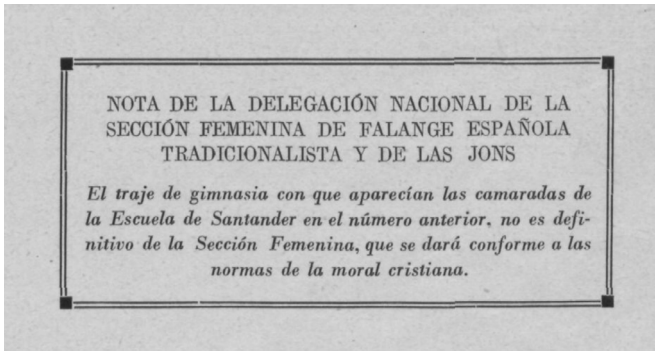




Figures 2 and 3. Still-frames from the newsreel "Santander: Organizaciones Juveniles" (*El Noticiario Español*, No. 7, 1938)

This idea of emancipation is also evident, although less explicitly, in the film footage of this "physical culture" course, as it is named in the voice-over. The cameras of the DNC linger on its most expressive aspects, the open-air gymnastics exercises whose harmony is highlighted in two shots: one wide shot showing two girls sitting in the foreground watching the movements of the group with the sea in the background; and a slightly angled shot showing the women with a building reminiscent of Greco-Roman—but also fascist—architecture behind them (Figures 2 and 3). The girls are dressed in light coveralls ending just above the knees and tied in at the waist, and the voice-over highlights the importance of exercise for the Falange: "the new Spain cultivates her body and spirit and prepares herself to create a better Spain." This newsreel is significant given that this was the period when criticisms began emerging about the young recruits' lack of modesty, as evidenced by the fact that the photographs of the course in Y magazine (No. 7, September 1938) warranted a clarifying note that the outfits shown in the pictures were only temporary and would soon be replaced with others more in keeping with "standards of Christian morality" (Figure 4). Nevertheless, these activities continued to be presented on screen, featured in the *El Noticiario Español* newsreel in October of that year.

Figure 4. Notice published in Y magazine (No. 8, 1938)



NOTA DE LA DELEGACIÓN NACIONAL DE LA SECCIÓN FEMENINA DE FALANGE ESPAÑOLA TRADICIONALISTA Y DE LAS JONS

El traje de gimnasia con que aparecían las camaradas de la Escuela de Santander en el número anterior, no es definitivo de la Sección Femenina, que se dará conforme a las normas de la moral cristiana.

The newsreel titled "Barcelona. Campeonato nacional deportivo de la Sección Femenina de Falange" [Barcelona: National Sporting Championship of the Falange's Sección Femenina] (No. 28, November/December 1939) offers a summary of the first public sporting competition for women with an audience made up of members of both sexes. This newsreel highlights the presence of national leaders—Pilar Primo de Rivera and General Orgaz—and lists the tournaments held both for competitive sports (basketball and hockey) and for those that could be classified as beauty sports

(tennis and Swedish gymnastics). The voice-over narration is notable for its evasion of gender bias, describing the activities of the "comrades" as "a brilliant and hard-fought competition", an "extremely competitive elimination" or a "game of great quality and sporting spirit". As noted above, the discourse of the SF in these early stages had not yet acquired the openly puritanical tone that would be adopted later, as reflected in Pilar Primo de Rivera's speech at the event, which, although it was not included in the newsreel, is worth citing here:

> You girls, who are the youngest of our Women's Section, may serve the cause best this way, outdoors, by showing Spain that the Falange is new and clean and agile like you... Train hard and be persistent because anything done by half never gives good results, and furthermore, you should know that nothing in life is gained by chance: the best always win out. (Quoted in Ofer, 2009: 112)

El Noticiario Español presents physical education for women in accordance with the Falangist ideal that rejects the idea that the body itself should be an object of praise, insisting instead that gymnastics should serve only for the glorification of discipline (Richmond, 2004: 66). However, the footage does present women who are shown enjoying the sport they play, the values associated with it (competition, skill, camaraderie) and their own bodies; as Labanyi (2002) suggests, these performative practices gave these young Falangists a paradoxical sense of self through the submission of the individual to national unity.

SF SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN NO-DO NEWSREELS IN THE 1940S: CONCEALMENT OF WOMEN'S BODIES

Although the SF made an express commitment to enlisting the women of the Falange Movement and indoctrinating Spain's female population through initiatives like community service and the *Cátedras Ambulantes* (reinforcing political, religious and gender values all at once), this social work and proselytising, referred to repeatedly in its print publications, was rarely remarked upon in the official newsreels. In general, the image that NO-DO disseminated of the organisation was much more institutionalised and conservative, focusing on its political ceremonies and its promotion of regional dance (Ramos, 2011; Oroz, 2013). Moreover, in the decade examined here, the SF was featured in only 38 news stories, six of which reported on sporting activities. Specifically, these stories dealt with skiing courses (8 [1943] and 66B [1944]), basketball instructors (27A [1943]) and gymnastics displays (17 [1943], 76A [1944] and 253B [1947]), with a notable dearth of news coverage of the organisation in 1946, as will be explained below.

NO-DO's first news story on the sporting activities promoted by the SF (8, 1943) focused on some skiing courses in Barcelona. Quite unusually for NO-DO, the commentator stresses the autonomy that exercise can offer, in keeping with the discourse described above:

> The Sección Femenina [...] looks after the cultural and sporting education of Spanish women with an especially keen interest [...]. Our female comrades carry out their training with enthusiasm, taking possession of themselves and their muscles. Sport allows them to achieve that difficult and wonderful balance between body and soul.

The footage shows a group of joyful, active women dressed in two-piece uniforms on which the embroidered Falange coat of arms is clearly visible. At dawn, they line up for the flag-raising ceremony, enthusiastically prepare their skiing equipment, march in a line up the mountain, and glide smoothly down the slopes. In addition to serving to introduce this training activity—a sport with an obvious classist dimension that would soon cease to be considered a priority due to its high cost (Ofer, 2009: 115)—to a general audience, it is striking to note how the voice-over posits physical activity as a means of acquiring agency ("taking possession of themselves and of their muscles"). In 1944, NO-DO would publicise these championships again in a

newsreel (66B) that presents the winning team and reports on the trophy ceremony, while also showing fascist rituals such as the Roman salute and including shots of the proudly smiling winners of the Pilar Primo de Rivera Prize (Figure 5).

These shots of the winners are important because the SF also had to deal with the objections of the party's male authorities to the idea of women being involved in competitive activities. In 1945, sport became an object of debate in the SF's National Council, as "certain defects in need of correction were identified": specifically, the fact that "certain women excelled too much in a particular sport" (Suárez Fernández, 1993: 170). In response, Pilar Primo de Rivera wrote a letter to the Falange's Deputy Secretary of Sections, in which she had to clarify that "it was not the Falange's objective to produce elite sportswomen, but to ensure that all or most young Spanish women had the chance to play sports; always with the same principle of placing training above any other objective" (ibid.).

This directive—the group above the individual and above personal recognition—is palpable in NO-DO's subsequent coverage of sporting activities in the 1940s. Moreover, the tone of the newsreels discussed above represents an exception, as the visual parameters of physical exercise for women would be redirected, with the outfits worn being a crucial element due to the numerous criticisms they sparked among the Catholic authorities. Indeed, the rigid dress code imposed on Spanish women after the Civil War proved incompatible with virtually all sports (Blasco Herranz, 1997; Ofer, 2006), as the Sports Council established a whole series of rules that were particularly severe for sports such as swimming, but also extremely detailed in relation to the length of the uniform or the use of trousers, an item of clothing allowed for skiing and mountaineering, basically because SF members engaged in these sports.

This sociopolitical climate, characterised by vehement demands for the concealment of the female body, influenced the promotion of sporting activities by the SF, as reflected in various censorship orders. In 1942, the National Press Office issued the following directive: "Attention, censors! Any photographs taken at sports championships involving the Sección Femenina in which our female comrades are showing their knees are prohibited and should therefore be ruled out" (quoted in Viuda Serrano, 2014: 230). And in the file for the lost documentary *Academia Isabel la Católica* (Luis Suárez de Lezo, 1944), which depicted a day in the school where SF leaders were trained, the only annotation to the script presented to the censors is: "Shots 30 and 31 of the gymnastics should presumably not raise any objections" (AGA, 3/121, 36/04663).

The three news stories included in NO-DO about the various gymnastics events similarly reflect the limits imposed on the public display of the *genuinely Spanish* female body. The structure of all three is practically identical: all include long shots of the event (Figure 6) and of the traditional dance performances (Figure 7), which, as we are told in Newsreel 76A (1944), "also form part of the program of these exercises" along with previous "flexibility" and "balance" exercises. The news story about the Third Gymnastics Championships (17A, 1943) does include the trophy ceremony, although it only shows the Falange leaders, never

Figure 5. Trophy ceremony in the newsreel on the Sección Femenina de Falange skiing championship (NO-DO 66B, 1944)









From top to bottom. Figure 6. Third National Gymnastics Championships held at University City of Madrid (NO-DO, 17A, 1943). Figure 7. Dance presentations at a rural gymnastics event (NO-DO, 76A, 1944). Figure 8. Coros y Danzas presentation at the Castellón Gymnastics Festival (NO-DO, 253B, 1947)

the winners. On the other hand, Newsreel 253B (1947) ends with what almost seems like a mistake: a close-up shot of a participant receiving a bouquet of flowers and a trophy, although the image quickly fades to black. Moreover, in this last newsreel (the analysis of which is hampered by the fact that the audio track has been lost), the sporting display is presented as a festival with a markedly traditional tone and practically half the footage is dedicated to the Coros y Danzas, Spanish folk singers and dancers shown performing in a wide shot under the vicarious gaze of Franco, whose face appears on a large poster positioned high above them (Figure 8).

But what perhaps most characterises the representation of these displays in the NO-DO newsreels is the restraint of the women's bodies. First of all, their physical movements as shown in these films are much feebler and more reticent than they appeared in the DNC newsreels (1938-1941), which reflected an interest in underscoring the gracefulness of the choreography through the framing, camera movements and wide shots of the people. For example, the first propaganda productions analysed contain hints of a Nazi aesthetic in the framing of the young people and the exaltation of the culture of the body that would reach its peak in *Juventudes de España* (Edgar Neville, DNC,1939), a documentary about a sports display held in Seville in 1938 to celebrate the Day of the Fallen (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2011: 355-360) with the participation of 1,600 girls and young women recruited by the SF. Secondly, this modesty is also evident in the outfits the girls are wearing, with the adoption of what would become the distinctive uniform of the organisation: the *pololo*, which served as a clearly palpable symbolic emblem of the strict gender boundaries in place and the delicate balance that the SF had to strike to remain within them if it wanted to make sport popular among women. A hybrid garment that was basically a pair of trousers with the appearance of a long skirt that buttoned up

on the side, the *pololo* allowed women to exercise discreetly, while at the same time marking their bodies as clearly feminine and, in keeping with a conservative conception of gender roles, limited their mobility. As Carmen Martín Gaite suggests (1987: 69), the *pololo* ended up turning what could have been "pleasure" into "sacrifice"; it was a garment that "hindered", turning the experience into a "painful imposed pregnancy that has never known the pleasure of a body in freedom."

Although the SF's sporting activities increased during the 1940s, their representation in NO-DO newsreels was limited, which could be interpreted as a sign that some of the SF's more innovative initiatives needed to be toned down. Although the gymnastics displays reflected Falangist principles of order and discipline, their depiction on screen was less spectacular than it had been previously, while the addition of traditional dance introduced a graceful and delicate (i.e., acceptably feminine) dimension that largely determined the perception of the sports promoted by the organisation. According to Simón (2019), this would prove contradictory for the audience of the period, given that the official newsreels included international stories provided by Actualidades UFA or Fox Movietone about women's swimming or mixed competitions that praised the physical abilities of the female athletes.

As the last news story discussed above suggests, the depiction on screen of the dynamic dimension of the SF began giving way to a more regressive image: its role in promoting the essence of the nation according to the Francoist and Falangist mythos (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2006; 2011) through the traditional singers and dancers of the Coros y Danzas. As the organisation would stress, the performance of traditional song and dance also represented a *national* variant of sport:

> The Sección Femenina recognises the vital importance of Spanish folk dance, which encapsulates the Spanish sense of rhythm and movement in its purest form, as an essential foundation for the achievement of the genuinely Spanish gymnastics to which we aspire (*Medina*, 17/7/1941, quoted in Martín Gaite, 1987: 69)

THE THREE NO-DO NEWS STORIES ON THE GYMNASTICS DISPLAYS REVEAL THE LIMITS IMPOSED ON THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF THE *TRULY SPANISH* WOMAN'S BODY AND THE RESTRAINT OF ITS MOVEMENTS AND STYLE OF DRESS, WITH THE ADOPTION OF WHAT WOULD BECOME THE DISTINCTIVE UNIFORM OF THE SF: THE *POLOLO*

CODA: A PERIOD OFF SCREEN

A crucial aspect of the representation of the SF in the NO-DO newsreels of the 1940s is the two-year hiatus between the reports on the last sporting activities discussed above, an absence that forms part of a general dynamic of visibility/concealment of the organisation in the early years of the dictatorship, with a substantial break identifiable in 1945. In numerical terms, the SF appeared in 14 news stories in 1943, nine in 1944, only one each in 1945 and 1946, two in 1947, four in 1948, and six in 1949. In discursive terms, a regression can be discerned in the on-screen representation of the SF in the DNC's productions, as noted above. In 1943, a certain fascist undercurrent is still evident in the sporting and political events where SF members acquire an awareness of their bodies and confirm their commitment to the party and its ultranationalist project. However, this more progressive side of the SF—considering the ideological context in which the organisation was conceived, established and developed—was soon erased from Spain's film screens. This erasure or blurring cannot be dissociated from the development of the film production policy of the New Francoist State. While propaganda was initially managed by the Falange, in 1945 the Ministry of People's Education

was created and NO-DO came under the purview of a government department controlled by the Catholic authorities. This political restructuring resulted in the abandonment of any expression that might identify the Franco regime with the recently defeated Axis powers of the Second World War, and, as Rodríguez Mateos (2008) points out, up until the early 1950s NO-DO was one of the media services that best reflected this propagandistic approach, involving the removal of the Falange from the country's film screens.

The internal documentation of the SF reflects this process in relation to the Falange's women's branch. The annual report presented by its Department of Cinema at the 11th National Council (1947) stated that over the previous year it had been unable to engage in its usual level of film production. Along with a lack of available film stock, the report noted that "the NO-DO organisation, which has always provided us with extremely effective assistance, for political reasons has deemed it inadvisable to film news stories and events related to the Sección Femenina" (AGA, Cultura: 3/51.41, Box 630). And indeed, in 1946 the presence of the SF in the newsreels was limited to a single 30-second appearance in the news story "Campaña de invierno de la Sección Femenina en Tarragona" [Sección Femenina's Winter Campaign in Tarragona] (159B). The same report stated that the SF's submissions to the Regulatory Sub-Committee of Cinematography requesting film stock to produce copies and documentaries had fallen on deaf ears. Aware of the crisis that its party was facing, the SF advocated prudence and discretion, focusing on local and rural activities (Richmond, 2004; Ofer, 2009). While the organisation withdrew into the background of Spain's social and political arena, NO-DO contributed from the outset to the fossilisation of its public image.

CONCLUSIONS

The discourse on femininity identifiable in the representation in the Franco regime's newsreels of the sporting activities promoted by the SF, along with the speeches and documentation associated with it, constituted a challenge to the hegemonic model of the female (wife, mother and home-maker) and to the traditional public/private binary, given the clear characterisation in the texts analysed above of physical exercise as an *outdoor* activity. In general terms, as a result of the dynamic, virile image of the organisation disseminated during the Spanish Civil War (Blasco Herranz, 1999; Oroz, 2013), the subsequent tensions between two ideas of what it meant to be Spanish—the National Syndicalist/fascist notion and the traditional/Catholic conception—were expressed in the depiction of Falangist women as politicised female bodies, active and present in the public sphere. Sporting activity thus constituted a clear, visible sign of the gradual concealment of the female body from public view in the 1940s, as well as the special symbolic value that femininity acquired as a measurement of national morality during the dictatorship. The power of the Catholic Church and the reorganisation of power among the political elite of the regime over the period studied were determining factors in the redefinition of the SF's ideological principles and visual parameters for women's sports, with the adoption of an image that was modern but above all modest.

Initially, in the DNC's *El Noticiario Español* and the first two years of the NO-DO newsreels, sport was presented as a disciplinary mechanism aimed at placing women's bodies proudly at the service of the political and national unity (Falange and the New Spain), while displaying *masculine*—but adaptable from a rhetorical and militant Falangist perspective (Labanyi, 2002)—qualities that would later be erased: competitiveness, self-improvement, physical skill and camaraderie. Beginning in 1944, on-screen representations of the sporting activities promoted by the SF became less common as coverage of the organisation came to be characterised by domestication and the replacement of sports with more traditional activities

such as regional dance, in an effort to stress the symbolic dimension of the SF—and by extension, of femininity—as a repository of the essence of the nation and a link to the Francoist notion of Spain's mythical past. There was thus a clear shift from a depiction of proud, energetic women associated with the virility and verticality of National Syndicalism towards a representation in accordance with the traditional female virtues of horizontality, submissiveness and modesty.

Although the news stories about women's sports and the activities of the SF largely disappeared from film screens during the 1940s—only to become more ubiquitous than ever in the decades that followed (Gil & Cabezas, 2012)—they were significant for laying the foundations of a representation of women in sport that was conditioned by political and religious factors. Future studies are therefore needed to analyse the representation of sport promoted by the SF in the 1950s and 1960s, a period marked not only by modernisation and consumerism as Spain opened up to the outside world, but also by new calls for greater social participation and access to employment for women (Ofer, 2009), in which the Falangists and sport would again play an important—and contradictory—role (Ofer, 2009; Morcillo, 2015). For example, in 1965, despite having lost its monopoly over sport and much of its social influence, the SF consistently advocated for sport as a vehicle for the "promotion of women" in a series of speeches where the concept of promotion encompassed not only personal betterment but also better job opportunities (Zagalaz & Martínez, 2006) in sectors already deemed acceptable for women (such as social work and education), as well as others from which they had previously been excluded or were not openly recognised (such as the legal end economic sectors) (Ofer, 2009). ■

NOTES

1 Far from describing the organisation as a mere vehicle for the gender ideology of the dictatorship, current literature on the Sección Femenina stresses its level of political agency in the dictatorship and its embodiment of a distinctive female identity, contrary to the hegemonic Francoist model, which simultaneously contained traditional and modernising elements (including political awareness, participation in the public sphere and independence). Research on the SF has also examined the contradictions between its practices and discourse (marked by a rhetoric aimed at maintaining its authority without upsetting the patriarchy) and its complex, problematic objective to close the gap between the elite women who ran the organisation and the general female population. For further information, see the studies by Blasco Herranz, Richmond, Labanyi or Ofer.

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BALANCE AND PRUDENCE (OR DIPLOMACY AND MODESTY): THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SECCIÓN FEMENINA'S SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN THE NEWSREELS OF EARLY FRANCOIST SPAIN (1938-1949)

Abstract

This article analyses the representation of the sporting activities promoted by the Sección Femenina (SF), the women's branch of the Spanish Falange, in film newsreels produced in Francoist Spain in the period from 1938 to 1949: The sources analysed are the *El Noticiario Español* newsreels produced by the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (DNC) from 1938 to 1940, and the Francoist government's NO-DO newsreels, which first appeared on Spanish film screens in 1943. Given the SF's total control over physical education for women and the value of sport as a propaganda tool, this analysis sheds light on the heated debates over sexuality, politics and religion that marked the early years of the dictatorship and their impact on the representation of women's sport on screen. This research involves the identification of news stories about the SF's sporting activities, which are analysed with the support of other historical sources. The aim is to examine the evolution of the discourse on sport promulgated by the women's branch of the Falange, its rhetorical expression and audiovisual representation, and to identify the factors that led to the gradual domestication of gender attributes and the representation of their bodies, as women who were politically active and present in the public sphere.

Key words

Sección Femenina de Falange; Francoism; Sports; Newsreels; Propaganda; Gender Politics.

Author

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Article reference

Oroz, E. (2024). Balance and Prudence (or Diplomacy and Modesty): The Representation of the Sección Femenina's Sporting Activities in the Newsreels of Early Francoist Spain (1938-1949). *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 61-74.

EQUILIBRIO Y PRUDENCIA (O DIPLOMACIA Y RECATO). LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LAS ACTIVIDADES DEPORTIVAS DE LA SECCIÓN FEMENINA EN LOS NOTICIARIOS CINEMATOGRÁFICOS FRANQUISTAS (1938-1949)

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la representación de las actividades deportivas promovidas por la Sección Femenina de Falange en los noticiarios cinematográficos franquistas en el periodo comprendido entre 1938 y 1949: *El Noticiario Español* del Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (1938-1940) y el noticiario de NO-DO que llegó a las pantallas españolas en 1943. Considerando el control total que la SF tuvo sobre la educación física femenina y el valor propagandístico del deporte, este ámbito permite iluminar enconados debates sobre sexualidad, política y religión que se produjeron durante los primeros años de la dictadura y su impacto en su difusión cinematográfica. Tras la identificación de las noticias dedicadas a la SF en este ámbito, se realiza un análisis textual que, junto con la consulta de documentación interna, tiene por objetivo examinar la evolución del discurso sobre el deporte por parte de las mujeres falangistas y su plasmación retórica y audiovisual, al tiempo que se exponen las causas que propiciaron una progresiva domesticación de los atributos de género y la representación de sus cuerpos, en tanto que mujeres políticas, activas y presentes en la esfera pública.

Palabras clave

Sección Femenina de Falange; Franquismo; Deporte; Noticiarios Cinematográficos; Propaganda, Políticas de género.

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Referencia de este artículo

Oroz, E. (2024). Equilibrio y prudencia (o diplomacia y recato). La representación de las actividades deportivas de la Sección Femenina en los noticiarios cinematográficos franquistas (1938-1949). *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 61-74.

recibido/received: 07.07.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 04.10.2023

Edita / Published by

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

FROM RIDICULE TO OBJECTIFICATION: DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN SPANISH NO-DO NEWSREELS AND COMEDY FILMS OF THE 1970S*,**

ELENA CORDERO HOYO
ASIER GIL VÁZQUEZ

INTRODUCTION

On 4 September 2021, the Spanish daily sports newspaper *As* published a column titled "*Una liga que no para de crecer*" ["A League that Keeps on Growing"], celebrating the rise of women's football in the country and the fact that Spanish girls can now grow up with role models like Alexia Putellas or Nahikari García. The world witnessed the culmination of this growth on the 20th of August of last year, when the Spanish women's team won the World Cup championship in Sydney. However, subsequent events, most notably the kiss that the Spanish Football Association's president, Luis Rubiales, gave the player Jenni Hermoso without her consent, made it clear that there are still obstacles to be overcome, on both the institutional and social levels. As will be explored in this study, these are obstacles that were already evident in the early days of Spanish women's football during the final years of the Franco regime. Some of the ongoing challenges are related to a lack of media visibility (Román-San Miguel, Giraldes & Sánchez-Gey, 2022) or the prevalence of negative stereotypes and an objectifying gaze (Mayoral Sánchez & Mera Fernández, 2017). The aforementioned column also looked back on all the work of the "pioneers [who] fought not only against the lack of financial supports but also against society" (Gil, 2021). Women's football in Spain has evolved in parallel with the evolution of women's rights, and it has been marked by a constant struggle to gain space, recognition and autonomy, as documented in the film *Algo más que una pasión* [Something More than a Passion] (Carlos Troncoso Grao, 2014), which features interviews with many of those pioneers who paved the way for women's football from the 1960s to the 1980s.

This article focuses on the depiction of women footballers on the big screen in Spain during the late Francoist period (1959-1975). Taking a gender perspective, it offers an analysis of the most preva-

lent discourses in the NO-DO newsreels and fiction films that complemented one another to convey the collective anxiety of a society that felt threatened by the presence of women on the football pitch. It thus identifies the most common discourses in NO-DO news coverage[1] and how they were replicated and reconstructed in the only two feature fiction films of the late Francoist period that portray women's football: *Las Ibéricas F.C.* (Pedro Masó, 1971) and *La liga no es cosa de hombres* [The League/ Garter Is Not for Men] (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1972). The aim is to demonstrate how humour was used as a key mechanism for alleviating the ideological tensions caused by the involvement of women in sport. While comedy functioned as a safe space for giving visibility to the progress of women's rights, the images in these films were articulated through a male gaze that was complicit with the forms of biopower imposed by the Franco regime, which penalised women footballers by means of mockery, ridicule and the objectification of their bodies.

For the purpose of contextualising the phenomenon of women's football in Spanish history, it is worth noting here that one of the first women's matches documented in newspaper records dates back to 1914, when a charity match was organised at the Real Club Deportivo Español stadium in Barcelona. In the early years of the 20th century, women's football would begin carving out a place in Spanish society amidst public rejection and ridicule (Torrebadella-Flix, 2016), two constants that would continue to hound the women's game for decades. These first milestones, which formed part of a series of advances for women in sport, took place in a context of the suffragette and emancipation movements that challenged traditional models of domestic femininity. The intersections between sport and the fight for gender equality came to be consolidated through feminist projects during the Second Spanish Republic in the early 1930s (Torrebadella-Flix, 2011).

However, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Francoist faction promoted clearly differentiated spheres of activity for men and women in its project for the nation, through legislation that demanded the subordination of women and reduced their field of action to the home. In the first years of the Franco regime, official discourse upheld an image of womanhood as the "eternal, passive, pious, pure, submissive women-as-mother for whom self-denial was the only road to real fulfilment" (Graham, 1995). The women's branch of the Falange, the Sección Femenina (SF), was the main organisation responsible for promoting and controlling activities for women and one of its constants was the encouragement of physical education in line with Falangist and Catholic values (Viuda-Serrano, 2022). The SF conceived of women's sport in eugenic terms as a form of physical and spiritual exercise whose main function was to serve the nation by cultivating disciplined, healthy and hygienic bodies that would produce strong offspring (Ramírez-Macías, 2018).

The ministerial changes of 1957 and the consolidation of Opus Dei technocrats in Franco's government led to the promotion of a strategy of neo-capitalist development that would bring an end to the policy of autarky pursued in the early Francoist period. As Pavoloviv (2011) suggests, these economic changes gave rise to disruptions to the social order and the discourses of the regime, whose philosophy of *bendito atraso* ("blessed backwardness") was gradually replaced with a materialist rhetoric of progress. Women emerged as key figures in this new social fabric, which was characterised by a redefinition of womanhood in accordance with their new roles as producer/ consumers (Romo Parra, 2006). The gradual entry of women into the public sphere gave rise to ideological tensions in the biopolitics of the regime, with the emergence of a conflict between the new policy of openness that sought to bring Spain into line with Western liberal democracies and the traditional structures and values of National Catholicism.

In this context, the SF continued to be one of the key exponents of Falangist ideology through a gradual adaptation to the new historical circumstances, although this reorganisation was not without its contradictions. At the same time, the Physical Education Act of 1961, which set forth the new Catholic principles in relation to physical exercise, consolidated the SF's new direction on the question of women's sport. This new direction included the professionalisation of female coaches, which as of 1956 were trained at Escuela Julio Ruiz de Alza, and the creation in 1962 of the "Medina Clubs" for the organisation of sporting competitions. These milestones exemplify the ideological tensions latent in the development of women's sport, which was institutionalised as a vehicle for controlling women's bodies, but at the same time offered alternatives to the household ideal (Ofer, 2006).



Image 1. Match between Sizam Paloma and Mercacredit in 1970

Some of the resulting obstacles were related to the need to clarify the scope of this agency offered by sport, as it could not have the effect of diverting women from traditional feminine behaviours or be used as a pretext for claiming an independence that would allow them to shirk their reproductive obligations (Morcillo Gómez, 2015). For this reason, the regime's official manuals took the utmost care to stress modesty and instruct young women in how to care for their bodies. These texts highlight the need for prudence in the choice of clothing and the avoidance of more violent exercises such as football or bullfighting, which could undermine the female values of passiveness, gentleness and decorum (Ramírez-Macías, 2018: 340).

The early 1970s would be a watershed moment for women's football in Spain. While until that time, the women's game might have been dismissed as a harmless eccentricity, this decade would be marked by the first attempt to create a women's football team, an effort that would attract unprecedented media attention. One of the milestones in the consolidation of women's football in Spain took place on 8 December 1970, when a match was held between the teams Sizam Paloma and Mercacredit in Villaverde on the outskirts of Madrid. Although this was not the first women's match held in the country, it was significant for attracting considerable attention from both the public and the media, as reflected by the front-page feature story dedicated to the match in the daily sports newspaper *Marca* (Edelmira, 1970). One year later, unofficial championships and competitions began being held all over Spain, in a move towards institutionalisation of the women's game (Ribalta Alcalde, 2011). Women's football thus began being considered a real event and even a potentially profitable spectacle. However, these developments sparked a negative reaction from institutions affiliated with the Franco regime ("*La sección femenina condena*," 1967), which resorted to "scientific" and "medical" arguments to condemn them ("*Un equipo de sociólogos*," 1970).

WOMEN FOOTBALLERS IN THE NO-DO NEWSREELS

In contrast to fiction films, which were produced by private companies (although they were also constrained by the regime's official censors), Spain's official newsreels (popularly known as "Noticiarios y Documentales" or "NO-DO" for short) became the Franco regime's main form of audiovisual propaganda. From 1943 to 1975, it was a legal requirement for all Spanish cinemas to screen these weekly newsreels prior to their feature presentations, thereby allowing the regime to filter all reporting of national and international events through its ideological prism. Francoist discourse markers are also evident in NO-DO's "soft" news, i.e., apparently less significant news stories (mass culture, sports, fashion, etc.), where the aim was to offer "tendentious entertainment, low on information and [...] loaded with clichés" (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2002: 215). As is evident in certain stories on women's sport, many reports would make use of footage taken from foreign news programs, subsequently re-edited and given a new soundtrack. María Rosón (2016: 218) analyses how, although the voice-over "domesticated and sometimes 'dumbed down' the visual content" from other countries, these international news stories offered alternative models of womanhood to the hegemonic model in Spain. As a result, the (very few) reports on women's football presented after 1949 combined the presentation of a phenomenon largely unheard of in Spain with an "official" voice that tried to mitigate its transgressive potential by means of ridicule.

Thus, in most of the stories on women's sport, the voice-over commentary tends to adopt a condescending tone that reinforces the idea of women's inferiority to men. Infantilising terminology is used to refer to the players (such as *señoritas* or the addition of diminutive suffixes to their names), and the commentary often focuses on the elegance of their outfits or their role as homemakers. The reports are always dominated by a perspective that minimises the idea of transgression and reframes the event in accordance with the official view of femininity. Specific references to football itself generally reflect more fervent attention to the women's bodies, presenting the match as "a prank performed [...] by pretty young girls" (Gil Gascón & Cabezas Deogracias, 2012: 205).

From 1949 to 1974, the NO-DO newsreels featured a total of six stories related to women's football.[2] The first of these was in 1949, about a match played in Belgium, initiating a tendency in the coverage of women's football to focus on events outside Spain, including a report from Austria (1961), presented with the subheading *incidencias humorísticas* ("humorous incidents") in the program guide, and two reports from Germany (both in 1974). The insistence on the foreign origins of the phenomenon serves to underscore its alien nature, depicting transgressions of gender roles to articulate an argument for describing Spain as the last spiritual safe haven of the West. This strategy can also be observed in the press; for example, in 1945 *El Correo de Mallorca* reported on the existence of women's football clubs in London, associating them with the unprecedented level of agency that British women enjoyed during the Second World War, and adding: "it is genuinely panic-inducing to think that this fad might expand its tyranny to our shores" (Avespa, 1945). Short news stories loaded with negative judgements about women's football matches in countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Italy thus began to appear in the late 1940s.[3]

The first documentary footage of women's football matches in Spain were presented in the context of the country's incipient modernity, the entry of women into the workforce and the defence of the social work of Franco's *Movimiento Nacional*. A report from 1964 presents a group of saleswomen in a department store, who are subsequently shown facing off on the football pitch at Parque Sindical in Madrid. The commentator, who

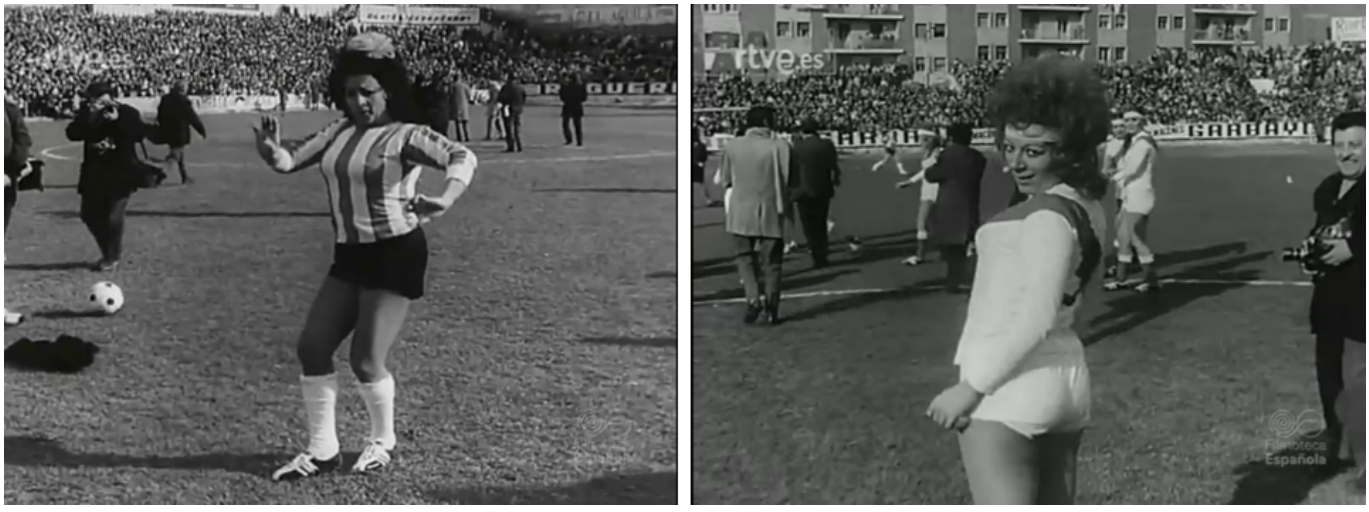
WOMEN IN FOOTBALL, MEDIATED BY THE REMARKS OF THE NO-DO COMMENTATOR, ARE THUS REPEATEDLY CONVEYED AS INEPT AND INADEQUATE

notes that bullfighting and football are banned for women, describes the event as a somewhat exceptional leisure activity. To mitigate the tension the footage might otherwise provoke, the report focuses on the players' hesitation and lack of skill. These news stories serve the purpose of presenting the work of the Franco regime's Educación y Descanso office, which promoted sports and leisure activities for the working class. During the 1950s and 1960s, news stories also appeared in the press about women's football matches held all over Spain.[4] These articles invariably highlight the status of the matches as recreational or charity events, suggesting a planned, domesticated deviation from the women's regular activities.

These constants are evident in the coverage in a NO-DO newsreel from 1971 of a charity match played by various film stars and singers at the Rayo Vallecano pitch that year in Madrid. With the aim of stressing the comical nature of the event, the trendy pop stars (the *Finolis*, or "Fancy" team) were grouped together to play against the folk artists (the *Folklóricas*), echoing the modernity/tradition binary of so many films of the period. The success of an event that brought together Spanish celebrities such as Encarnita Polo, Rocío Jurado, Marujita Díaz, Luciana Wolff and Lola Flores led to the organisation of a second encounter, held on 19 March of the same year at the Sánchez-Pizjuán Stadium in Seville ("Mañana a beneficio," 1971). The tongue-in-cheek comments on the celebrities' appearance or peculiar behaviour on the pitch (such as Lola Flores's "flamenco steps and *olé*") reinforce the farcical nature of these matches, which had more of the quality of a charity show than a sporting competition. Real women players who were struggling under precarious conditions and the limitations of having to train outside working hours at their poorly paid jobs saw these celebrity matches as yet another insult, with their depiction of women's football as frivolous, laughable and inconsequential (Troncoso Grao, 2014).

Women in football, mediated by the remarks of the NO-DO commentator, are thus repeatedly conveyed as inept and inadequate. Their physicality, tactics, position and technique are all simply wrong according to the announcer. Even when

Image 2. Match between the Folclóricas and the Finolis in 1971



the footage filmed conveys a different message, the voice-over's interpretation of the images wins out with its inexorable verdict: women do not belong on the football pitch. For example, the newsreel from 1961 is rife with jokes and features circus-style background music to add to the comical effect. All the players' hard work and effort is thus reduced to farce: when they fall down it is not because they are playing the game but because they are clumsy; cries of pain are merely "whingeing"; the coach's directions are not tactical instructions but *consejillos* ("little tips") from a woman who says simply whatever comes to her mind; and the arguments with the referee are symptomatic of the players' lack of discipline and tendency to play dirty.

More than ten years later, the report from July 1974 resorts to similar strategies in its coverage of the German women's league, accompanying the footage of the match with a children's song that trivialises the event. The commentator remarks that "every once in a while, the women like to play some football," vesting the images with the quality of an unusual whim, and concluding that "they are matches that generally end rather poorly." Just as Iquino does with the title to his film, the narrator of this newsreel plays with the two meanings of the word *liga* ("league" and "garter") to suggest that the players are actually wearing stockings. The narrator continues to question the professionalism of the players at the moment of a foul, when he explains that in women's football "anything or almost anything goes" and the referee might as well put away his whistle because "nobody pays him any attention or if they do it isn't much."[5] In December of that same year, an excerpt of a women's football match in Germany was shown again, this time explaining the events of the match without the tongue-in-cheek attitude. However, in the first few seconds of the footage the commentator takes the opportunity to assert that football contributes to a destabilising of the traditional gender roles with the remark that "it isn't easy to tell whether these are men or women" and that "it is necessary to focus the camera considerably to be able to recognise that these are young girls," thus evoking the trope that activities traditionally associated with males can make women look less feminine.

Just like audiovisual constructions of women in the bullring, women's football in the NO-DO newsreels was depicted "by way of visual gags" (Gascón & Cabeza Deogracias 2012: 208). It would not be until 1974 that a NO-DO newsreel would contain a genuine sports commentary on the action of the footballers, seriously assessing the plays and goals of the different teams. It was the coverage of Germany's first Women's Football Championship, reflecting the serious attention that this phenomenon was receiving internationally, although the commentary still includes a humorous reflection on the possible confusion of genders that this new reality might cause.[6]

WOMEN, SPORT AND COMEDY IN THE LATE FRANCOIST PERIOD

The appearance of sportswomen in Spanish fiction films occurred in the context of a new form of the comedy of manners that began redefining the habits and customs of Spain's new developmentalist society through a constant dialogue between the country's traditional values and its incipient modernity. A new generation of female stars—including Concha Velasco, Sonia Bruno and Laura Valenzuela—embodied the image of the "happy, independent girl with attitude, but prudent and respectful of the rules of the game imposed upon her by society" (Ibáñez Fernández, 2017: 45). Taking moderately conservative positions, various films use women's work or gender relations as a central theme in their stories. At the same time, several of these productions would acquire more explicitly erotic dimensions, whereby the liberation of the body and the loosening of sexual mores would be depicted through an objectifying male gaze (Fernández-Labayen & Melero, 2022).

HUMOUR WOULD BE ONE OF THE MOST COMMON WAYS OF RESPONDING TO THE ADVANCES MADE BY WOMEN IN SPORT, IN AN EFFORT TO INSTITUTIONALISE A DERISIVE VIEW OF AN EMERGING REALITY

It is worth noting that the financial crisis that the Spanish film industry was plunged into by the Matesa scandal and the resulting debt that forced the closure of Spain's Banco de Crédito Industrial, which until then had provided the funding for Spanish films, had the effect of accelerating the liberalisation of a sector that depended more than ever on commercial supply and demand in the absence of government subsidies (Torreiro, 2010). As a result, a number of studios embraced an opportunistic vision with films that exploited successful formulas, such as comedies relying on popular celebrities and visual gags references to topical news or events (such as women's football), and above all, an incipient eroticism that was becoming increasingly accepted by the censors.

With the exception of certain forms like satire, comedy had been able to prosper even in the totalitarian conditions of the Franco regime due to its nature as light, harmless entertainment (King, 2002). One of the key features of this genre is its focus on the unexpected, the inappropriate or the transgressive to play with deviations from sociocultural norms and conventions (Neale & Krutnik, 2006: 3). Its suspension of logic and common sense enables depictions of womanhood marked by less normative characterisations or behaviours. With mix-ups, masquerades and carnivalesque inversions, the comedy of late Francoism depicted the social advances being made by women through a "battle of the sexes" theme, where women would take on positions traditionally reserved for men and enjoy greater freedom in the public sphere and in personal relationships. Despite the conservative moralising of their endings, often involving romance and the recovery of the patriarchal status quo, these films offered new perspectives that portrayed women who behaved more liberally than the majority of their female spectators, constituting new archetypes of modern women, young working women, or sportswomen.

However, this potential freedom was often limited by the conditions under which these characters were depicted. The comicality relied on certain clear power relations that established a distance between the active agent of the joke and its object (Horlacher, 2009). In this way, the mechanisms of enunciation could articulate a form of ridicule complicit with biopower, eliciting a response of punitive laughter directed at the characters who transgress gender norms. The very portrayal of alternative forms of womanhood could pose a danger of "making a spectacle out of oneself", exposing oneself to ridicule or derision due to a disciplinary scrutiny that has controlled women's behaviour throughout history (Russo, 1995).

Descartes pointed out long ago that the use of comedy "corrects the vices in a useful way by making us look ridiculous, but without one laughing directly at or displaying hatred towards people" (1997: 252). This idea of the corrective function of humour from a perspective that is depersonalised and free of hatred, and therefore "non-violent", was subsequently expanded on by Henri Bergson in *Laughter* (2016 [1900]), a key text on the uses and functions of comedy that sheds light on the social, collective and popular imagination (2016: 36) as a necessary cultural and referential element. This is why the analysis of the comedies *Las Ibéricas F.C.* and *La liga no es cosa de hombres* constitutes an effective way of exploring the perception that society had of the reality of women's football, which these film's spectators portrayed and punished with their laughter.

In this way, late Francoist comedy operated in an ambiguous discursive space that celebrated the new modernity by portraying new realities, such as the entry of women into the public sphere,

including the world of sport. However, the autonomy of these female characters would constitute the very deviation or transgression on which the comedy is sustained. The mechanisms of filmic enunciation would limit the agency of the characters by turning them into objects of a derision that would extend beyond the film screen and the caricatures in the press (Corcuera, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). This attitude would have its equivalent in the matches where women footballers could be ridiculed in person. According to Carme Nieto, one of Spain's first Spanish female footballers, the humourist Pedro Ruiz was hired as a commentator at her first match and made numerous degrading comments disguised as harmless jokes about the players over the stadium loudspeakers, such as: "There is a substitution. Perhaps she has broken a bra strap?"[7] Humour would thus be one of the most common ways of responding to the advances made by women in sport, in an effort to institutionalise a derisive view of an emerging reality.

Image 3. Poster for *Las Ibéricas F.C.*



LAS IBÉRICAS F.C.

The film *Las Ibéricas F.C.*, a comedy co-written, directed and produced by Pedro Masó that enjoyed box office admissions of nearly 1.5 million in Spain, premièred in Madrid on 7 October 1971. This film reflects one of the preferred styles of Masó's productions: comedies of manners with touches of romance, telling intersecting stories of young women in a modern Madrid. Other examples include *Las chicas de la cruz roja* [Red Cross Girls] (Rafael J. Salvia, 1958) and the later films *La chica de los anuncios* [Ad Girl] (1968), *Las secretarias* [The Secretaries] (1969) and *Las amigas* [Girlfriends] (1969), all directed by Pedro Lazaga. *Las Ibéricas F.C.* contains the same stylistic features as these films, such as an ensemble cast and the modernisation of gender roles, although it is distinguished by a more explicit eroticism. This distinction is evident in the replacement of the stars of the earlier films, such as Sonia Bruno or Teresa Gimpera, with the faces of Spain's "sexy comedies", whose physical appearance was a bigger box office draw than their acting skills, such as Claudia Gravy, Rosanna Yanni or Ingrid Garbo.

Although the use of illustrations and caricatures in the posters for Spanish comedies was not unusual for the period, the promotional poster for *Las Ibéricas F.C.* reinforced the objectifying gaze on women footballers. In the first sequence, a voice-over imitating the style of a NO-DO commentator offers a historical recounting of the heroes of Spanish football, with a frenetic montage of photographs showing them in action. The montage ends with a group shot of the female protagonists dressed in tight-fitting football shirts and mini-shorts, while the commentator concludes: "and now come Chelo, Menchu, Luisa, Piluca, Ju-



Image 4. Menchu doing her lipstick before a penalty shot

lita." Here, the emphatic tone used while reciting the names of the male footballers is replaced with a bewildered air that reinforces the double entendre in the commentator's description of the women as "*una delantera de primera división*", playing with the two meanings of *delantera* ("forwards" and "breasts"). This sequence is followed by the title credits to the sound of the song "Once corazones" [Eleven Hearts], whose lyrics hint at the film's other constants of romance and the agency of the women footballers: these women "jump on the pitch with grit and determination", but their only real goal is to "put the ball in the back of the net in the world of love."[8]

The storyline of each protagonist serves to convey a discourse on women's football. Menchu (Claudia Gravy) exhibits a flirtatiousness and frivolousness out of keeping with professional football, as her only real objective is to look stylish and cute. The objectification of this character is obvious in various scenes, such as the first one after the title credits, where she appears in her underwear, or when the male goalkeepers use another girl's goal as an excuse to lift Menchu up in their arms because "she is the hottest", a remark she responds to with a complaisant smile. In the end, her status as an object will be somewhat subverted when she meets a Swedish male football player. In a manner analogous to the "sexy comedies" of this period in which sexually repressed protagonists, played by stars such as Alfredo Landa and José Luis López Vázquez, fantasised about Nordic girls, here it is a female protagonist who falls for a Scandinavian, reversing the gender order while turning football into a pretext for morally looser romantic behaviour.

The sexualisation of women's bodies extends to the other players, although it acquires a different meaning in each character's storyline. When the teams are being formed, Luisa (Ingrid Garbo) and Piluca (La Contrahecha) are reluctant to join because they know their men will object to the skimpy uniforms. In this way, the eroticisation proposed and celebrated in the film comes into conflict with a prevailing morality that penalises the same bodies it sexualises. Playing football constitutes a transgression of the boundaries of the home and turns a submissive body into an active one. As football players, Luisa and Piluca transcend their roles as wife and girlfriend, respectively, and run the risk of becoming "public women". Piluca describes her boyfriend as an "*Ibericus hispanicus*", a violent and sexist species. Their fights over her career in sports, which he argues is incompatible with her duties as a girlfriend, serve as a vehicle for a debate on the limits of female autonomy.

The limits on Luisa's freedom are defined by the family unit, as she is married with children to Federico (Fernando Fernán Gómez), who disapproves of his wife's decision to play football. Their marital quarrels once again place the man's traditional mentality in opposition to the woman's independence, although here the woman's position is expressed by Luisa's mother. The film thus resorts to the typical, comical confrontation between a man and his mother-in-law, such as when they argue about whether being a mother is compatible with playing football. While Federico insists that she is engaging in a perversion with

deleterious consequences ("have you thought about what future awaits our little angels with a footballer for a mother?"), his mother-in-law brings an end to the discussion with a pragmatic conclusion ("well, playing forward for Madrid; does that not seem like much of a future to you?"). Luisa will ultimately be vindicated, as Federico will end up supporting her and bringing their children to the team's last match.



Image 5. Tere gives birth to a baby-ball

Women's football is not only presented as a force with the potential to destabilise the domestic ideal for women, but also as a threat to their physical and mental health. To this end, two storylines resort to a medical/psychiatric discourse that opposes women's participation in the sport. Julita (Puri Villa) is dating a medical student who warns her about the physiological harm that football can do to the female body, especially to its reproductive capacity. The future doctor's fears are made visible in a scene where he imagines Julita giving birth to a baby with a ball-shaped head. In this way, the film ridicules women who play football while at the same time farcically exaggerating popular beliefs about its unhealthy nature. On the other hand, Chelo (Rosanna Yanni) is depicted as being masculinised by her skill with the ball. After scoring a goal, she begins to imagine she is Pirri, Argoitia, or one of Spain's other football legends, and she feels an irrepressible urge to start smoking cigars, drinking cognac or shaving. This prompts her to go see a psychoanalyst to determine whether she is a man or a woman. The film thus takes up the discourse of the loss of femininity and sexual ambiguity that would subsequently be expressed in the NO-DO newsreel of December 1974. Chelo's identity crisis is placated when the analyst kisses her, positing heterosexual romance as the cure for gender dysphoria.

The only storyline in which women's football is not a source of conflict is that of Loli (Tina Sáinz), a single working-class girl who is less overtly attractive than the others. This allows her to avoid being sexualised, and her body is not subject to the kind of ideological confrontations affecting the others. However, the many fouls she is accused of for playing dirty hints at a lack of feminine softness. Ultimately, although football offers a possibility for her to climb the social ladder, as her mother (Rafaela Aparicio) suggests when she encourages Loli to seek fame to avoid ending up in a dead-end job like the rest of her family, she finds an alternative way out when a wealthy young man takes an interest in her. Her chance at upward mobility thus shifts to the realm of romance, indirectly suggesting that her talent lies in being a wife rather than a football star.

As hinted at in the lyrics to the opening song, which describes the "eleven hearts" of Las Ibéricas F.C. scoring "their greatest goal" (meaning marriage), the synopsis submitted to the Censorship Board suggests that "the girls play with their boyfriends more than with the ball, and the match ends up being a resounding victory as they take their opponents to the altar."[9] In accordance with the "Masó formula", all the disruptions to the gender norms ultimately lead to a wedding, and thus to the recovery of the status quo. In the final scene, the players all emerge from the church in bride's dresses, albeit still kicking a football, hinting at a conciliatory view that even the most conser-

vative idea of romance is not incompatible with a love for the beautiful game.

This film's storylines unfold in an ideologically ambiguous space in which ridicule of women coexists with ridicule of those who oppose the advances they were making. Indeed, the Franco regime's Censorship Board itself raised questions about the supposed "comicality" of the film, which it authorised with a few edits, offering the opinion that the script "is not merely bad but terrible. With it, the Spanish film industry hits a new low. [...] There is a lot of crudeness, but there is even more vulgarity."[10] The censors also warned against "excesses of exhibitionism" and "unacceptable erotic details", and required that care be taken with "the depiction of the effeminate man so that he doesn't seem homosexual." They also demanded changes to dialogues with "tasteless" double entendres, such as replacing the phrase *tocar el pito* (which means blowing a whistle but can also to refer to touching a part of the male anatomy) with the less ambiguous *tocar el silbato*. The film's less monolithic view of the issue than the perspective offered in official media sources like NO-DO is reinforced by the variety of opinions provided by supporting characters. In the stands, streets or homes, every character offers a point of view, resulting in a film that functions as a cultural forum for a diversity of perspectives similar to diversity of the film's audience itself.

But the film's predominant feature is its eroticising of the women's bodies, which in 1971 constituted one of the main attractions of Spanish mainstream cinema. Some scenes exist exclusively for this purpose, such as when some mice invade the pitch and the story is suspended momentarily to present a series of different shots showing the animals scuttling over the players' legs or hiding in their cleavages, at the sight of which one fan exclaims: "If only I were a mouse!" This sexualising gaze is reinforced by some of the supporting male characters, such as the masseur (José Sacristán), who ponders that he will *ponerse morado* (another double entendre, literally meaning "to turn purple", but also suggesting overindulgence) from constantly massaging the players' bodies. Some of the male fans at the matches—such as the peeping Tom who hides in the changing rooms or the men who try to make a peep-hole in the dressing-room wall—serve to express the scopophilic drive, with POV shots that frame the legs and other parts of the young women's bodies, thereby turning the spectator into an accomplice to the voyeurism. Through its commercial cinematic strategies, *Las Ibéricas F.C.* uses football as a manifestation of the social tensions provoked by the modernisation of gender roles, a narrative pretext for a romantic comedy with an ensemble cast, but above all, a spectacle in which women's bodies exist to be gazed at.

LA LIGA NO ES COSA DE HOMBRES

Produced, co-written and directed by Ignacio F. Iquino, *La liga no es cosa de hombres* premièred in Barcelona on 3 April 1972, and would go onto surpass 1 million in box office admissions. The film is set in Rome and tells the story of Julián (Cassen), a clumsy footballer and womaniser who is forced to flee when the club president discovers he has been

Image 6. Julián dressed as Coqui



having an affair with his wife. To make his escape he is forced to disguise himself as a woman and ends up getting into Italy's national women's team thanks to a former lover who is now the team's coach. Iquino's long and successful career reflects his commercial vision of filmmaking and his ability to produce what were generally low-budget films adapted to the context of the time and the tastes of the general public. In the late 1960s, he began to capitalise on the success of Cassen, one of Spain's top comedians at the time, with a series of star vehicles designed to showcase his skills as a performer.

Cassen had already constructed an image parodying the lady's man in *El mujeriego* [The Womaniser] (Francisco Pérez-Dolz, 1963) and *El castigador* [The Lady Killer] (Juan Bosch, 1965). Iquino made use of Cassen in *07 con el 2 delante* [07 with 2 in Front] (Iquino, 1966), *La tía de Carlos en minifalda* [Carlos' Aunt in a Mini-Skirt] (Augusto Fenollar, 1967) and *El terrible de Chicago* (Juan Bosch, 1967), all of which contain markedly erotic elements and employ storylines that involve the protagonist assuming a false identity. *La liga no es cosa de hombres* continues with this formula by combining comical mix-ups (including cross-dressing like *La tía de Carlos en minifalda*) with the attraction of sexualised female bodies.

Image 7. Poster for *La liga no es cosa de hombres*



In this film, the narrative focus is not on the women players but on the man who has infiltrated the team dressed as a woman. Indeed, football here is a mere pretext for the development of an erotic, picaresque story. The first half hour of the film contains no mention of women's football, focusing instead on the protagonist's romantic conquests and his clumsiness on the pitch. In this way, the contrast between his failure as an athlete and his success with women is established from the outset.

Julián's cross-dressing will give him access to private spaces reserved for women, such as lavatories and changing rooms. The disguise serves as a device to make the spectator, who is aware of the deceit, an accomplice in the sexualisation of the players through the protagonist's gaze and touch. The scenes of the training sessions allow Coqui (Julián's female alter ego) to get close to his teammates when they celebrate a goal or to bump into them "accidentally" on the pitch. The players themselves, who barely have any lines in the film, are mere background figures on which the camera lingers to display their bodies, positioning the spectator in the same scopophilic space as the protagonist.

The only sportswoman depicted with any substance is the coach, Colette (Silvia Soler). The first time she appears is in the club office, explaining on the phone that "[women's] football is not a burlesque show; you can have short and shapely legs that can still be strong and muscular." This assertion contrasts with the visual treatment of the women's legs, the most fetishised part of their anatomy. At the same time, Colette's career as an athlete suggests a masculinisation similar to Chelo's in *Las Ibéricas*

F.C., as she is depicted as a woman who is attractive, but who engages in behaviour that constitutes a deviation from domestic femininity. Her husband is a timid, complaisant man who looks after their baby because, as Colette remarks quite unromantically, "in Rome it's cheaper to have a husband than a nanny." Her lack of maternal instinct also recalls the moral dangers that threatened Luisa in Masó's film, although in this case it serves merely as a joke based on an inversion of gender roles.

The sexual ambiguity alluded to in so many media texts on women's football is explicit in the case of Coqui/Julián, as his transformation depends entirely on his use of a wig and mascara, yet his obviously male appearance never seems to arouse the suspicions of the girls on the team. The disguise serves two purposes in the scenes of the training sessions and matches, as in addition to the aforementioned pretext for physical closeness, it also allows Coqui/Julián to go from being the most inept player on the men's team to being the most skilful player on the women's team. This contrast underscores the lack of skill of the women, who on several occasions are depicted playing poorly or committing fouls. The message appears to be that even the worst male footballer is better than any professional women player. This depiction contradicts the message conveyed in the theme song—performed by Cassen himself—that plays in the opening credits and at other moments in the film, with lyrics that suggest that "a lot of guys who think they're football stars could learn a lesson from the women," and that football "is for women, brave and bold, who in only two passes score a goal."[11] Yet the women's dedication to football is never treated as a subject of the film, and their skills on the pitch are never displayed.

Football is thus used in this film more as a commercial strategy, typical of the opportunistic approach of Iquino, who evidently sought to capitalise on a topical issue. This intention is made clear when Colette points out that there is money in women's football now. Yet in reality it serves merely as another setting in which the "racy" plot direction of Cassen's previous films can be repeated once again. It is thus used to reinforce the objectification of women, as reflected in the bedroom and pool scenes (where the female characters are very scantily clad), and on the football pitch. Indeed, the combination of comedy star and eroticism was understood to be the film's main box office draw, as is evident in the promotional poster for the film, where a caricature of Cassen appears beside the curvaceous figure of a female footballer, similar to the aforementioned caricatures in the press and the poster for *Las Ibéricas F.C.*

CONCLUSIONS

In the contemporary context of debates about humour, political correctness and cancel culture, the films and NO-DO newsreels analysed here might seem outrageously outdated, yet some of the prejudices they reinforced about women's football, although in decline, are still evident today. Humour in 1970s Spain operated in collusion with a widespread attitude of derision and ridicule of women's football. Through a mirror effect, fiction films, NO-DO newsreels, cartoons and the press all repeated patterns of humour that operated on two levels: a medical discourse warning that women's football is unnatural and may directly undermine female reproductive functions and the biological differences between the genders; and a technical-cultural discourse that viewed the intrusion of women onto the football pitch as a perversion of the history and rules of the sport, as the women footballers' frivolousness, flirtatiousness and lack of tactical skills hindered their ability to play the game correctly.

The comedic response, complicit with these expressions of biopower, would serve as an instructive and corrective measure, while trivialising the players' performance on the pitch and thus defusing their disruptive potential and liberating influence. This coercive force is especially evident in the NO-DO newsreels, an official vehicle of the

Franco regime, in which the voice-over narration interprets the phenomenon through a prism of ridicule tinted by National Catholic ideology. *Las Ibéricas F.C.* and *La liga no es cosa de hombres* resort to similar tropes, although their commercial objective places them in a different orbit. These are comedy films with an optimism that clashed with the reality of women's football in the early 1970s. Masó's film encourages debate over whether women should be playing football and each of its multiple storylines conveys a different attitude towards the issue. The depiction of the female body (sexual, active, domestic, maternal, womanly) conveys the tensions provoked by the presence of women in sports, and by gender roles in general in the context of Spain's entry into the modern age. Although it reinforces a discourse on the inadequacy of the players, who are presented as sexual objects, frivolous and inept, and at risk of losing their femininity or reproductive ability, the film also introduces alternative discourses that support women's football and ridicule the arguments criticising it. Iquino's film simplifies this debate, seizing on the topic merely as an excuse to show scantily clad bodies on screen. Women's football is thus used in these films as a way of attracting an audience, with the depiction of the advances of women in sport framed in conservative humour and, above all, undermined by an objectifying eroticism that was becoming increasingly common in Spanish mainstream cinema at the time. ■

NOTES

* Article written in the context of a research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation on Spain, football and visual culture during the Franco regime: discourses of class, gender and national construction in cinema, the press and newsreels, 1939-1975 (PID2020-116277GA-I00).

** This study was conducted in the context of the R+D+i project "Cinema and Television in Spain in the Digital Era (2008-2022): New Agents and Spaces for Exchange in the Audiovisual Panorama", a project funded by the State Research Agency (PID2022-140102NB-I00/AEI/10.13039/501100011033)

1 Although the entire NO-DO archives have been analysed to identify depictions of women's football, this article makes reference mostly to those of the late Francoist period (1959-1975).

2 NO-DO 348A (5 September 1949); NO-DO 975B (11 September 1961); NO-DO 1136B (12 October 1964); NO-DO 142B (11 January 1971); NO-DO 1642 (1 July 1974); NO-DO 1664A (2 December 1974).

3 See *Noticias al sprint* (1950); *Prospera en el undo* (1958); *Deren* (1960); *El fútbol femenino ignorado* (1965); *Primer campeonato mundial* (1970).

4 See *Encuentro de fútbol femenino* (1950); *Fútbol modesto* (1955); *Fútbol femenino en el Luis Sitjar* (1960) *En Elviña (La Coruña) se juega* (1962); *Fútbol femenino* (1964); *Fútbol femenino en Bilbao* (1967).

5 See NO-DO 975B (11 September 1961) and NO-DO 1642A (1 July 1974).

6 See NO-DO 1664A (2 December 1974).

7 See tweet by Islàndia RAC1 [@islandiarac1] (24 May 2019).

8 Original lyrics: *"Once corazones que al terreno saltan con moral y decisión* [...] *Once chicas decididas al llegar con el balón hasta el fondo de las mallas en el marco del amor."*

9 Archivo General de la Administración, box 36.04219, file 64950.

10 Archivo General de la Administración, box 36.04219, file 36.05080.

11 Original lyrics: *"así juega la mujer y que aprendan la lección muchos tipos que se creen unos ases del balón* [...] *el fútbol es cosa de chicas, valientes y audaces que en solo dos pases consiguen el gol."*

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FROM RIDICULE TO OBJECTIFICATION: DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN SPANISH NO-DO NEWSREELS AND COMEDY FILMS OF THE 1970S

Abstract

After decades of control over women's sports by the Franco regime's Sección Femenina, Spain's first women's football teams were founded in 1970 with the aim of institutionalising the women's game and establishing the first unofficial championships. However, the entrance of women into such a male-dominated sphere of activity was out of keeping with the heteropatriarchal ideological norms of Francoist society. Exploiting the novelty and controversy of the issue at this time, a number of mainstream cultural products depicted female footballers in deliberately negative ways characterised by ridicule and sexualisation. This article takes a perspective informed by gender studies and humour studies to analyse the circulation of different biological and technical-cultural discourses in Francoist Spain's official newsreels and the comedy films *Las Ibéricas F.C.* (Pedro Masó, 1971) and *La liga no es cosa de hombres* (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1972). The comical discourses of these audiovisual products complemented each other to convey the collective anxiety of a society that felt threatened by teams of women who were advancing relentlessly with a ball at their feet.

Key words

Women's football; *Las Ibéricas F.C.*; *La liga no es cosa de hombres*; NO-DO; Comedy; Gender Studies; Humour Studies; Francoism.

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ENTRE LA MOFA Y LA COSIFICACIÓN: REPRESENTACIONES DEL FÚTBOL FEMENINO EN EL NO-DO Y LAS COMEDIAS DE LOS AÑOS SETENTA

Resumen

Tras décadas de control del deporte femenino bajo la tutela de la Sección Femenina, en 1970, el fútbol femenino se abría paso en España, y se fundaban los primeros equipos formados exclusivamente por mujeres con ánimo de institucionalización y reconocimiento, así como los primeros campeonatos oficiosos. Sin embargo, este salto de las mujeres a un ámbito de clara dominación masculina, no cuadraba con los estándares heteropatriarcales de la sociedad franquista. Por ese motivo, y aprovechando la novedad y controversia del tema en el momento, surgieron varios eventos y productos culturales/comerciales que representaban a las futbolistas de forma nada inocente, mediante la burla y la sexualización. En este artículo vamos a analizar desde los estudios de género y los estudios de humor cómo diferentes discursos biológicos y técnico-culturales circulaban entre los noticiarios NO-DO y las comedias *Las Ibéricas F.C.* (Pedro Masó, 1971) y *La liga no es cosa de hombres* (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1972). De esta forma, los discursos cómicos audio-visuales se complementaron para condensar la ansiedad colectiva de un imaginario social que se veía amenazado por unas mujeres que avanzaban imparables con un balón en sus pies.

Palabras clave

Fútbol femenino; *Las Ibéricas F.C.*; *La liga no es cosa de hombres*; NO-DO; Comedia; Estudios de género; Estudios de humor; Franquismo.

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Article reference

Cordero Hoyo, E,, Gil Vázquez, A. (2024). From Ridicule to Objectification: Depictions of Women's Football in Spanish NO-DO Newsreels and Comedy Films of the 1970s. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 37, 75-92.

Referencia de este artículo

Cordero Hoyo, E,, Gil Vázquez, A. (2024). Entre la mofa y la cosificación: representaciones del fútbol femenino en el NO-DO y las comedias de los años setenta. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 37, 75-92.

recibido/received: 21.06.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 16.10.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

WOMEN AND SPORT IN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES: THE CASE OF *HOME GROUND*

JOAQUÍN MARÍN-MONTÍN
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FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN TELEVISION FICTION ABOUT SPORTS

Since the beginning of the 21st century, representations of women on TV have grown exponentially both in quantity and in terms of the diversity of genres and formats (Lotz, 2006). Female characters in recent series are characterised by a shift from traditional—mostly stereotypical—roles towards new character types and traits, including archetypes traditionally associated with men (Hernández-Carrillo, 2022; Higueras-Ruíz, 2019). Contributing to this change has been the new context of production in the international television industry (Ruiz Muñoz & Pérez Rufí, 2020), with a larger number of women in senior creative positions (López Rodríguez & Raya Bravo, 2021).

At the same time, sport has become an increasingly prominent topic in TV fiction. The rise of digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, AppleTV+ and HBO Max has contributed to the thematic diversification of television content (Evans, 2011), including an increase in the number of fiction series with sports-related topics. Some of these series have included storylines focusing on female characters (Gil-Quintana & Gil-Tevar, 2020), contrasting with the tendency towards male dominance in other media formats, such as sports-related fiction films. Indeed, women have traditionally been neglected on the big screen, relegated to a limited number of supporting roles that are generally subordinate to the male characters (Crosson, 2013; Cummins, 2009; Lieberman 2015; Marín Montín, 2021). There are also very few sports-related films that have explored questions of gender with a focus on women's experiences (Whannel, 2008), or in which female characters are more than mere sex objects for the male gaze in the traditional sense (Caudwell, 2009).

The growth in the number of sports-related TV series about women has coincided with recent initiatives calling for women's sports to be recog-

nised on a par with men's sports (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022). In the last few years, the proliferation of television fiction series about women in sport in different contexts and formats has allowed for the exploration of new issues that emerge when women are the protagonists rather than merely incidental characters (Gavilán, Martínez-Navarro & Ayestarán, 2019). Moreover, the increased presence of women in television fiction has resulted in the construction of more complex and realistic characters (García, 2022). Some series underscore the challenges and hardships that women have to overcome to succeed in the sporting world. Others explore issues such as the gender inequality or sexist behaviour that women in sports are subjected to. However, the plotlines of many of these series still reproduce a pattern associated with men's sports and with a hierarchical perspective that places males above females (Sezen & Çiçekoğlu, 2020).

Television series about sports can be found in a wide range of genres. A significant number of these productions are aimed at young audiences, featuring female protagonists who face all kinds of obstacles to make it to the top in their chosen sports. Examples include the North American series *The Kicks* (Alex Morgan & David Babcock, Amazon Prime Video: 2015-2016), about a young girl who plays football, and *Ride* (Jill Girling & Lori Mather-Welch, YTV: 2016-2017), about a girl at an equestrian academy. Among European productions, *Voetbalmeisjes* (Addy Otto, NPO Zapp: 2016-) is a Dutch series about a football team made up of girls of different ethnic and religious backgrounds who have to cope with sexism. Examples from Asia include the Japanese series *Shogi Meshi* (Nagisa Matsumoto, Fuji TV: 2017), about a professional *shōgi* player who ties her eating choices to her performance in the sport; the Chinese series *The Whirlwind Girl* (Xuan Feng Shao Nu, Ming Xiao Xi, Hunan TV: 2015), about a female martial artist whose path to success is marked by personal hardships, including the loss of her parents; and the South Korean series *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-joo* (Yeokdo Yojeong Kimbokju, Han Hee, MBC: 2016-2017), about a university student who follows in her father's steps to become a champion weightlifter.

One of the most prominent features of these series is the importance they give to the emotions expressed by their young protagonists as members of a group of girls whose insecurities make them more vulnerable (Forteza-Martínez, 2019). Taking more of a feminist perspective, the Spanish series *The Hockey Girls* (Les de l'hoquei, N. Parera, TV3 and Netflix: 2019-2020) tells the story of an amateur girls' roller hockey team whose members have to fight to keep their team alive and demand greater visibility, crucially with the support of the boys' team (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022). There are other fiction series that are more drama-oriented, targeting an older audience and offering a more realistic reconstruction of a sporting world in which women play leading roles. Notable examples of this include the US productions *Hit the Floor* (James LaRosa, VH1: 2013-2018), *Pitch* (Dan Fogelman & Rick Singer, Fox: 2016) and *Spinning Out* (Samantha Stratton, Netflix: 2020): the first tells the story of a group of cheerleaders for a professional men's basketball team and the complex romantic relationships they form with team members; the second focuses on a young baseball pitcher who becomes the first woman to compete in the men's major league; and the third depicts a figure skater who, after suffering a serious injury, has to confront personal

THE PROLIFERATION OF TELEVISION FICTION SERIES ABOUT WOMEN IN SPORT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND FORMATS HAS ALLOWED FOR THE EXPLORATION OF NEW ISSUES THAT EMERGE WHEN WOMEN ARE THE PROTAGONISTS

THERE ARE OTHER FICTION SERIES THAT ARE MORE DRAMA-ORIENTED, TARGETING AN OLDER AUDIENCE AND OFFERING A MORE REALISTIC RECONSTRUCTION OF A SPORTING WORLD IN WHICH WOMEN PLAY LEADING ROLES

and family circumstances that threaten to thwart her goal of becoming an Olympic medallist. Another in this group that is worthy of mention is *The Queen's Gambit* (S. Frank & A. Scott, Netflix: 2020), a US miniseries about an orphan girl who becomes a chess prodigy. What makes this series unique is the way it deconstructs the female stereotype with its depiction of an imperfect heroine who suffers from emotional disorders that lead to drug and alcohol addiction (Menéndez-Menéndez & Fernández-Morales, 2023).

The sitcom genre has also tackled the topic of women in sports. *Back in the Game* (Marc Cullen & Robb Cullen, ABC: 2013) is a series about a former baseball player who, after getting a divorce and changing her life, ends up coaching the school team that her son plays on. Recent television series that have combined comedy and drama include *Glow* (L. Flahive & C. Mensh, Netflix: 2017-2019) and *A League of Their Own* (W. Graham & A. Jacobson, Amazon Prime: 2022-). *Glow* is a series inspired by the television program *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (1986-1989), about the women's wrestling circuit, which offers a critique of the sexist degradation that women of different national, ethnic, racial and gender identities were subject to in those years (Sezen & Çiçekoğlu, 2020; Chow & Laine, 2022). *A League of Their Own* is an adaptation of the film of the same name (Penny Marshall, 1992) about a women's baseball team that competes in the top professional league in the United States during the Second World War. The series explores issues including the prejudices suffered by women due to their race, ethnicity or class, as well as their sexual orientation and gender identity (Stier Adler & Clark, 2023).

In the context outlined above, the main purpose of this article is to analyse the representation of women in sport based on a specific case study: *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), a Norwegian drama series about a female football coach who is hired to coach a team in the men's premiere league. More specifically, this study aims to examine the contributions made by the series to sports-related fiction, to identify the gender issues explored in it, and to consider the gender stereotypes evident in the depiction of the protagonist. The methodology adopted for this research is qualitative, combining a case study with critical discourse analysis. The study sample is comprised of the ten episodes of the series' first season. The findings are organised on the basis of the recurrence of aspects that connect to three key points: the depiction of gender inequality, the protagonist's defiance of stereotypes, and female empowerment in the series.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE COACHES IN FILM AND TV FICTION

The representation of gender in television entertainment generally reproduces normative roles, stereotypes and existing inequalities between men and women (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2021). In the case of television fiction, stories of heroism also include realistic depictions of women fighting against the patriarchal system (García, 2022). These elements have been reflected in certain sports-related film and TV productions that feature a female coach in a leading role. An obvious example of inequality in sport is the predominance of male coaches, who, despite the marked growth of women's sports over the past decade, still vastly outnumber female coaches in both men's and women's sports (DuBose, 2022; Walker & Bopp, 2011). Female coaches are practically non-existent at the elite levels of men's

football, largely due to the lack of opportunities for their advancement in a sport dominated by men (Norman, 2012). Moreover, female coaches face additional obstacles including less recognition for their work, sexual discrimination (López, 2017; Reade, Rodgers y Norman, 2009) and gender-based violence. In addition, women in coaching jobs find it harder to develop professionally and sustain a viable career (Solanas, Hinojosa-Alcalde et al., 2022).

FEMALE COACHES HAVE RARELY BEEN PORTRAYED IN LEADING ROLES IN FILMS OR SERIES

To address these challenges faced by female coaches, the empowerment of women in sport is essential. Currie, Callary & Young (2021) describe one example of empowerment as when female coaches see themselves as participating and competing in a sport that they belong to, overcoming the social restrictions imposed on them. Another example can be found in organisational initiatives aimed at recognising the presence of women in sports, such as the program designed by Nike, in collaboration with Women Win[1] and Gurls Talk,[2] to help increase the number of female coaches through the creation of a network of mentors in order to prevent girls from leaving sports due to a lack of role models (Menéndez, 2020). Similarly, a group of Australian coaches of Muay Thai, a sport traditionally associated with men, created their own training program with a feminist dimension, specifically aimed at women (Nichols, Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2023). In addition, despite the limited opportunities, there are female coaches who have managed to reach elite levels in their chosen sports, such as Katie Allen, the only woman ever to have coached a men's field hockey team in Spain's First Division (Amorós, 2022). In the case of elite football, despite the growing number of female coaches on Spanish First Division women's teams, most aspire to make the leap into men's football (Puig, Tikas & Soria, 2022).

Female coaches have rarely been portrayed in leading roles in films or series. Notable among the few exceptions in the case of film are *Coach* (Bud Townsend, 1978), *Eddie* (Steve Rash, 1996), *Sunset Park* (Steve Gomer, 1996) and *The Mighty Macs* (Tim Chambers, 2009). These productions all portray women who try to take control of their careers and win the respect of the players, while challenging the traditional structures of their chosen sport (Lieberman, 2015). In the case of television fiction, a female coach is depicted in the series *Hockey Girls* with the character Anna, the new coach of the club's girls' division, who tries to develop unique strategies that distinguish her from her predecessor's male-oriented approach, and also calls on the players on the top team in the boys' division to support real equality (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022).

HOME GROUND: A PORTRAIT OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The characters in the series analysed in this article are people who have a direct relationship with professional football (players, coaching staff, management) and an indirect one (the players' families and fans). The team depicted in the series, around which most of the characters' relationships are articulated, is Varg IL, a top-tier team based in the small Norwegian coastal town of Ulsteinvik. Helena Mikkelsen is the main protagonist, occupying a central role in a story that follows her evolution as a coach. After playing football herself until the age of 24 and completing a master's degree at the School of Sport Sciences, Helena starts coaching Trondheims-Ørn, the top women's football team in Norway, leading them to three consecutive national championships and to the semifinals of the European Champions League. She then goes

onto become the first female coach of Varg IL, a men's football club that has recently risen to Norway's Eliteserien.[3]

The issue of gender inequality is made clear from the very beginning of the series, reflected mainly in two ways: the lack of parity between men's and women's football, and the lack of respect given to Helena as a coach. For example, the series' depiction of the current state of Norwegian football reveals the lack of women at the elite level by showing Mikkelsen as the only female present on a football talk show (Image 1). And when she talks about the state of men's football in Norway, her analysis is dismissed by two of the men on the show, who remark that "[...] passion and motivation can take you a long way in women's football, but in the men's game the demands are different [...] for the girls who play women's football it may be more of a social thing, a hobby, motivation is fine to get a spark going" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). In the same episode, her first interactions with the players in the changeroom make it clear that they have little faith in her, doubting her coaching ability and undervaluing her professional achievements. She also has to contend with the hostility of some of Varg IL's more extreme fans,[4] for no other reason than that she is a woman. This hostility includes sexist threats graffitied on her house and her car (Image 2) in an effort to bully her into leaving the club (#1x04: Supporters, Medgangssupportarar, Cecilie Mosli, NRK: 2018). Another example of the lack of respect for Helena is the constantly dismissive attitude of the club owner, who expresses his discontent to the board of directors and seeks to use the team's poor results as an excuse to get rid of

Image 1. Helena Mikkelsen taking part in VG Sporten



her, when in fact the real reason for his dissatisfaction is the fact that she is a woman (#1x09: It Was a Very Good Year, Over streken, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). The undervaluing of her work is made clear when, after she has been fired as coach, she receives an unexpected visit from the club manager and the players, who ask her to continue training the team in secret, to which she responds: "You want me to explain to Michael [the new coach] everything that occurs to me about tactics? And if it goes well, I let him take all the credit, in the hope of getting back the job I'm already doing. Do you think that makes sense?" (#1x10: The Great Escape, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). But the ultimate display of gender inequality identified in the series is the sexual assault committed against Helena during a match by the coach of the opposing team, who provokes her and grabs her by the vagina (#1x05: Fair Play, Stian Kristiansen, NRK: 2018), and even breaks into her house a few days later to harass her further, threatening her to keep quiet about the assault because he is afraid of losing his job (#1x06: No Comment, Ingen Kommentar, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). These various moments in the series reflect Helena's immersion in a reality dominated by men and the patriarchal values associated with it (García, 2022).

Image 2. Offensive graffiti targeting the female coach



HELENA MIKKELSEN AND HER DEFIANCE OF STEREOTYPES

Many of the situations that Helena experiences at different moments in the series relate to traditional gender norms whereby women seek social acceptance by means of both their physical appearance and their behaviour. These are stereotypes associated with femininity, such as physical beauty, vulnerability, motherhood and dependence, which are reflected by other female characters in the series, such as the players' wives. Helena's physical appearance is not stereotypical, as she wears her hair pulled back in a ponytail, uses no make-up and is nearly always shown in a sports training outfit. However, she occasionally abandons her usual style in an effort to conform to traditional gender standards, although this generally makes her uncomfortable. For example, when she goes to a business dinner with the club owner, Bjørn, and manager, Espen, she puts on make-up, lets her hair down and wears a red dress and high heels (Image 3). In this sequence there are also various pieces of dialogue that allude to this stereotype of femininity. Before leaving for the dinner, Helena justifies her attire to her family by explaining: "I have to go have dinner and be charming." Later, when Espen meets her at the restaurant, he tells her: "Concentrate on being polite and sincere; I'm sure you'll charm him." Then, when Bjørn himself sees her, he says: "What a beautiful dress. You should have worn it to the press conference too" (#1x02: Jolly Good, Lads!, Steikje bra, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

Another stereotype present in the series is related to motherhood, as Helena has a 17-year-old daughter, Camilla, who lives with her, although they don't



Image 3. Helena Mikkelsen with Espen greeting the club owner

spend much time together because Helena prioritises her career over her home life. Helena thus challenges the conventional model of what a mother should be. For example, when she arrives home hungry and finds no meal prepared, she asks her daughter flatly: "Don't we have anything for sandwiches?" Camilla replies: "I'm sorry. I forgot to go shopping" (#1x09: It Was a Very Good Year, Over streken, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). Helena is unable to take time out to do things with Camilla and she often makes promises that she ends up breaking. The sudden changes in her job situation as a coach spark a conflict with her daughter, who feels neglected and ends up leaving home. As she explains in the note she leaves behind for her mother: "I feel alone. If we had talked, things would be different" (#1x10: The Great Escape, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

THE DEPICTION OF HELENA IN THE SERIES ALSO CHALLENGES THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE OF DEPENDENCE, AS SHE IS NEITHER ECONOMICALLY NOR EMOTIONALLY RELIANT ON ANYBODY

The depiction of Helena in the series also challenges the female stereotype of dependence, as she is neither economically nor emotionally reliant on anybody. For example, just when the women's team she is coaching is on the verge of qualifying for a major final, Helena decides to leave them in the interests of professional development and makes the jump to elite men's football. Her fierce independence is evident in the first episode, when one of the women's team players says to her: "You can't leave us... we've come so far," to which Helena replies simply: "It's the Eliteserien" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Helena's emotional independence is reflected in her choice not to have any emotional ties that might constrain her. This can be identified in the series, for example, when she deals with the sexual assault without any kind of support (#1x06: No Comment, Ingen Kommentar, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

Contrasting with the stereotype of weakness associated with women, Helena comes across as cold and calculating. She shows strength at different moments of tension throughout the series, such as when she has to negotiate with Varg IL's owner to sign up a player at a decisive mo-

ment to keep the team from dropping from the top tier (Image 4). In this situation, she maintains her self-confidence and refuses to be pushed around, despite the owner's lack of respect for her when he tells her: "You are insolent, selfish and arrogant... I'm not going to bother investing in you" (#1x07: Deadline Day, Yngvild Sve Flikke, NRK: 2018). All these examples reflect how the depiction of the protagonist in this series abandons traditional models of femininity to offer a picture closer to the contemporary social reality (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022).

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN TELEVISION FICTION ABOUT SPORTS

Another element explored in *Home Ground* is related to female empowerment, which is reflected by the protagonist in various situations. For example, Helena seizes the chance to coach at the elite level of men's football and advance in her career, drawing on her professional experience in the sport. This is evident in a conversation she has with the club manager, when she tells him: "I've been doing this for fifteen years... nobody wants this... more than I do" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Much later in the series when she is fired as Varg IL's coach, she is offered another opportunity to coach Norway's under-21 women's team because of her iconic status as a coach in the country (#1x10: The Great Escape, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). Her empowerment is also evident in her ability to take control of her own career; for example, when she is initially offered the job of assistant coach at Varg IL, she rejects the offer, telling the manager: "I don't want to be second coach; I want to be first" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). And in the same episode, when she introduces herself to the team in the changeroom (Image 5), she highlights her own agency in her description of her career: "I was a player, but at the age of twenty-four, I decided to become a coach" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

HELENA'S LEADERSHIP OF THE TEAM REPRESENTS ANOTHER KEY ELEMENT OF HER EMPOWERMENT, EARNING HER THE RESPECT OF THE COMMUNITY IN A MALE-DOMINATED ENVIRONMENT

Image 4. The coach meets with the club owner





Image 5. Helena Mikkelsen in the Varg IL changeroom

Helena's leadership of the team represents another key element of her empowerment, earning her the respect of the community in a male-dominated environment. Particularly notable in her interactions with the players are her aggressive pep talks, especially during the matches, which ultimately influence the team's performance: "Let's go, boys! Let's give them a beating. Go for it tooth and nail. This match isn't going to be won by the best players, but by the team that can put aside all their bullshit" (#1x05: Fair Play, Stian Kristiansen, NRK: 2018). Meanwhile, Varg IL's fans, who initially reject Helena, end up praising her work, as reflected in their chants from the stands: "Nobody can beat our girl, our girl, our girl, nobody can beat our girl" (#1x09: It Was a Very Good Year, Over streken, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

The media coverage of Helena in the series is marked by a predominantly sensationalist tone, although occasionally it is more strictly informative, referring to issues related specifically to the sport. For example, when she is introduced at her first press conference (Image 6 and Image 7), some media outlets react positively: "You're making history. You're the first female coach in the Eliteserien… You're a pioneer and a great role model for sportswomen" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

Another aspect related to women's empowerment in the series is Helena's use of unique strategies that break with the traditional male approach to football. A glimpse of this is offered when Helena appears on a TV show explaining her work method, which is based on encouraging drive, motivation and passion, elements that led to her success as a coach of elite women's football (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Another example is when Helena applies her method to the men's team, as revealed in the following dialogue: "We're doing everything really well. Don't lose your concentration. We can do this" (#1x04:



Image 6. Live press conference



Image 7. Helena Mikkelsen faces the media

Supporters, Medgangssupportarar, Cecilie Mosli, NRK: 2018). These various aspects associated with the empowerment of the female coach reveal how Helena manages to overcome the obstacles inherent to a predominantly male environment (Currie, Callary & Young, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of the representation of women in sport in *Home Ground* has shown that its realistic depiction of a female coach in the world of men's professional football is the most prominent aspect of the series. The inclusion of various real-life elements serves to enhance the verisimilitude of the series' treatment of its sport-related subject. A notable example is the presence of the celebrated Norwegian former footballer John Carew in the role of Michael, who works with Helena as assistant coach. In addition, the depiction of the Eliteserien involves the use of the name and official image of Norway's real premier league, and the appearance of real teams such as Rosenborg and Aalesunds. Another element that enhances the realism of the series is the recurring presence of the Lerkendal Stadion, Norway's most emblematic football stadium, as well as the presence of real-world media outlets such as Norway's public television broadcaster, NRK, and the sensationalist tabloid VG.

The main sports-related issue explored in *Home Ground* is the upheaval of the traditional structures of men's football provoked by the arrival of a female coach. In the series, the rupture of the traditional all-male model in the sport at the elite level (Norman, 2012) unsettles various stakeholders, including managers, fans, the media and the players. Of the various gender-related issues identified in the series, gender inequality constitutes the most significant challenge that Helena Mikkelsen has to confront. This is reflected in the shortage of opportunities for a female coach to develop professionally and gain recognition in keeping with her achievements, as pointed out by García (2022) and Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva (2022). At the same time, the extreme level of contempt for women is identifiable in the harassment suffered by Helena, which is depicted explicitly in the series, as she is the victim of gender-based violence used as a form of misogynistic intimidation intended to pressure her to give up her job. The analysis of the gender stereotypes represented by the protagonist has revealed that Helena deconstructs normative roles and disrupts the traditionally established binary order for men and women. Her defiance of stereotypes thus contrasts with the tendency identified by Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay (2021). Related to this point is the break with the classical female hero stereotype in film and television fiction, as described by Menéndez-Menéndez

& Fernández Morales (2023), with the depiction of a strong, independent woman who ultimately achieves success. Moreover, female empowerment constitutes a key component of the stereotype represented by Mikkelsen. The series thus constructs a world in which a woman is able to enter the elite level of men's football as a coach, which in reality would be highly unusual (DuBose, 2022; Walker & Bopp 2011). Another dimension of empowerment associated with Helena is related to how she consciously chooses every step she takes in her career, successfully overcoming the social obstacles placed in her way, in keeping with the findings of Currie, Callary & Young (2021). This study has thus shown how, although women continue to be under-represented in television series, *Home Ground* contributes to closing the gender gap in professional sports through the visibility it gives to a woman in a leadership position. ■

NOTES

1 For more information on Women Win, visit their website ("Women Win", n. d.).
2 For more information on *Gurls Talk*, visit their website ("Gurls Talk", 2023).
3 The top-tier league in Norwegian football.
4 Fans are represented exclusively by men in the series.

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WOMEN AND SPORT IN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES: THE CASE OF *HOME GROUND*

Abstract

This article analyses the representation of women in sport in contemporary international TV fiction, based on a case study of the Norwegian series *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), about a woman working as a coach at the top level of men's professional football. The study also aims to examine the specific contributions the series makes to sports-related fiction, to identify the gender issues explored in it, and to consider the gender stereotypes evident in the depiction of the protagonist. The methodology used combines a case study with critical discourse analysis, taking the first season of the series as the study sample. The findings reflect the unexpected changes to the traditional structures of men's professional football resulting from the entry of a woman into this male-dominated world. The gender inequality faced by the protagonist, in a context of limited opportunities for her professional development, is also an important issue in the series. Another notable element identified is the defiance of traditional gender stereotypes, as the coach depicted in the series challenges traditional norms for women. Finally, female empowerment is reflected in the visibility given to a woman in a leadership position in a context characterised by male dominance.

Key words

Home Ground; Television fiction; Series; Women; Sport; Gender.

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MUJER Y DEPORTE EN LA FICCIÓN TELEVISIVA SERIADA. EL CASO DE *HOME GROUND*

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la representación de la mujer en el deporte, a través de la ficción televisiva contemporánea internacional y, en concreto, a partir del caso específico de la serie noruega *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), cuya protagonista es una entrenadora de fútbol que trabaja en la alta competición masculina. Asimismo, el estudio busca examinar qué rasgos propios aporta la serie a la temática deportiva, identificar qué cuestiones de género aparecen y considerar qué estereotipo de género representa la protagonista en la ficción. La metodología utilizada combina el estudio de caso con el análisis crítico del discurso, siendo la muestra analizada la primera temporada de la serie. Los resultados indican cómo la llegada de una mujer al entorno del fútbol profesional masculino provoca cambios inesperados en sus estructuras tradicionales. La desigualdad de género, a la que se enfrenta la protagonista, en un ámbito de escasas oportunidades para acceder profesionalmente, es otro componente relevante en la serie. La resistencia a los estereotipos tradicionales de género constituye otro hallazgo destacado, ya que la entrenadora quiebra el modelo tradicional asociado a la mujer. Finalmente, el empoderamiento femenino permite visibilizar a la mujer en posición de liderazgo dentro de un contexto caracterizado por un predominio masculino.

Palabras clave

Home Ground; Ficción televisiva; Series; Mujer; Deporte; Género.

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Article reference

Marín-Montín, J., Bianchi, P. (2024). Women and Sport in Television Fiction Series: The Case of *Home Ground*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 93-108.

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Referencia de este artículo

Marín-Montín, J., Bianchi, P. (2024). Mujer y deporte en la ficción televisiva seriada. El caso de *Home Ground*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 93-108.

recibido/received: 30.05.2023 | *aceptado/accepted:* 22.11.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

DIALOGUE

RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT

A Conversation With

NATALIA ARROYO

RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT:
A CONVERSATION WITH NATALIA ARROYO

VIOLETA KOVACSICS
MANUEL GARIN

In the iconography of football, images of euphoria coexist with those of defeat; those of celebration with those of loss; the image of the goal with that of the save. Every image has its opposite. One of football's most painful images is that of the injury, whether caused by an opponent during a match or as a result of an accident during training. Such an image determined a crucial moment in Natalia Arroyo's history. After playing in the lower divisions for FC Barcelona and on Real Club Deportivo Espanyol's first team, her career as a professional footballer was cut short by injury in 2008. One career ended, but very soon another began, as a journalist.

Arroyo is a unique figure in the world of football: once a player and then a journalist, she is now head coach for the Real Sociedad women's team. She has also previously coached the Catalonia region's women's team. These multiple careers have given her a comprehensive understanding of the world of women's sport, as she has had the chance to observe it both from within and from without. After studying audiovisual communication at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Arroyo worked for several years as a journalist for media outlets including the newspaper *Diari Ara*, making her one of the leading authorities on women's football and its relationship with images. Arroyo made herself available for this interview at the beginning of Real Sociedad's pre-season, finding time in her working schedule to provide in-depth answers to the questions we asked her.

This interview was conducted on Thursday, 20 July 2023, via a video call between Donostia and Barcelona. This was within days of the commencement in Australia and New Zealand of the World Cup, which the Spanish women's team would end up winning. What happened on

the dais at the medal ceremony for that title, and subsequently in press conferences and communiques, effectively confirmed the truth of a whole range of protests that Spanish female footballers have been making more or less directly now for years (or even decades). The interview with Arroyo presented here took place before these events, so obviously there is no reference to them. Nevertheless, many of Arroyo's comments reflect the debates that have intensified in response to the actions of the former President of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales. We believe this makes her observations all the more interesting, given that they are not a reaction to the current media attention but the product of a thoughtful perspective, developed over many years, that connects past and present in an extraordinarily lucid way.

In 2022, Columna published Arroyo's book *Dones de futbol*, which outlines the history of football played by women. The book begins by constructing a narrative based on the notion of the pioneer, a term that has been attributed to women footballers for many years, given that football played by women always seemed to be in its first stages (not due to a lack of success or audience, as Jean Williams [2007: 111] has shown, but due to prohibitions imposed by men). It is a term that has even been attributed to Arroyo herself, both on the pitch and off it as a journalist, and it serves as an excellent example of the aforementioned relationship between past and present (historical problems and new horizons). Both in her book and throughout this interview, Arroyo explains how this history has been changing, so that thanks to those very same pioneers, victories both small and large have been achieved in terms of working conditions in the sport, but also in terms of the public sphere and the media, through new images and new ways of relating to the image. It is a battle and a shared desire that Arroyo is passing onto the next generation through her passion for the game. ■

What type of films or audiovisual products do you think had a major impact on your way of understanding and experiencing sport before you knew you would become a footballer?

I have a hard time coming up with films. Instead, I think of series like *Captain Tusbasa* (TV Tokyo, 1983-1986). On the other hand, in my professional experience, the really important influence was the sports broadcasts. I do remember watching channels like TV3 or any channel that presented sports. I was especially interested in football because it was also broadcast free to air. For example, I recall the broadcasts of the *Barça* (FC Barcelona) matches that featured the image of Jordi Culé (a caricaturesque cartoon character representing a Barcelona fan) and that the commentating was a lot of fun. As a spectator, I watched on two levels, corresponding to my two professional sides: first, I tried to imitate some of the players' technical plays, and second, I tried to imitate what the pitch-side reporters were doing. This extended to other sports broadcasts, like the Barcelona Open and French Open tennis tournaments, with Carlos Moyá or Sergi Bruguera, and the handball broadcasts in the days of Enric Masip and Andréi Xepkin. I spent the whole weekend watching sports. As for films, it wasn't until I was an adult that I first became aware of some titles that conveyed a really negative image of women in sport.

Was there a change in your relationship with images of sport when you began working as a coach? In other words, what are the most substantial differences you find between the broadcasts of the matches for the general public and the images you use professionally to work on technical or tactical issues?

There are differences. The standard broadcasts of men's professional football are the sports broadcasts with the most resources. For example, they have cameras that can move at different speeds around the pitch, and drones and other devices that provide a really complete view of the match. The company Mediapro, for example, has a tactical camera system set up in the stadium that can capture an amazing 360-degree image, with a level of tracking that can offer a coach's view, which is not the same as the view of a spectator who is watching the match at home and wants just the opposite, closer shots, more detail. That's why for the broadcasts of the big matches they use a movie camera that can zoom in on the details. This is totally different from what has always been used in women's sports, where for a long time the broadcasts of a sport like football, with its huge field and so many people running around (unlike a pavilion or a straight line like you have in swimming), have relied on only three or four cameras. As a coach, the footage of women's football that I was using before I worked for a first division team, which is where I have the privilege to be working now, was TV broadcast footage. TV broadcasts are often used as a tactical support because there aren't enough resources to send an analyst to other stadiums. The objective would be to stop using the TV footage because they're different communication and visual styles, but if the resources are limited you have to develop a different way of looking at the same images; the view is the same, but it offers different perspectives.

For player motivation, do you use live action footage?

We use footage most of all for tactical purposes: video clips that we've been able to get of the opposing team and sequences of our own matches to be able to correct mistakes or go over combination plays. We do the same with the footage we record every day at the training sessions, whether with ordinary cameras on tripods (depending on the pitch where we're training) or with 360-degree technology that takes a more oval recording. That type of image does have a use in day-to-day training, at different times in the week and with different focuses. On the other hand, I haven't used motivational images in recent seasons, whe-

ther based on films or on photographs that review what we've done during the year. With the Spanish selection, for example, I have used them, also on the request of the players: I remember one season when two of the captains wanted to do a montage, and they asked for my permission and in the end we worked on it together. I think they have an impact, but sometimes it can be excessive; it's important not to overwhelm them. These days, my use of video is more technical, based more on tactics. As I have a team with different language levels, I know that asking them to think about a match by talking to them alone doesn't work as well as supporting the talk with all the technology I have at my disposal. There is always a screen behind my messaging: sometimes I use something more organised in PowerPoint form, going slide by slide, but other times I prefer to do it in a bit more of a raw way so that I can monitor the energy the players have, and still other times I simply use the traditional whiteboard with magnets. I change it up to avoid the coldness that digital technology can have these days. Felt tip pens, whiteboards and flash cards keep things from getting too technological and alienating the players. I'm going back to notebooks and paper instead of using a digital notepad. You've caught me in a bit of a technological crisis [laughs].

There is obviously a generational difference with some of your players. What changes do you see to the type of audiovisual technology they use today? For example, do you think their viewing is more fragmented, like in the typical videos of highlights?

I'm wrestling with this because in fact I have a pretty young team, as most of the players were born after the year 2000. They're young, you see them with their phones every day, and we always have the dilemma of whether we should make everything shorter, get to the point more quickly, because sometimes their attention span gives out. I learned this in the days when I was working for the newspaper *Diari Ara*: they say that people do a lot of skim reading, or they only read the headlines. But I think that right now everyone is thinking that maybe it isn't too much for people, that maybe we've crossed the line a bit and people actually want fuller, longer and more detailed texts, because they get tired of the superficiality of everything being so fragmented. Just today, the talk we had [on the Real Sociedad training grounds] was about the platforms that we're going to use so that the players have all the resources on hand throughout the season: from accessing the schedule for the week to playing back any videos we've worked on as a reminder. One of the changes we've introduced this year is that everything will be more optimised for mobile phones, which is the main device they view things on. Generally speaking, I would say that the players use technology a lot, but generally in a fragmented rather than an organised way. That's why it is important to find ways of connecting the materials we offer them when they're going to view them on their own. Sometimes it's hard to get them to focus on reviewing plays where not much seems to happen; in those cases, I do think it is more effective to watch the videos with them, together. If you show them the videos more as part of a conversation, you do capture their attention for as long as you want. But on their own they need a lot of action, as if it was the first episode of a series on Netflix, where if there aren't five romantic encounters, three deaths and two explosions it's a waste of time [laughs]. Obviously, I'm generalising; there's a lot of variety and football demands variety. Sometimes it demands something really light so that they can view it when they feel like it, and other times I do think they like to be guided, to follow a story. Because otherwise all this content with everything so fast, flashing past in ten seconds, with the audio at full volume and Spotify too, it doesn't work... Again, it's the technological crisis we were talking about before, getting the players to understand that there are certain recordings

that still have to be that way, and that they aren't outdated. Football matches still last ninety minutes. I don't think it's necessary to replay the match from beginning to end, all together, like they used to do with me. These days you choose and you edit, you review the plays that are interesting and you complement them with slides, spotlights, footage from training, and that's how you prepare it.

How do you address issues of self-representation and media presence? We are emerging from a paradigm of objectification or sexualisation of the bodies of sportswomen, which is changing. Do you work in any way on the use of social media?
I feel that the younger generations have naturalised this issue. My generation dealt with these changes with difficulties and by overdoing it: we exposed ourselves when we started using social media, sometimes too much. These days, as female footballers and sportswomen have a much clearer professional future, as they know that if they take the right steps, that professional future could become a reality, they take conscious control of their social media use. It's a control that comes from the players themselves, from their ability to understand that the "social media" tool is almost more useful for professional development than it is for interacting. The communication department at Real Sociedad does give them guidance, so that they're aware of what things are not in keeping with the image of a player for this club (supporting them with common sense), but I also see them getting plenty of guidance from their agents. The trial-error system that others used before has made them more aware of the image they have. And they know that they can work for advertising brands, which represents an important source of income or of cachet for them.

In terms of the question of objectification, they choose it freely. They choose it based on a pride in their own bodies, which is a very American thing. In the United States, the girls have no qualms about appearing on magazine covers showing off a very developed body: if I'm a cyclist, I show my legs; if I'm a swimmer, I show my muscles. I think in Europe and in Spain that it's been much harder for us to associate female athletes with this power of the body. The new generations know that part of what they do in their profession gives them a body that is viewed very positively by society and that is really normalised for them: I show what I want to show; I roll up my pants if I want to, and I choose the photo that shows off the body that this sport has given me. The biggest victory is that *they* choose what they want to show, in terms of both their bodies and their private lives. From my point of view, this reflects a command, a control and an empowerment very much in keeping with the new generations: they dare to say things that previous generations found it very hard to do. The same is true of sexual orientation: they've broken a whole range of taboos and barriers. Before, you had to decide whether to publicly declare non-normative sexuality or not; now, in most cases, what they want to declare is understood based on what they post or don't post. Although sometimes we think they're slaves to social media, I think they handle their time pretty well and they have more control than it might seem.

Non-heteronormative relationships continue to be a very strong taboo in men's football. On the other hand, in women's football, they are completely naturalised. What do you think is the reason for this difference?
I find that a complex question to answer; let me see if I can put my ideas in order. In the context of my experience, in sport or major sports, everything that is given priority is founded on male standards. As much as we are moving towards greater gender openness, in sport we're stuck in the binary. The rules of competitive sport, of win or lose, where you have to have certain athletic abilities, have led us to think that you need to be strong, aggressive, almost cruel to the person opposite you. It is a set of traditionally male quali-

ties that have connected with one type of woman more than others. I have always been interested in these kinds of questions. How could we rethink sport so that its codes reflect more female qualities? Why is it that the sports where homosexuality has been able to be expressed publicly are the more artistic, more supposedly feminine ones?
There are a lot of studies that have identified that many girls during childhood and adolescence don't feel comfortable with the win-or-lose philosophy, that they want to do other things, collective things, with a different kind of scoring that is not about beating an opponent. I think that this does separate people and it may then lead to a specific sexual orientation (or not). Obviously, I'm not going to get into questions about gender construction, because that is a very complex debate. But I have often reflected on why women's football has an apparently higher percentage of gay people than other social contexts. Homosexuality seems much more normalised among women who play sport: it is normalised for them that anyone can be anyone and be with anyone. I think that socially too it should be becoming normalised, as sport begins to abandon that traditional view where success is associated with winning, with being the most aggressive or the strongest. As long as we continue to associate success with those kinds of qualities, it will be hard for men to think that *being a man* can mean being really free in your sexual orientation, because of all the codes surrounding sport. Sport should be simply another vehicle of society, and not a vehicle for the expression of masculinity based on strength or individual success. I don't think I've answered the question [laughs].

One very positive aspect that is very noticeable at a women's football match is that there is much less distance between the players and the fans, more closeness in the sense that the status barrier between elite athletes and the people is not so visible. Do you think that has to do with questions of money or media coverage? Could women's sport represent a different, less elitist model?
For me it all comes down to money, like the differences in pay, when one group gets paid more than the rest and that gives them the capacity to be closer or more isolated. Although this could be extrapolated to other areas; for example, right now we are in the middle of an electoral campaign [for the Spanish general elections of 2023], and when people ask the politicians, they don't know the cost of a tub of yoghurt, a kilo of squash, a month's rent or a ride on public transport. Sportswomen lead everyday lives very similar to most people in the street: they don't have luxury cars, they might even take the bus, and when they travel they don't go in first class, much less on a private jet. Under those financial conditions, women players know that they can't retire after a good twelve years in the sport, so they combine it with studies, so that when they retire from the sport they can take up another profession. This probably brings you closer to a normal person, someone who isn't just a successful football star.

I don't know where the transformation of women's sport will take us, as in some cases it will become elite, with big salaries and a need for protection. I'm thinking, for example of Alexia Putellas: if every time she has gone to the beach this summer she has had five *paparazzi* around her, I don't know how much she's going to have to "bunker down", or whether she'll be able to keep up that closeness that is of course a really nice thing to have. There are a lot of cases of sportswomen who understand that that's where their strength lies, in not isolating themselves from the people, in understanding that sport is the fans, the kids and the families who follow you and look up to you, because if you get mad at a match and don't sign an autograph, what kind of athlete are you really? I think that in this respect women players, perhaps due to a lack of role models, still feel a sense of responsibility. I don't know whether we're going

to maintain it when the financial barrier goes up. But I do notice their awareness of their status as role models, and that they don't want to be distant role models; they want to make the girls happy. However, there can also be cases where people get confused, stepping over the line, because they don't know how to recognise when they're invading a *famous* person's privacy. Perhaps there will soon be major sportswomen who will have to start protecting themselves a little because that closeness will start to have a negative impact on their private lives. But I still see a different awareness, without so much separation between the pitch and the stands, with a different kind of audience because the sport they watch and enjoy has more intimacy, more sportsmanship, and that makes the player want to stop and express her gratitude. Women in sport are still very grateful for this, while men in sport have normalised it to the point that it doesn't excite them so much anymore.

When you mention Alexia Putellas, it brings to our minds a very iconic image of her: the moment when she is celebrating at Camp Nou stadium, and a fan passes her a drum that she starts playing on. The history of football is filled with iconic images, both technical feats and others that have nothing to do with the game, which construct the history of the sport. What images are essential for you in the case of women's football?

Obviously, a photo or a video doesn't make an athlete, but they do contribute. When I was working for *Diari Ara*, when there was a big sports victory that made the front pages and was featured in the TV news, like a gold at the Olympics, we always wondered what effect that image would have. Are there more women swimmers because there is a Mireia Belmonte? Are more people interested in synchronised swimming because suddenly they've discovered a sport that didn't receive any media coverage in the past four years? The answer is almost always yes, at least at the level of coaching licences, as the evidence shows in the case of swimming. So, visibility and presence in traditional media and social media is essential. For many years, shows with big audiences like *Deportes Cuatro* usually only talked about women's sport when there were conflicts or controversies. If the only thing about women's football that gets media coverage is that we're fighting over the contract, that we're on strike, or that the Spanish Football Federation is fed up with the CSD [Spain's National Sports Council] or with Liga F [the professional league for women's football], that creates a negative image. On the other hand, if you're seeing games, goals and sport, that creates a different image, a positive one. I remember that a friend of mine created a YouTube channel where he posted images of international women's football, at a time when there was no access at all: in 2013, in the final for the Copa de la Reina [a national women's football tournament], Alexia Putellas scored a goal, and he posted it on YouTube and it got more than a million views. That goal was a unique moment. Finally, the press is able to recognise these kinds of images. They show goals and great plays and not things like "the goalkeeper is fat and can't save anything" or "a great goal because of an error by a player who made a very bad mistake." I think that now there is a good enough level and reporters have the ability or the sensitivity to choose.

Obviously, there are also images that have had an impact on whole generations, like Brandi Chastain's celebration at the World Cup in the United States in 1999, which I think is one of the 100 most important images in the history of sport. She wrote a book titled *It's Not About the Bra* (2005). Again, in this sense the Americans have no inhibitions: with all the excitement of winning a World Cup in front of 90,000 people, she slides to her knees on the grass and takes off her shirt with no qualms. These are powerful iconic moments that travel around the world. Like Alexia's celebration, similar to Lionel Messi's at Camp Nou... They are images that the media replay so often that in the

end they become icons of the sport. The one of Chastain is one of the images that have had the biggest impact on me, but that penalty shoot-out had other great moments too. Any of Megan Rapinoe's celebrations at the World Cup as well. The problem is the images that we haven't been able to see, what we haven't heard about, what hasn't reached us because we haven't been told, and that is sad. But this image that did reach us has been able to last for nearly 25 years. I think that these kinds of images can't be manufactured. They have to happen spontaneously, with the good fortune that a camera is there at that moment taking the picture. Today, social media platforms allow their dissemination without depending on the editor of a newspaper or some director of a TV network with an outdated mentality; it depends on us, with the ability to retweet it and coordinate it. What is a shame is all the undoubtedly amazing images that haven't reached us because the system prevented them from being seen.

Sport is like other fields of activity in that it has certain visual motifs or shared, recurrent forms of representation in countless images that convey particular messages. What for you would be the most important visual motifs in the world of football? Do you think that football played by women is changing those motifs in some way?
When I was working for the newspaper, when we had to choose the photo that would accompany a football article, the photographers nearly always chose celebrations. Obviously, in a sport that doesn't have very high scores, goals are extremely important, along with the celebrations of them. In fact, many of the examples of what we were talking about before are celebrations or victories. The images of celebrations give rise to imitations: there are boys and girls who repeat or imitate the gestures of their role models when they play football. Scoring a goal is one of those visual motifs; another is the coin toss, with the referees and the team captains; or the players' huddle and the coach's pep talk, with or without shouting. More recently, in video images, increasing importance is being given to fouls: from excessive somersaults to foul itself to show whether the player has suffered a lot of harm or not, or even the moment when a player helps their opponent up off the ground. There are other sports that have been better at highlighting that kind of sportsmanship, that respect for the refereeing. I think that in football, fouls are still associated more with protesting than with apologising, with confronting the referee instead of worrying about the person lying on the ground in pain. Fouls could become a key factor for thinking about the kind of sport we want: a sport that is all about faking and protesting, or a sport that is about helping the players who fell back up to their feet.

From a coach's perspective, what motifs do you think are most important?
I think that this is something that is being rediscovered now, precisely because people are thinking about how the new generations watch sports today, and especially sports with long matches like football. A match lasts nearly two hours. How many people are still capable of watching it all in one sitting and how many people do we need to engage in a different way? Between matches, what information do fans want? The normal routine? The training was on schedule, nobody has been injured, nobody is at risk of being benched... It's sort of superfluous information. If the clubs don't offer different content, revealing everything that goes on inside them, I think it will affect their reputation, because a lot happens from one Sunday to the next. We're beginning to reveal all these things, with Amazon documentaries (like the Joanna Pardos series *Alexia, Labor Omnia Vincit*, released in 2022), or the Netflix docuseries about the US team, *Under Pressure: The U.S. Women's World Cup Team* (Rebecca Gitlitz, 2023). As a coach, I think we have to be open to it, even if the camera makes us uncomfortable. There are moments when you want the team to be relaxed, and

of course the camera bothers them, but we need to normalise what goes on between matches. At present, there aren't many examples.

The best documentaries, or the ones that have had the most impact on me, are the American ones, and that's a shame because they come with a particular kind of mentality and discourse: sometimes I ask the people in the US that I'm in touch with, are all of them born as Al Pacino? [laughs]. Do they all have the ability to make a speech in front of who knows how many people without getting nervous? Here in Europe, my impression is that we're more modest. At Real Sociedad we don't find that everything that portrays the day-to-day happenings inside the club generates much interest. In my context, for example, I get asked about the day-to-day stuff, because they have no idea what it's like to arrive at the stadium two hours beforehand, or to check in together at a hotel, or the talks with the players. Probably in the media-centred world in which we live, we're going to have to open up and there won't be much privacy, but the results could be interesting. Maybe women's football could take the step before men's football in certain things that the boys aren't bold enough to do, such as the microphone that female coaches carry, or the interviews at half time. In the United States, they did an experiment where the assistant coach would provide continuous commentary on the match. These are new formulas to try to engage new audiences. I don't know whether we have to be experimental or wait for the ones who have theoretically always led the way to be experimental. It's hard, but I think it's a good challenge to attract attention outside the traditional format and the ninety minutes.

Taking into account your work as a communicator and a journalist for various media outlets, what are your points of reference? In your case, you worked primarily as a tactical analyst.

As a player and as a reporter I haven't followed a very clear path: I've taken ideas from a wide variety of sources. I have done it all very much my own way. In fact, when I was starting out as a reporter, in theory I didn't have to do tactical analysis because my job was as a pitch-side commentator. What happened was that I didn't do exactly what is expected of a standard pitch-side commentator, perhaps because I didn't know what that was. Do I only have to comment on whether there is a big crowd or not? Or on whether the coach gets up off the bench? I didn't know. So suddenly I would say: "did you see that last play?" And I had the good fortune of being with people who were able to recognise that I was better at that. Only over time have I realised the influence that certain people have had on me: that first coach who did something I liked, or Pere Escobar's broadcasts on TV3. But I didn't study them in depth. I've been very haphazard in that sense. I didn't have any famous female analysts as role models, but I discovered them later, people like Julia Luna. I didn't want to be the first or to do it like others had. Now I do see people who maybe have paid attention to my style, and it even startles me, because I was just doing what I felt comfortable doing, talking about what I wanted to talk about, or even thinking about what could be done differently: what I didn't want to do, what I didn't want to be commenting on. On a journalistic level, maybe I only had one mission: to avoid saying certain things like "the girls", or "*Barça*'s women's team". I've been very self-aware in terms of this use of language or vocabulary, and also in terms of certain types of messaging: not being just about drama, not being just about tragedy, but being about results and sport... talking from a sporting perspective.

On that point, what do you think of the term "women's football"?

When I did the book *Dones de futbol* [Women of Football] (2022), one of the things I fought for was that the subject was not women's football, but football played by women. That was a battle that I used to have constantly with the different as-

sistant managers and editors at the newspaper: if I put "a goal by Alexia gives *Barça* the win", they would say to me "which *Barça?*" Well, the fact is that Alexia only plays on one Barça team, so there's no need to say "*Barça* women's team". I'd hoped by now that we'd be rid of this excessive sensitivity, but no, we have to keep fighting for our rights. The main problem is that nobody talks about "men's football"; the women are the only ones who get the extra word, as if sport *per se* was only played by men. If we could normalise the use of the term "men's sports", I think that would be fantastic. But when "women's" is used as if to say that football played by women is less than footbaⅼl, it drives me mad. That's when my personality would come out a bit... I was younger, and I would fight with the editors on the newspaper until I realised they might just kick me out [laughs]. Yes, I've been obsessed with it, it's a little cause I have, although I'm not the most radical person. But I think there are certain things that are changing and being normalised.

To conclude, mixed teams are a recurring and controversial question in discussions of gender parity and media representation. Although the notion of gender itself is extremely complex, in other professional contexts men and women work together on the same teams. However, in sport, there is often a very marked segregation of male and female genders, with different competitive categories (hormone levels to regulate or classify players, etc.). On the level of representation and audiences, do you think this has consequences? For example, do you foresee mixed football competitions at the elite level, where instead of separating genders, men and women are combined and playing together?

I think it's far into the future. In some things, sport can be a pioneer, because it can break new ground and it is a vehicle for making certain things visible, but most of the time it's a few steps behind other fields. And society... Look at the debate we're having right now about who will win or lose the elections. We're at a moment when it seems we're going so far backwards that it seems futuristic to me, when on top of it all there are so many conflicts and battles that have to do... with neckties ... for lack of a better example. As we're still operating like that, the question of mixed teams seems to me like science fiction, or football fiction. Having said that, I think it's a very relevant debate for ensuring that in the separation that we currently have, the differences that exist are experienced naturally, because on the physical level above all there are differences, in the sense that there are spectators who may enjoy a sport because it's fast-paced or not, and they respond to the stimuli that they're used to. In mixed sport, there would be something very positive to explore, that would no doubt eliminate some of the things that frustrate the boys and the girls in the sport. There are still debates today over whether the goalkeeper should be smaller in football played by women. Perhaps those debates would disappear if we mixed them up. On a mixed team, if I'm not such a strong striker I pass it to you and you shoot, but I can do something else that maybe you can't. We support one another instead of trying to prove who is better. We're still operating on that level, so it might well be a great solution, but I think it is a step that will come a long way after a series of things that society has to sort out first, beginning with whether you can change the information on your ID card, the right to get married, or which lavatory I should use if there are two little drawings representing genders. We still have a long way to go.

Given how things are now, in some cases it will seem like a problem, because suddenly there will be an athlete in circumstances that will give them a big advantage over the rest. We have to keep discovering this; there have to be a few first times. If we go back to the origins of football, there have been a lot of things that were forbidden, and it was necessary to fight to make them possi-

ble, beginning with having a competition or having certain minimum standards, or not playing for 35 minutes on a half-sized pitch. It's the evolution from imposing to eliminating restrictions. For example, we had a player in the women's first division, Barbra Banda, who has been accused of having testosterone levels that were too high, so we don't know whether they'll let her play in the World Cup. Until we get this sorted out, mixed teams will only happen in experimental contexts or in sports that already have a mixed tradition. I think it will come, even if it is only in a parallel competition, but we're so much in our infancy in other aspects that it seems to me to be football-fiction. Perhaps we'll never even see it, but we'll put it down on paper and we'll do what we can so that future generations can be closer to that possibility, if it's what they want. ■

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RE-EXAMINING THE IMAGES AND RETHINKING THE SPORT: A CONVERSATION WITH NATALIA ARROYO

Abstract
Natalia Arroyo is a coach, journalist and former footballer. She trained in FC Barcelona's lower tiers and played on RCD Espanyol's first team and for FC Levante Las Planas. She combined playing sport with studying a bachelor's degree in audiovisual communication and has worked as a writer for the newspaper *Diari Ara* and as a match commentator for the networks Bein Sports, Gol and Movistar La Liga. She currently coaches Real Sociedad in Spain's Women's First Division.

Key words
Image; Sport; Women; Audiovisual; Football; Communication.

Authors
Violeta Kovacsics holds a PhD in Communication. She is a film critic and a lecturer at Escuela Superior de Cine y Audiovisuales de Cataluña (ESCAC) and Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. She has contributed to several collective works, and she coordinated the book Very Funny Things. Nueva Comedia Americana (Festival de Donostia, 2012), as well authoring 50 maneras de morir. Cine negro y poética de la fatalidad (UOC, 2022). She was on the selection committee and responsible for the journal and catalogue for the Sitges-Festival Internacional de Cinema Fantàstic de Catalunya, and she is a programming advisor for the Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival. She is also a regular contributor to the program La finestra indiscreta on Catalunya Ràdio and to the journal Caimán Cuadernos de Cine, as a member of the editorial board. She was the first woman to chair the Asociación Catalana de Crítica y Escritura Cinematográfica (ACCEC).

Manuel Garin is a professor in aesthetics and audiovisual narrative at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. He is the author of the book *El gag visual. De Buster Keaton a Super Mario* (Cátedra, 2014), and has worked as a visiting researcher at Tokyo University of the Arts, University of Southern California and Columbia University, where he pursued the digital humanities projects *Gameplaygag: Between Silent Film and New Media* and *A Hundred Busters: Keaton Across the Arts*. His research on cinema, history and audiovisual culture has been published in scholarly journals such as *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies* and *Communication & Society*, in cultural criticism magazines such as *La Maleta de Portbou*, *Contrapicado* and *Cultura/s*, and in books by publishers such as the MIT Press, Routledge, Oxford University Press and Palgrave. He is currently directing a research project on image, sport and historical memory in Spain, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Article reference
Kovacsics, V., Garin, M. (2024). Re-examining the Images and Rethinking the Sport: A conversation with Natalia arroyo. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 37, 109-122.

REMIRAR LAS IMÁGENES Y REVISAR EL DEPORTE. DIÁLOGO CON NATALIA ARROYO

Resumen
Natalia Arroyo es entrenadora, periodista y exfutbolista. Se formó en las categorías inferiores del Fútbol Club Barcelona y jugó en el primer equipo del R. C. D. Espanyol y en el Levante Las Planas. Compaginó el deporte con una licenciatura en Comunicación Audiovisual y ha sido redactora en el *Diari Ara* y comentarista de partidos para Bein Sports, Gol y Movistar La Liga. Actualmente dirige a la Real Sociedad en la Primera División Femenina de España.

Palabras clave
Imagen; Deporte; Mujeres; Audiovisual; Fútbol; Comunicación.

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Referencia de este artículo
Kovacsics, V., Garin, M. (2024). Remirar las imágenes y revisar el deporte. Diálogo con Natalia arroyo. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 37, 109-122.

Edita / Published by
associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE
EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES IN DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN'S SPORT IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: PERSPECTIVES OF SPANISH SPORTSWOMEN

introduction
Nuria Cancela
Laia Puig-Fontrodona
Ariadna Cordal

discussion
Laia Palau
Núria Picas
Omaira Perdomo
Adiaratou Iglesias
Tania Álvarez

conclusion
Nuria Cancela
Laia Puig-Fontrodona
Ariadna Cordal

introduction*

NURIA CANCELA
LAIA PUIG-FONTRODONA
ARIADNA CORDAL

This edition of the *(Dis)Agreements* section explores the topic of this issue of *L'Atalante*, "Women and Sport in Audiovisual Media: Bodies, Images, Politics" from the perspective of the people whose bodies appear in sports images: sportswomen themselves. A diverse group of Spanish sporting professionals were interviewed about their opinions on the depictions of sportswomen in audiovisual media based on their own experience with such depictions. To cover the wide range of audiovisual media options available today for disseminating information on sports, the questions here revolve around three key elements: depictions of sports in film and television fiction; sports coverage in the mass media; and self-representation on social media. In recent years, there has been considerable debate over patterns of invisibility and stereotyping of women in sport, which have tended to relegate female athletes to an inferior position in relation to their male counterparts. Indeed, as the analysis by Dayna B. Daniels (2008) reveals, there are key differences in the way the image of sportswomen in films and other media is constructed through language use, character construction and filming strategies, all based on the conservative values associated with the traditional conception of the female. Conversely, the presence in sports films of male athletes lauded as heroes is an established trend in entertainment history. In such films, the depiction of women is invariably limited to the archetypal opposition between "inspirational muse" and *femme fatale* (Crosson, 2013), the former generally given the role of wives or cheerleaders of the male heroes (Daniels, 2008). With this in mind, we wanted to explore the role played by films and TV series in inspiring or influencing the careers of these sportswomen. Are there any positive role models for women in specific sports? Or can inspiration only be found in films about specific men's sports?

"Women characters within sports films tend to repeat, with some crucial differences, positions

defined in non-fictional discourse of sport" (Tudor, 1997: 95). With this in mind, in the case of media coverage we were interested in exploring what goes on both on and off the "field" (or pitch, stadium, track, or ring), covering both what is shown and what is rendered invisible: the shots, plays and facets of the sport that are displayed and those that are withheld from view, whether for technical or political reasons. In this way, we sought to identify any differences based on class, race, gender or disability that the sportswomen have experienced in this media construction. Today, even with the increased participation of women in sport, female athletes continue to be ignored and their achievements continue to be given less coverage (López-Albala, 2016), perpetuating the gender gap in traditional media such as the press and television (Adá Lameiras, 2019). This invisibility is not just a question of the number of news stories or the time they are given on screen; it is also a question of content. As Alba Adá Lameiras (2019) points out, news stories about sportswomen rely on images that either highlight their beauty or focus on their personal and family lives rather than on their sporting achievements, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes.

In relation to the role of social media, we have asked these sportswomen about how they represent themselves online and their potential status as celebrities. Celebrity is not so much a set of inherent personality traits as it is a performative practice that involves building a fan base, performing intimacy, authenticity and accessibility, and constructing a consumable persona (Marwick & boyd, 2011: 140). It is therefore important to understand how sportswomen experience the tension between their personal and professional lives on social media in an age when these platforms greatly reduce the distance between the public and the private, as authors such as Anne Jerslev and Mette Mortensen (2018) have shown. The analysis of sportswomen as celebrities reveals the social conditions that influence the way they present themselves online.

In all these media representations and audiovisual products, there is one question in particular that we were interested in exploring: the depiction of the female body in relation to sport. Depictions of sportswomen in film and on television reveal a dichotomy between the transgressive potential of the female athlete's body and its sexualisation and objectification (Lindner, 2013). As Emma Pullen and Michael Silk (2019) have demonstrated in their extensive review of the literature, media coverage of the bodies of sportswomen with disabilities has historically been characterised by "asexual objectification", trivialisation and infantilisation. Ana Pastor Pascual (2020) suggests that sport is a gender technology and a biopolitical institution that reinforces the male-female gender binary, with mechanisms such as medical examinations to detect testosterone levels, the division of sports into men's and women's categories, and the *gendering* of certain sports. This complicates the participation of intersex and trans people in sport, with the media treating trans women athletes as "intruders" in women's sports (Curbelo, 2023), just as previously the presence of women in the masculinised context of sport was itself considered an intrusion (Lindner, 2013). It also forces female athletes to embody a hegemonic, heteronormative femininity, which includes, for example, not being too muscular. In this sense, in the sporting world both gender performance and female masculinity are viewed as subversive acts of the body (Pastor Pascual, 2020). The White construction of normative femininity systematically marginalises racialised women in sport and in other fields, as is evident in sports media coverage, which generally renders Black women invisible or depicts them with negative stereotypes, subjecting them to "controlling images" such as the mammy, the matriarch, the jezebel, or the welfare queen (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016).

In view of these considerations, this section aims for diversity in terms of both the sports concerned and the profiles of the women who play them. The interviewees compete in a wide range of both team and individual sports, including mountain running, basketball, athletics, volleyball and boxing. And although all of the interviewees have competed at a professional level in Spain, their profiles differ in terms of age, class, gender, race and functional diversity. In addition to these factors, we believe that the different backgrounds of these sportswomen will facilitate a diverse picture of the current state of women's sport in Spain and its depiction in audiovisual media. The interviewees are:

Laia Palau (born in Barcelona, 1979), former basketball player and current sports executive for the team Spar Girona. She is the player with the most caps and medals at the national level in the history of Spanish basketball, including the silver medal at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Núria Picas (born in Manresa, 1976), mountain runner with the Catalan selection who has won numerous competitions, including the Ultra Trail World Cup in 2012 and the inaugural Ultra Trail World Tour in 2014. In 2022, she won the Ultra Pirineu, beating her previous record by 17 minutes, after taking a three-year hiatus due to an injury.

Omaira Perdomo (born in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, 1999), volleyball player and trans sportswoman who has played with the team CCO7 Las Palmas in the Iberdrola league (Superliga), following numerous achievements including winning the Spanish Championship with the J. A. V. Olímpico volleyball team.

Adiaratou Iglesias (born in Bamako, Mali, 1999), para athlete who represented Spain at the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo, where she won gold and silver medals in two different para athletics categories, following numerous accomplishments in national and international competitions, including two silver medals at the World Para Athletics Championship.

Tania Álvarez (born in Barcelona, 2002), boxer, winner of the Spanish women's Super Bantamweight Championship in 2023, with an impressive record that includes competing at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

The presentation of the profiles above conforms to a standard that reflects one of the ideas about sport that we are interested in exploring here: the culture of individual achievements and success. With this in mind, before providing the opportunity for them to represent themselves, we believe it important to recognise these sportswomen, beyond their individual accomplishments, as role models in their sports, and to acknowledge the political implications of their status as individuals in the public sphere and pioneering negotiators of relationships with the body, identity, and competitive practices. ■

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discussion
PERSPECTIVES

1. When thinking about films that deal with women and sport, titles like *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002) or *Million Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2005) come to mind for most people. But there are other lesser-known productions that offer very bold and personal perspectives. What is your opinion about how the sport you play is depicted in films, series and documentaries? Do you remember any titles or characters who have served as role models for you?

Laia Palau

As I'm 44 years old, my generation really didn't have any films about women playing sports when we were kids. The biggest female role model who did amazing things was Sarah Connor, the apocalyptic warrior in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991) or, if I think harder about it, Catwoman. Beyond that, I didn't have any role models for women in sport. There are more role models now. Apart from *Million Dollar Baby* and *Bend It Like Beckham*, there is also *Love & Basketball* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2000), for example. In any case, there aren't many women playing sport on screen, so basically my role models were men.

Núria Picas

We have a lot of role models on screen for my sport, and moreover, the footage taken in the mountains are really spectacular. We are lucky in that the footage of sportswomen in this case, whether they're climbing or running up the mountain, always comes with awesome scenery. So, we have an advantage over football, basketball and other sports. I have been really influenced, for example, by reports like the ones about Kilian Jornet or films like Alex Honnold's *Free Solo* (2018), which won an Oscar. The free-climbing footage in Yosemite is the one that has had the biggest impact on me in my life. If we go further back, I was inspired by the documentary *Everest* (Greg MacGillivray & David Breashers, 1998) starring Araceli Segarra, which introduced the Everest climb in IMAX format. I was also extremely influenced by the documentary about the rock climber Lynn Hill (*Free Climbing the Nose,* Lynn Hill, 1997), who climbed a legendary route known as The Nose, on the El Capitán rock formation. She is the first person to free climb The Nose, without any artificial support.

Omaira Perdomo

I've never seen myself represented in sport because no stories similar to mine have ever been told. When I started playing volleyball, I remember that there was nobody similar to my situation, so I could never fully identify with anyone. I could identify with role models who had a very strong, competitive personality, like Serena Williams, who has always been very optimistic when she fights for what she wants. Her personality fits well with mine, because she works really hard to achieve her goals. I can see myself reflected in her competitiveness and aggression on the court. In my case, becoming a role model to so many, opening that door for so many people or giving peace of mind to so many parents with children in the same situation as mine who play sports, makes me proud. It's important to construct role models so that everyone can feel represented in sport.

I think sport really needs to be reflected in films and series, especially women's sport. There are a lot of films and series that show you how wonderful and how hard sport can be, what it's like to be playing at the top competitive level, but I think a lot more stories need to be told that deal with different situations, like the one I have lived through since childhood, for example. I really like films like *I, Tonya* (Craig Gillespie, 2017) and *King Richard* (Reinaldo Marcus Green, 2021), but I think there should be a lot more where the audience can see themselves represented and can talk about things that happen that are not okay but that we often keep quiet about.

Adiaratou Iglesias
I think those films—*Bend It Like Beckham* and *Million Dollar Baby*—were the ones that inspired me most when they came out. Seeing women playing sport in those days was really new and I think it was a key time for women.

Tania Álvarez
In films, series and documentaries about boxing, they nearly always depict boxing as a sport played by people from low socioeconomic backgrounds with no education who are troubled or aggressive, and who have a fatal ending like dying or suffering severe injuries. Both for men and for women, the view of boxing in film and television productions tends to present these factors that create a bleak impression of the sport: poverty, aggression, violence, injuries and death. For example, in *Million Dollar Baby*, the protagonist (Maggie) is a woman from a low socioeconomic background who barely has enough money to eat; she's from a dysfunctional family and she ends up dying at the end of the film after being made a quadriplegic in her last fight.

2. Another important way of representing of sport on screen is in broadcasts of sporting events. What differences do you see between the way you experience the sporting event, on location, and the way it is treated in a media broadcast? Are there images or actions that are important for you, but that don't tend to be made public in pictures or videos? And conversely, do you find there are any kinds of images that the media repeat or disseminate too often?

Laia Palau
I think we need to improve how we commentate on the sporting event being broadcast. In a lot of cases, the commentators have a paternalistic attitude about how women play sports, at least in basketball. Sportswomen are infantilised and treated with less consideration; they are called "girls" even if they're 35-year-old women, and there is no appreciation for the technical feats they are capable of because of their physical skill. Furthermore, it's hard to sell a product if it doesn't have a good production that shows details, replays, close-ups of the players in action... in other words, if it can't really show their skills. And finally, women are often judged for their physical appearance instead of their athleticism.

Núria Picas
I do long-distance runs; I run 100km or 160km races, and there are moments when I don't have any cameras around me. That means there are moments when I'm suffering a lot, which I would like to see get coverage, but they don't. Most coverage is of the nice bit, when I reach the finish line, which is triumphant, and people say: "I'd like to be her." But they don't show all the effort that went into it. I would like it if they could show the hours of solitude, the training, spending a whole sum-

mer going out at seven in the morning to avoid the heat, the doctors, the physiotherapy, the diet regime, the loneliness, not being with your kids... They show footage of the victory and reaching the finish line that gets replayed over and over. Afterwards, when I'm with my friends they say to me that I get my shoes, my Gore-Tex or my granola bars for free, but really I don't get anything for free; I've had to work for everything and I've paid for it with effort and sweat, which is something people obviously don't see. That's why I would like these things to get more coverage.

Omaira Perdomo
Everything revolves around the glass ceiling. Everyone has always said that men's sport sells and that women's sport doesn't so much, and I think that is a big lie. It depends on the sport, the fans and the people who follow it. Obviously, there are sports that are much more important for the media, like football, basketball or tennis. They are viewed as more important and significant than minority sports like volleyball, which is the sport I play. For example, here in Spain, women's volleyball is much more famous than men's, but the men still get paid much more than the women and men tend to get much more media attention than women.

As for the broadcasts, a couple of years ago it was a difficult issue in volleyball that there weren't so many people who watched the live broadcasts on a constant basis. Nowadays, you can follow the league on YouTube, but not all the broadcasts are the same quality. The image quality varies depending on the club, the funding and the priority they give to live coverage. It should be given higher priority, because all audiovisual coverage is important to hook in outsiders, so they can see that there are other sports and how cool it can be to play at the elite level in one. So, I think we should be giving a lot more priority to creating better live broadcasts, because honestly, in this country, compared to volleyball in other countries, the quality of the broadcasts and commentators falls a little bit short.

In the Spanish media, the negative side of sport is what tends to get talked about most. The positive side, like competitions or medals won, doesn't tend to get much coverage. But there tends to be a lot of talk about the bad side of volleyball, like transphobia, homophobia, racism, or child abuse... or for example, clubs that haven't paid their players and have been reported by the Sports Association. I've experienced some very difficult situations in the sport that have ended up being made public. There is a lot more talk about the negative side of national volleyball than the positive side, but the truth is that I see it as normal, because the things going on inside this federation are shameful.

Adiaratou Iglesias
I think that these days, especially in the world of sport, these things are handled tactfully, but it is true that sometimes it can be stressful because they twist the words of the professionals or present an image that perhaps is not what best represents them or is not what the athlete would like.

Tania Álvarez
To tell the truth, I wouldn't know whether there are differences or not, because it's been years since a boxing match was broadcast on television in Spain. However, when I came back from Madison Square Garden after becoming the first Spanish woman boxer to fight there, the television and radio networks did take a lot of interest in broadcasting the news. But several times I was told that they had taken an interest because I was a woman, and because of the issue of feminism today, and if the same news story had been about a man ("The first Spanish boxer to fight at Madison Square Garden"), they wouldn't have been interested. On top of that, the only time a TV network came to a fight here at Castellbisbal [boxing ring] was for the Spanish championship, the first fight in history between two Catalan women, but it wasn't broadcast live, and they didn't replay the whole fight.

3. How do you think the sports press and television shape our understanding of women's sport? Have you ever noticed differential treatment due to gender, race, social class or disability? And along the same lines, do you think there is a preference for celebrating stories of heroism, individualism and drive instead of group stories?

Laia Palau

The media are the ones who decide what is important and what isn't. The way they treat sport matters. If the production, the time scheduling and the stories aren't good, if they're "second class", the people who watch it are going to understand that it's a "second class" sport. There is also differential treatment. What we should be valuing and celebrating is the athlete's ability to endure and to give her best, regardless of gender or race. In society right now, we have a discourse of individualism and success that is misunderstood, which creates a situation where not everyone is treated the same way. I'm not talking about men and women here, but about team sports. We should try to celebrate how the team is working together, not just the individual who stands out from the rest.

Núria Picas

In my case, I've never come up against that problem. I've been lucky in the sense that the press has always treated me well and publicised all my achievements in my sports career. It is true in the case of other sports, as it is right now in women's football or basketball, which have been getting much more attention in the last two years. That makes you realise that they didn't get so much attention before, and then you start thinking about how women's sport has been discriminated against a lot in the media in the last few decades. Now they are giving it much more visibility, which is very positive because young people and kids see it and that creates a desire for constant growth thanks to the promotional power of television. There has been a substantial change that will be noticeable in future generations. A lot of girls are playing football now, which just a little while ago was unthinkable, thanks to the importance given to Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmatí. These generations need role models. And they only have role models if they can see them. In other words, if you don't see them, they're not there. You have to search for them and it's harder. That's why the images in the media in this case help a lot.

Omaira Perdomo

I have experienced a lot of difficult situations in relation to this issue. The press is always going to look for what sells. I'm a transgender volleyball player, the first one in this country, and the youngest one in the world. That's why overnight I wound up on all the front pages all over the world. But what were they selling? My ability as an athlete or the fascination of being the first? A lot of people sold it as something really great, praising what I'd achieved. But others just talked about it to create debate or report on the presence of trans sportswomen. It's a double-edged sword: I was doing what I really wanted to do, which was to be playing in the sport and to be like any of my teammates, but I started to realise that I was different from them, because the media gave me an importance that they didn't give any of the others. So, this type of situation ended up creating individualism within the group. And added to this is the fact that female groups tend to be a little complicated because there are a lot of people who like being the stars, who don't like seeing others stand out.

Overnight I turned into a major role model. I went from being an unknown to having people knocking on my door every day. This was hard on me and on the people around me. Then, as time goes by, you realise that you end up turning into

an object. Because people aren't cheering you for your abilities, but because you've opened a door, perhaps in a positive way. There are also people who are talking about you as the star simply because you're a novelty, because your story sells. At the end of the day, I know that being a trans woman today is not a fad, but it's good click bait. Everyone wants to get involved in the debate; everyone wants to have a say. It's a controversial topic. There are a lot of people who may be in favour, a lot against, and a lot on the fence about it. It's understandable. And what most of the media want to do is create this excitement, this consumerism around the topic. As a result, as time goes by, you end up wondering: Are they cheering me for what I've achieved? Or simply because I'm trans and they want to take advantage of the fascination?

Everything that has happened to Jenni Hermoso in these last few months has been a clear example of this. We've won the world championship in women's football and yet a lot more attention has been given to a misogynist incident than to the fact that Spain are world champions for the first time. If you compare it to 2010, when the men's team won the World Cup, you see how people celebrated in the streets and how it brought the country together. The same thing could have happened now with the women's team, but everything got twisted by sexualisation and misogyny. There is a big problem there. And there is also the big debate over how a female world champion is not perceived in the same way as a man. This happens in football and in any other sport. It seems ridiculous to me, but I think it's necessary for us to talk about situations like this so that they don't happen again in the future and to raise awareness among the future generations.

We often keep quiet about things that happen to us in sport, like misogyny, the glass ceiling, the wage gap or the violations of our privacy. These are very difficult situations that we experience because we're sportswomen, which men in our same situation don't experience because they're more privileged in this sense. Ever since I was little, I've been in an important club, at a high-performance centre, so I always had to be perfect because there was always a spotlight on me. As a teenager I couldn't post whatever I felt like posting on social media, or do what a teenage girl normally does, like fall in love, go partying, or experiment with things like drinking, smoking or trying different foods. We were kept under strict control in that sense: you have to be perfect and watch what you eat. On the other hand, for the men it has never been the same. That has always made me really angry. They treat us women like we were in the army. These are things that we should dare to talk about and stop normalising this kind of treatment, sexualising us or treating us any way they like.

Adiaratou Iglesias

I honestly think we need to start calling it "sport for women" because the way I see it, the term "women's sport"... What is it? It could end up confusing the boys and girls because there is no sport that is more a "woman's sport" than any other; it's just sport. We need to change the term and use a better one. These days it is true that there is still a huge difference between press coverage of women compared to men, and that is a fact, but I think it will keep changing. We women haven't been in the world of sport for very long, and little by little we're changing things. I don't know whether one day we'll get to full equality in the media or in anything else, but I think we'll get close. The coverage of people with disabilities in the media is a different matter altogether; that happens less often because the public isn't interested, but honestly that's not what concerns me most right now. I think that things are changing a lot, and we have to take it step by step.

Tania Álvarez
Within the world of boxing, I've never noticed differential treatment based on gender, race, social class or disability. But I have seen it in society. People who don't know this sport have a very bleak view of what it is really: the aggressive and violent view conveyed in films that I mentioned before. Added to this, as I was saying, the media do take an interest in news related to feminism, like the headline "The First Spanish Woman Boxer to Fight at the Legendary Madison Square Garden", and thus women's sport, boxing in this case, can get more coverage.

4. Certain sportswomen are viewed as celebrities because their image transcends the world of sport and their personal lives become public, on TV shows and even in the tabloids. Given that brands and sponsors are an important part of the sportswoman's image, perhaps even more so in non-mainstream sports that offer more modest pay, what approaches or strategies do you think can be used to reconcile public profile and professional integrity?

Laia Palau
With the rise of social media, a lot of athletes are now depicting their own public image; we are providing the information. The boundaries have blurred a little. The media doesn't have the power over the information anymore. We are making the mistake of thinking that the person is the athlete, but you should be able to maintain your privacy, apart from showing how you work or publicising yourself. In the case of minority sports, as there is less coverage of the sport, we have to use other ways to make ourselves visible. But I think there is a need to make a very clear distinction between the profession and the person, for the athlete's own protection. Your personal life is something private that should be left out of the general public's judgement. I know that we're living in the information age, but I think we need to protect people and only judge their professional lives, without delving into the details of their private lives. I think that sometimes public criticism can end up harming us.

Núria Picas
There comes a moment when you're under everyone's gaze because you're a good athlete and you've been successful, and you end up becoming a mirror for better or for worse. As a result, your sporting life takes a turn; you go from being an amateur to being a professional, and on the one hand you're a mirror and a role model, but on the other, people know you and you need to be careful. You need to be a "public personality", which means you're in the public eye. Thus, whatever you do, whether in the sport or outside it, is also important. I think that in this case we sportswomen have the responsibility to try to present a good image, to be a role model in a particular sport and also to be a role model in public life in general. And we can't complain because this brings us some good things, even if it means we lose some privacy.

Omaira Perdomo
I earn a lot more money from giving interviews, talking about my life, taking part in discussion panels or being the face for exclusive brands than I do from playing volleyball. I would say that more than seventy percent of what I earn comes from that, because salaries in sports are absurd. The problem with all this is that when you end up creating a name for yourself and making a living from your image, you can't connect the two things, because your club wants you to work, to train, to give it all. So, when you have a photo shoot job for brands like Adidas, your club gets much more demanding, telling you that you can't miss training

and that sport is your job. On the other hand, this doesn't happen to other players who maybe are dentists or working in a clothing shop. The clubs understand that and see it as a job. But they can't understand that I make a living off social media and my image. I have experienced a lot of difficulties trying to live in both worlds. As of today, in the 2023 season, I decided to focus more on social media than on sport itself, because I wasn't being treated in a way that made me feel comfortable and I wasn't getting the opportunities I felt I deserved. I couldn't reconcile the two things. There came a moment when I was tired and decided to focus more on one side.

I think it's very hard to be a celebrity in sport because the clubs are always going to be watching everything you do and say very closely. At the end of the day, you're not only representing yourself as a celebrity, but the club thinks that you're representing them too, because you're associated with them and with the volleyball federation. For that reason, you have to present a flawless image. At the end of the day, they end up profiting from it. It's difficult when you're invited to events, or to do an ad, and your club isn't happy about it, because it's beneficial for your career, for your image and for your wallet.

How to reconcile your public profile with professional integrity seems to me a very interesting question. I think it's very difficult. It depends on the conditions you agree to when you sign the contract, but there are nasty people out there and you need to remember that you have to train, that it's your job and you can't miss a day, even if the pay is ridiculous for the time and dedication you invest. Sometimes they forget that there is a lot more to our lives than sport, that there are a lot of people who base their everyday lives around sport but that other people do it as a hobby. For me that's how I see it: I love sport, I love volleyball; it has given me everything. I am where I am today thanks to sport, but I also believe that there are many other things in life that represent me more and that I'm much more interested in. That on the day of the match they put up a photo of you, they make a sign with your face on it and they talk about you. That really excites me. These things that sport gives you, that people see you as a role model; it's wonderful. But to achieve other goals, like to be the face of certain things, can also fill you with pride. It's hard to live on the borderline between these two worlds.

Adiaratou Iglesias

I think it's possible to integrate our public profile and our professional integrity by starting with sharing only what we want our followers to know. That's the only way to avoid confusion and the same is true with sponsors: we have to give them what we really think we can give and read the contracts carefully.

Tania Álvarez

These days, in my professional life, what I've seen businesses and sponsors looking for is the profile of a good sportswoman, and at the same time physically attractive so she looks good on social media, or with a good backstory related to feminism (gender violence, misogyny, etc.).

5. What do you think the role of social media is in promoting women's sport, and what do you use it for? When you represent yourself and post content, what type of actions, images or moments do you like to share most? How/when do you usually record them?

Laia Palau

I only use Instagram and I haven't posted anything for a while, because I think it's useful for publicising things, but there are certain things I don't share. I posted certain moments, especially with my teammates in the national selection at the Olympics in 2016. Apart from that I haven't made use of it because I felt it was information that wasn't so important or that made me feel too exposed to opinions that would have me wasting time working out whether I should believe them or not, both the positive and the negative.

Núria Picas

I think that these days communicating fast and effectively is key, because it is a necessity in today's globalised world and we sportswomen have decided to turn it into a big opportunity. In my case, it's an opportunity that enables us to analyse and explain reality to others from our point of view. I realise that there are thousands of people who have some interest in what I do and who follow me, and I try to be honest with them on social media. That imposes a big responsibility on us. I prefer to be genuine and to show what I am rather than just trying to get likes. There are certain moments that people couldn't have access to before but now they can when I capture them with my camera. A point on a climb, a moment of frustration... People are interested in these moments; they're interested to see how you interact when you have a big victory or a disappointment. The scenery also helps a lot. If I take a photo of myself training with the Pedraforca in the background, it will have a lot more visibility than a photo taken of me training in some unknown forest.

For example, in 2022 I won a really important race, the Ultra Pirineu, and I set the record for it. That had a massive impact on social media. This year I ran the same race, which didn't go well for me, and I finished in what I thought was a terrible position. But I coped really well: I finished the race, and my social media posts showed me suffering, struggling against the elements and against the pain. People also had a lot of engagement with that, as if I had won the race. That's why it's great to be able to show both sides and opposite extremes. People like to see strong emotions. True emotions, not poses. Real emotions: suffering, victories, exertion, perseverance... Not just taking a photo to try to get likes.

Omaira Perdomo

I try to be myself. In my Instagram not all of the content is sport, because I've always connected it with my personal life. But I think it depends on the athlete, on what they want to convey. I want to convey my lifestyle. I've always been very honest and faithful to myself, to my tastes, to what I like to show. I'm aware of what I show and what I don't, but I like to be natural. I want people to see me and say that I'm not just a volleyball player, but that I'm also a cool girl, that they enjoy my content and have a good time watching my pictures and reels.

It makes me proud to know that people like the interviews I do about my profession and experiences. I recently appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* and for me it was a dream come true. I talked about a lot of things related to volleyball. I've had a lot of exposure in the media, and I've had the good fortune to appear in most of the newspapers. It's wonderful to be able to represent your sport, your community and your values; but I've always wanted to show that I'm a trans woman, I'm a sportswoman, but it doesn't rule my life. Yes, I'm a pioneer. Yes, I feel very proud of the woman I am and the goals I've achieved. But I'm so much more than that. That's why on my social media

accounts I want to convey that I'm a completely normal girl, that I live my life, that I have my style and my way of being.

In many cases the depiction of women's sport in reels or TikToks on the club accounts is not generally players in action, but the sexualised bodies of sportswomen. It's something I experience often due to the type of body I have. The photographers often send you photos and the first image is of your butt. There are a lot of clubs that are getting things right on this point, but there are many others that aren't.

Adiaratou Iglesias
Right now, I only share what I want my followers to know and what I think they might find interesting, and therefore rewarding. I always try to convey a message with everything I post because behind it, I don't know who is looking at it.

Tania Álvarez
When promoting women's sport on social media, the role I adopt is "being me naturally". On my social media, I show what my everyday life is like, what I'm doing, etc., while I also show myself off as an athlete and physically. I like to show moments related to sport and my personal life in a natural way. To do this, in my everyday life I generally take photos and record videos so that I can share them.

On my social media accounts, I tend to receive a lot of messages from girls who tell me I'm a role model for them and I encourage them to want to play sport. They also often write to me to thank me for giving visibility to women's boxing, and in doing so, paving the way for their parents to let them play this apparently violent, masculine sport.

6. Considering the historical context of objectification and sexualisation of women's bodies, what is your opinion about how the sportswoman's body is portrayed today? Do you identify a relationship between your image and the normative canons of beauty? And finally, what potential do you see in the sporting body for transgressing binaries?

Laia Palau
I think we've progressed in terms of the image of a physically powerful woman. There has been a clear change in society in relation to health, sport and the idea that a woman should "be in shape". The canons of beauty are not of a strong, tall or big woman. But I find those bodies pretty because I've always been surrounded by them and I feel that behind them is work, care and training.

The binary seems to me a difficult issue. Even for me it isn't very clear. Nature dictates your genes. I'm not talking about how you feel, but about a physical structure that is defined as male and as female. And there is a big difference there between the two sexes. A complete physical difference. It is a debate that society has to keep working on and accepting, and I don't mean in everyday life, where it seems to me perfectly normal, but it does get complicated when you're talking about the question of physical competitiveness. It's an issue that needs to be examined really closely, because a man's body will always be superior to a woman's in terms of structure. So, I don't know whether we can compete at the same level, because it's not the same and that's why there are different categories.

Núria Picas
A lot of barriers are breaking down. What I want is to show myself naturally, just as I am, and to be judged on my results, my way of understanding the sport and of trying to compete the best I can. I will take care of my image, because I have a bunch of sponsors.

Omaira Perdomo

At the elite level of a sport, you always need to try to keep your body healthy. Debating about what a normative body is today seems completely absurd to me. Every sport has its discipline and needs its specific kind of body. I don't think you're going to expect the same of a volleyball player as you would of a Canarian wrestler. Therefore, what a normative body is depends on the sport.

What we need to give top priority is taking care of our sportswomen. Taking care of them when they don't conform to the canons, because there are a lot of situations where women are afraid to get on a scale or to measure their skinfolds. And this pressure to be in a normative body can lead to a lot of eating disorders. I think there should be a lot more concern about players' mental health, not just about the body, the physical side, your performance in the sport, how much weight you can lift or the level you're training at. Mental health is really important and in women's sport it isn't given much importance. Especially in under-age categories, where young women are starting out.

It's hard to work all your life training with a group of people and because of your body you can't reach the same goal as they can, because you don't fit the same standard, such as height. In volleyball, I've seen a lot of people with huge talent who have been told to quit because they are under six feet tall. That's why I think they should be much more concerned about players' mental health and be really careful about how they say things, how they treat us when dealing with these issues. Because we don't know a person's mental health or what might happen to it in the future. In my case, I've always had the same body, but I've seen a lot of teammates with eating disorders and a lot of worries about getting on a scale or measuring their skinfolds, or because they've been told they have to lose weight.

I've seen a lot of comparisons between teammates related to the canons of beauty. "I'm not like you," "I could jump higher if I was skinnier," or "I want to be stronger so that I can have more power." And it ends up becoming an obsession for a lot of people. In my case, one of the big problems I've had is that I don't want to look too strong. I'm a tall woman; I stand out a lot for my height. I'm not interested in looking really strong because I build muscles quickly. So, that makes me extremely insecure. And you have a lot of conversations about how you feel about this, but they don't see it as really important, because what they care about is your physical performance and getting the most out of you. It's a very difficult situation that depends on the person, which is why I think mental health is so important.

Adiaratou Iglesias

I don't know of any cases of sexualisation or objectification in my sport. At least in the world of athletics, I think there's room for all kinds of bodies; size or height doesn't matter, nor does race or colour. But unfortunately, there are sports today that go by weight, and others where you have to be really thin and maybe those are the ones right now that are the most dangerous for a boy or girl when they start out in that sport.

Tania Álvarez

I've often received comments from people in society like: "You're so pretty... You're going to ruin your face with boxing." I always reply with a laugh: "I enjoy what I do, and I don't worry about my physical appearance. If I get a broken nose, I'll get a nose job." There are a lot of women boxers right now who look like models when they're weighing in and then they're absolute warriors in the ring. I think we can look good physically and at the same time break the established canons of beauty in the ring. In this way, we can transgress binaries and show that boxing has no gender, and that both men and women can do it. ■

conclusion

NURIA CANCELA
LAIA PUIG-FONTRODONA
ARIADNA CORDAL

As the five interviews above have effectively demonstrated, opinions about the depiction of women's sport in the media differ depending on the experience, profile and sport of the interviewees; but there are also numerous similarities. Regarding the depiction of women's sport in film and television fiction, it is clear that there is a shortage of female role models—beyond the most obvious well-known cases, like *Bend It Like Beckham* or *Love and Basketball*. Generally, the film and television content viewed by these sportswomen features men in the main roles. In the absence of female role models in sport, fictional characters like Catwoman and Sarah Connor have also been sources of inspiration for sportswomen like Laia Palau. The characters they identify with most are those who show personal determination and strength, which is why they have been inspired by films like *King Richard* (in the case of Omaira Perdomo) or Lynn Hill's *Free Climbing the Nose* (in the case of Núria Picas). We are living in a context that is constantly changing, with clear signs of improvement, which calls for a wider diversity of stories in film and television fiction. As Lindner points out (2013: 239), "there are some useful parallels to be drawn between women's 'intrusion' into the male-dominated world of sports and the entrance of female protagonists into the male-centred genre of the sports film."

Media coverage of women's sports reflects the imbalance that exists in the marketing of sports broadcasts and shows based on gender—and on other factors, such as disability. These inequalities ultimately influence what the athletes are paid. The poor production standards and low quality of broadcasts that lack details, replays or close-ups do not allow for an effective display of sportswomen's skills. In addition to the infantilisation of women in the broadcasts, media discourses generally focus on achievements like being "the first trans woman in Spain to compete at the top level of an Olympic sport" in the case of Omaira Perdomo, or "the first Spanish woman to fight at Madison Square Garden" in the case of Tania Álvarez, instead of giving attention to their effort and development as athletes. Núria Picas points out how the camera invariably captures the same isolated achievements, such as reaching the finish line, without presenting all the hard work and suffering that it took to get there. Several interviewees condemn the sexualisation of sportswomen, in both conventional and social media, when the camera focuses on detail shots of certain parts of the body that have no bearing on the sport. Close-ups and replays in sports broadcasts, while essential for capturing all the action, may sometimes sexualise the players, as Deborah V. Tudor (1997) has pointed out. In film and television depictions

of sportswomen and in sports in general, the largely unachievable established canons of physical beauty continue to exist, with the potential to provoke mental health problems. These canons demand a normative femininity that does not allow for physical qualities like muscularity (Pastor Pascual, 2020). At the same time, media dynamics tend to promote individualism, evident as well in fiction productions about sports (Lindner, 2013), which Laia Palau suggests should be countered by extolling teamwork in the case of team sports.

All of the interviewees are aware of the importance of self-representation on social media for their professional development. Laia Palau and Adiaratou Iglesias limit the level of personal information they share online, while Núria Picas, Omaira Perdomo and Tania Álvarez all share parts of their personal lives in an effort to present themselves in a genuine, honest and natural way so that they can connect with—and engage—their followers and fans. Social media not only enables them to get closer to their followers but also facilitates a positive visibility as role models for new generations of young sportswomen. Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe call this the "athletic labour of femininity", arguing that "social media interaction between female athletes and fans is governed by gender norms and arrangements that expect and reward female athletic articulations of empowerment, entrepreneurialism and individualisation in the context of post-feminism and consumer self-fashioning" (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018 : 298). Followers thus expect sportswomen to present a successful feminine subjectivity on social media, characterised by notions of personal choice, individual responsibility and self-management. To do this, sportswomen reveal personal content as part of the construction of their own personal brand. Through this use of social media, some sportswomen end up becoming celebrities working professionally with different brands. In such cases, the marketing of a personal image is a key means of earning a living for many sportswomen, considering the low salaries generally offered in women's sports. All of this reflects a context of greater visibility for women's sports in audiovisual media, although there is still a long way to go. Along the way, it will be important to listen to the voices of sportswomen, seizing opportunities like those offered by *(Dis)Agreements*. ■

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TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES IN DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN'S SPORT IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: PERSPECTIVES OF SPANISH SPORTSWOMEN

Abstract

Film and television depictions of women's sports are marked by tensions and challenges in contemporary society. Laia Palau (former basketball player), Núria Picas (mountain runner), Omaira Perdomo (volleyball player), Adiaratou Iglesias (para athlete), and Tania Álvarez (boxer) offer us their first-person perspective on this topic with a focus on three key issues: depictions in film and television fiction, media coverage, and self-representation on social media. The diversity of their profiles and sports results in some thought-provoking differences of opinion, along with a number of significant similarities. In film and television fiction, the interviewees value the portrayal of the physical exertion and determination of female athletes. Historically, films have offered very few role models for women in sport. Although media coverage today provides visibility for women's sports that have traditionally been ignored, it also objectifies and sexualises sportswomen's bodies. To combat this, social media provides a space for self-representation where sportswomen can subvert such treatment of their image by conventional media, giving rise to a tension between their private lives and their professional persona as celebrities. In recent years there has been a clear paradigm shift, with an increasing number of female role models in sports films, greater visibility of women's sports in the media, and positive depictions of female athletes. However, there are still many challenges to face—both in sport itself and in its representation on screen.

Key words

Women's sport; film and TV fiction; media coverage; social media; gender; body.

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Nuria Cancela holds a bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Communication from Universidad de Santiago de Compostela and a master's degree in Contemporary Film and Audiovisual Studies from Universitat Pompeu Fabra, where she is currently a pre-doctoral researcher on an FPU grant (19/02441) awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Universities. Her doctoral thesis investigates the archetype of the *femme fatale* in Spanish cinema during the Franco dictatorship from the perspective of star studies. She is also participating in the research projects "Football and visual culture in Francoism" and "Production of new subjectivities in female characters and actresses", both funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation. Contact: nuria.cancela@upf.edu

TENSIONES Y RETOS EN LA REPRESENTACIÓN AUDIOVISUAL DEL DEPORTE FEMENINO: PERSPECTIVAS DE DEPORTISTAS ESPAÑOLAS

Resumen

La representación audiovisual del deporte femenino enfrenta tensiones y retos en la contemporaneidad. Laia Palau (exjugadora de baloncesto), Núria Picas (corredora de montaña), Omaira Perdomo (jugadora de vóleibol), Adiaratou Iglesias (deportista de atletismo adaptado) y Tania Álvarez (boxeadora) nos ofrecen en primera persona su perspectiva sobre este tema alrededor de tres ejes fundamentales: la representación en la ficción audiovisual, la cobertura mediática y la autorrepresentación en redes sociales. La diversidad de perfiles y de deportes conlleva enriquecedoras diferencias de opinión, con relevantes similitudes compartidas. En la ficción audiovisual, las entrevistadas valoran que se represente el esfuerzo físico y la superación de las protagonistas deportistas. Históricamente existe una falta de referentes fílmicos sobre deporte femenino. La cobertura de los medios de comunicación, a la vez que ofrece visibilidad de las categorías femeninas deportivas tradicionalmente invisibilizadas, también cosifica y sexualiza el cuerpo de la deportista. Ante esto, las redes sociales ofrecen un espacio de autorrepresentación en el que las deportistas pueden subvertir dicho tratamiento de su imagen, lo que conlleva una tensión entre la intimidad y la profesión que deben encarar dentro de su faceta como celebridades. En la contemporaneidad se da un cambio de paradigma: cada vez tenemos más referentes cinematográficos, mayor visibilidad en medios y representaciones positivas de las deportistas; pero todavía quedan muchos retos —deportivos y cinematográficos— que afrontar.

Palabras clave

Deporte femenino; ficción audiovisual; cobertura mediática; redes sociales; género; cuerpo.

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Laia Palau is a former professional basketball player and current sports executive for the team Spar Girona. She played as a point guard and holds the record for the most caps (315) and medals (12) in the history of the Spanish national basketball team. She is a three-time Intercontinental champion, winning in 2013, 2017 and 2018, a World Cup runner-up in 2014, and an Olympic runner-up at the 2016 Rio Olympics. She played for CJM Bourges Basket (France), Ros Casares Valencia, USK Prague (Czech Republic), and Uni Girona.

Núria Picas is a professional mountain runner. She ran her first mountain marathon at the age of 22 in the Nike Aneto X-treme Marathon. She was a member of the Catalan mountain running team and achieved numerous victories in competitions such as the Ultra Trail World Cup in 2012 and the inaugural Ultra Trail World Tour in 2014. In 2022, she won the Ultra Pirineu, breaking her previous record by 17 minutes, after taking a three-year hiatus due to an injury. Her achievements are documented in films like *Home to Home* (2016) and *Thar-Ua* (Íñigo Jiménez, 2018).

Laia Puig-Fontrodona (Blanes, 1996) es graduada en Cine y Audiovisuales por la ESCAC y cursó el Máster de Estudios de Cine y Audiovisual Contemporáneo en la UPF. Actualmente, realiza el Doctorado en Comunicación en la misma universidad (con un contrato PIPF) sobre la representación de la maternidad en la ficción española contemporánea a través de sus actrices. Sus líneas de investigación son los *star studies*, los *celebrity studies* y los *motherhood studies*. Colabora en los proyectos de investigación «Fútbol y cultura visual en el Franquismo» y «Producción de nuevas subjetividades en los personajes femeninos y las actrices», financiados por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación. Contacto: laia.puig@upf.edu

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Laia Palau (Barcelona, 1979) es exjugadora de baloncesto profesional y actual dirigente deportiva del Spar Girona. Ocupaba la posición base y es la jugadora con más partidos y medallas con la Selección en la historia del baloncesto español. Concretamente, ganó 12 medallas y jugó 315 partidos con ella. Fue tricampeona intercontinental en 2013, 2017 y 2018; subcampeona mundial en 2014 y subcampeona olímpica en los Juegos Olímpicos de Río de 2016. Jugó en el CJM (Cercle Jean Macé) Bourges Basket (Francia), el Ros Casares Valencia, el USK Praga (Chequia), y finalmente el Uni Girona Club de Bàsquet.

Núria Picas (Manresa, 1976) es corredora de montaña profesional. Su primera maratón de montaña fue con 22 años en la Nike Aneto X-treme Marathon. Formó parte de la selección catalana de carreras de montaña y obtuvo numerosas victorias en competiciones como la Copa del Mundo de Ultra Trail en 2012 y la primera edición del Ultra Trail World Tour en 2014. En 2022 ganó el Ultra Pirineu superando en diecisiete minutos su marca anterior, aún habiendo estado tres años retirada por una lesión. Sus expediciones son recogidas en documentales como *Home to Home* (2016) o *Thar-Ua* (Íñigo Jiménez, 2018).

Omaira Perdomo is a professional volleyball player and a transgender athlete. She has played as a blocker for CCO7 Las Palmas in the Iberdrola League (Superliga). Her achievements include winning the Spanish Championship with CV JAV Olímpico. Currently, she balances her sports profile with her public persona and partnerships with various brands on social media.

Adiaratou Iglesias is a professional para athlete. She represented Spain at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, where she won a gold medal in the 100-metre category and a silver in the 400-metre category. She has an extensive list of accomplishments in national and international competitions, including two silver medals in the 100- and 200-metre categories at the 2019 World Para Athletics Championships. She was also previously a medallist at the Spanish Under-23 Athletics Championships.

Tania Álvarez is a professional boxer. Still in the early stages of her career, she won the Spanish Women's Super Bantamweight Championship in 2023, held in Castellbisbal, defeating Natali Francesca. Other achievements include competing at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Article reference
Cancela, N., Puig-Fontrodona, L., Cordal, A., Palau, L., Picas, N., Perdomo, O., Iglesias, A., Álvarez, T. (2024). Tensions and Challenges in Depictions of Women's Sport in Audiovisual Media: Perspectives of Spanish Sportswomen. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 123-144.

Omaira Perdomo (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1999) es jugadora de vóleibol profesional y deportista trans. Ha participado como bloqueadora con el equipo CCO7 Las Palmas en la Liga Iberdrola (Superliga) de vóleibol. Cuenta con logros como haber ganado el Campeonato de España con el CV JAV Olímpico. Actualmente, compagina su perfil deportivo con su faceta de personaje público y su trabajo con diversas marcas en redes sociales.

Adiaratou Iglesias (Bamako, 1999) es deportista profesional paralímpica de atletismo adaptado. Fue representante de España en los Juegos Paralímpicos de Tokio 2020, donde obtuvo una medalla de oro en la categoría de 100 metros y otra de plata en la de 400 metros. Logró un amplio palmarés en competiciones nacionales e internacionales, como sus dos medallas de plata en las categorías de 100 y 200 metros del Campeonato Mundial de Atletismo Adaptado de 2019. Previamente también fue medallista en el Campeonato de España de Atletismo Sub-23.

Tania Álvarez (Barcelona, 2002) es boxeadora profesional. Aún estando en el comienzo de su carrera, es ganadora del Campeonato de España femenino del peso supergallo en 2023 celebrado en Castellbisbal contra Natali Francesca. Tiene logros a sus espaldas como haber competido en el Madison Square Garden de Nueva York.

Referencia de este artículo
Cancela, N., Puig-Fontrodona, L., Cordal, A., Palau, L., Picas, N., Perdomo, O., Iglesias, A., Álvarez, T. (2024). Tensiones y retos en la representación audiovisual del deporte femenino: perspectivas de deportistas españolas. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 123-144.

Edita / Published by
associació cineforum L'ATALANTE
EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

VANISHING POINTS

CINEMATIC DUNES: THE CONFIGURATION OF THE DESERT IN EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO ART
Albert Alcoz

HUMANISM, LANDSCAPE AND THE SEQUENCE-SHOT IN BÉLA TARR'S *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*
Carlos Ruiz Carmona
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THE EMPTIED IMAGE: NEW APPROACHES TO DEAGRARIANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NON-FICTION CINEMA
Valentín Via Vázquez

CINEMATIC DUNES: THE CONFIGURATION OF THE DESERT IN EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO ART*

ALBERT ALCOZ

INTRODUCTION

> In the desert it isn't necessary to move, given that it is the desert itself that moves beneath the feet of those who dare to visit it. What sense does it make to travel if the landscape itself is doing so? So far as I know, the desert is the only place in the world where something like this happens.
>
> D'ORS, 2019: 98

The main objective of this article is to investigate the role acquired by the desert in a number of audiovisual productions that represent it. The film and video production practices studied here are formalist, conceptual creations of the past 60 years. By identifying how the desert has served as a source of inspiration for various filmmakers and video artists on the international scene, this study aims to contribute to research on experimental film from the perspective of the landscape. Based on a specific visual motif (a type of geographical setting characterised by a lack of rain and the aridness of its terrain), the article explores how the desert is depicted in these artistic practices as a territory that invites us to mediate on the conditions of life and to reflect on the viability of audiovisual technology to document them. Portraying the desert in sound and moving images facilitates the articulation of abstract aesthetics, fictionalised metaphorical constructions and wordless philosophical mediations.

Leaving aside fiction films (which use the desert as a backdrop for the resolution of dramatic conflicts) and expository documentaries (which generally describe it with explanatory voice-overs), the focus here is on a group of productions free of narrative impositions and informational parameters. They are works belonging to the tradition of experimental film and video art, shot on film stock (16 mm or 35 mm) or recorded on analogue or digital video, exhibited exclusively in artistic contexts or at specialised festivals. The piec-

es chosen for this study are predominantly from Europe and North America, as audiovisual experimentation has been a practice limited mainly to Western countries. Some Japanese, Australian and African titles were also considered but could not be included in the final study because it was not possible to gain viewing access to them. Ideally, a precise analysis of the connection between cinema and the desert should consider a full range of African and Asian films. However, in view of the difficulties associated with obtaining certain relatively unknown films by creators such as India's Mani Kaul, Iran's Atoosa Pour Hosseini and Senegal's Ousmane Sembène, it was decided to leave these peripheral film industries out of the analysis. Nevertheless, on the question of African cinema, it is worth recalling Alberto Elena's observation that "the cinematographic desert that Sadoul spoke of thirty years ago is a desert no longer: with some major works to its credit, and, above all, an inexhaustible vitality, the emergent cinema of Africa has become not only 'the night school of my people' as Sembène once described it, but an important part of the contemporary film scene" (1999: 187).

The works discussed here offer a cinematic overview divided into three blocks. Three specific visual motifs—sand, the human figure, and the horizon—serve as starting points for three sections each analysing three different films. The first section explores stylistic perspectives that describe the surface of desert landscapes in poetic terms. From these perspectives, the notion of abstraction makes its presence felt in images of sandy, arid and rocky terrain that serve autobiographical intentions. The second block considers narrative questions expressed through human performers. The human figure is the focal point in three titles that erase the boundary between fiction and documentary. With minimalist mises-en-scéne or clever essayistic montages, these films experiment with idiosyncratic ways of adding bodies to the desert landscape. Finally, the third section offers an analysis of the horizon as an element of the landscape that fosters philosophical meditation, allowing for an exploration of the concepts of emptiness and endlessness.

Based on the subjective perspectives of the artists, the works studied here offer a glimpse of the fascination that a setting characterised by extreme conditions can arouse. These filmmakers and video artists tell intimate stories in films that highlight the desolate nature of the landscapes, which are revealed to be epistemological foundations. Technology and the imagination are used to counteract the lifelessness associated with the desert. In this way, they take an exploratory approach located between philosophical reflection and cinematic investigation. Why does the desert attract so many audiovisual artists to carry out their projects there? What is the source of this fascination? How do they express the experience of being in the desert? Why does taking a poetic perspective and playing with metaphor prove so insightful? What ideas does the desert inspire and how are audiovisual techniques used to express them? These and other questions are examined below through the analysis of a range of works, many of which use the word "desert" in their titles.

DESERTS IMAGINED, DESERTS SIGNALLED

The desert landscape suggests countless semantic considerations that stretch beyond its physical boundaries. According to Milani, "[t]he landscape is not limited to the territory, that is, to an expanse of land that remains identical through the mutations of its environment. The territory is a geographical, political and social expression, while the landscape contains symbolic and affective meanings" (2006: 76). Desert or semi-desert regions cover a third of the land surface of the Earth; their presence all over the planet is impossible to ignore. In climatological terms, deserts are regions with only sporadic precipitation, spaces with no permanent bodies of water on their surface. At

the biogeographical level, although deserts are abiotic (devoid of life), they do in fact provide a home to sparse animal and plant populations that exist thanks to their adapted forms. The paucity of flora and fauna in these regions is obvious, as is their endemic nature and their physical similarities. The Sahara is far and away the largest desert on the planet, its 9 million square kilometres stretching across 12 North African countries.

The vast sands of the Rub' al Khali in Saudi Arabia, the basins of East Asia, the rocky terrain of the Saharan woodlands, the arid wastes of the Southwestern United States, Australia's desolate interior, the littoral of Peru and Chile, and the coastal dunes of the Namib are all places that have exerted a powerful attraction on numerous audiovisual artists. As Michael Martin (2004) suggests, deserts are sanctuaries for the imagination because they allow us to enter another dimension, a place where solitude, silence and the connection with Earth and the cosmos transcend time. The desert draws us into the most profound mystery of life, as time there acquires a different density. In these magnificent landscapes, past and future unfold with all their force.

Atmospheric pressure and wind patterns determine the meteorological processes that create the arid zones where deserts are created. The dunes of Taklamakan, the Gobi and the Atacama, the mountains of the Sierra Nevada and the volcanic vastness of the Danakil are a few of the emblematic motifs of deserts classified as tropical, subtropical, interior, temperate, cold, coastal, high-altitude or rain shadow. These are sandy, stony or rocky deserts whose topographic forms have been the subject of geological research, but which have also served as material for visual documentation using the technologies of photography and cinematography. The results of both may be expressive, poetic or informational.

Fiction films and contemporary conceptual art can both reveal the desert's ability to express aesthetic interests and narrative objectives. Many of the regions mentioned above have been used as locations for dramatic situations in cinematic narratives. Emblematic titles in film history have demonstrated that deserts can serve as important settings for dramatic conflicts, or vast spaces for the staging of psychological horrors. Motion pictures as diverse as *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962), *Woman of the Dunes* (Hiroshi Teshigahara, 1964), *Simon of the Desert* (Simón del desierto, Luis Buñuel, 1965), *Zabriskie Point* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1970), *Punishment Park* (Peter Watkins, 1971), *Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg, 1971), *The Inner Scar* (La cicatrice intérieure, Philippe Garrel, 1972), *Xala* (Ousame Sembène, 1975), *The Sheltering Sky* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1990) and *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996) all feature sequences filmed in deserts. In most of these, actors are at the centre of the attention.

Scholars have offered a wide range detailed analyses of the desert in films like these. Examples include Brad Sykes' book *Terror in the Desert: Dark Cinema of the American Southwest* (2018) and Chris Byford's article "The Garden of Light: Images of the Desert in Film" (1999). Byford's study explores the mythology of the desert in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The English Patient*. In both films, the desert *mise-en-scène* is limited to sand, light and heat, turning this geographic space into "the ideal place for the process of myth-making" (Byford, 1999: 38). The inherently epic nature of these two canonical works in film history reflects the fact that "in the secular West, the desert has become the purest signifier of the mystic emptiness of the soul" (Byford, 1999: 37). The comparative analysis of the insignificance of the human being and the immensity of the desert is one of the key points in a study focusing on how light and shadow are used in different scenes.

As a favourable location for the development of artistic projects, the desert has become a notable feature of the practices of a number of artists working in the fields of land art and Earthworks (Lippard, 1973; Krauss, 1979), the former being as-

sociated with the US context, while the latter is used mainly with reference to British artists. The dramatic alteration of the landscape in land art contrasts with the subtlety and respect for nature that characterises Earthworks. Both are expressions that emerged during the rise of conceptual movements associated with the dematerialisation of art in the 1960s and 1970s. Various American artists intervene in desert zones with aesthetic objectives involving the transformation of their physical appearance. According to the theorist Simón Marchán Fiz:

> [...] works of land art as well publicised as Heizer's *Double Negative*, Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* and *Spiral Jetty*, Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field*, Christo's *Running Fence*, James Turrell's *Roden Crater* (an ongoing work in progress since 1974), scattered across deserts in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Utah, are landmarks where the surrounding nature not only serves as their setting, their specific site, but is also integrated into each one as part of the piece. (2006: 43)

Another emblematic work worth adding to this list is an artistic intervention titled *Sun Tunnels* (1973-1976) by the American artist Nancy Holt, which includes a documentary of the same name completed in 1978. The 26 minutes of this film documents the process of constructing four concrete cylinders with a diameter of two metres, which were transported by truck to their final location: a remote valley of the Great Basin Desert near Wendhover in northern Utah. The film is a descriptive testimony to the creation process for a project involving dozens of workers interacting with construction tools in the open air. Another artist worthy of mention here is the English sculptor Sir Richard Long, whose desert walks and interventions, consisting of marking routes, drawing circles or collecting found objects, are recorded in the documentary *Stones and Flies: Richard Long in the Sahara* (Philip Haas, 1988).

The abstract nature of certain fiction sequences set in deserts and the artistic sensibility apparent in land art interventions can also be identified in the films and videos analysed below. The poetics of their images and the conceptual background to their formal approaches provide evidence of the exchange of influences between filmmaking and contemporary art. Situated between these two cultural dimensions is a kind of experimental film and video art that uses the desert as a vehicle for expressing personal concerns. These audiovisual expressions eschew both the drama and the exoticism that the desert acquires in mainstream cinema, while also shying away from the monumental quality implicit in land art sculptures. Instead, they articulate unique aesthetic approaches and unexpected developments involving filmmaking techniques that invite the viewer to ponder the desert.

DESERT POETICS: FROM HYPER-REALIST SAND TO ABSTRACT ARIDITY

While in the first avant-garde film movements the play of luminous reflections on water became a recurring motif for filmmakers such as Ralph Steiner (*H20*, 1929) and Joris Ivens (*Rain*, 1929), from the 1960s to the 1980s the sandy surface of the desert attracted various filmmakers who examined its appearance with a focus on the transformation of its dunes. Pondering the movement of the sand through the flow of images is an analytical exercise that reveals not only the iconic nature of film images but the self-reflexive undercurrent implicit in any filmmaking exercise in the desert. The sand's constant motion has an analogous relationship with the variations of the photochemical process of the celluloid and its subsequent projection. The continuous formation of these landscapes is a source of fascination for filmmakers who allow themselves to be seduced by its immensity, discovering the resilience of the individual subject in an inhospitable setting.

If there is any one film that best exemplifies this fluctuating quality of the desert expanse, it is

Alaya (1987) by the American filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky. Over the course of 30 minutes of footage, Dorsky meticulously documents the changes occurring to the dunes of different deserts around the world. Demonstrating a profound knowledge of the 16mm film camera, the director assembles a montage of static shots, close-ups and overhead views of different sandy regions. Framed with an "all over" approach (in keeping with the principles of abstract Expressionist painting), the compositions become an abstraction of vibrating particles resulting from the precise use of macroscopic optics during filming (Image 1). Added to this unusual view of grains of sand are the changes of position caused by the wind, as well as changes to the lighting. Filmed indiscriminately at daytime and night-time hours, the shots demonstrate not only the contemplative tone of the enterprise but also the highly individual approach adopted by the filmmaker to achieve his purpose. With nothing added to the soundtrack, Dorsky creates a hypnotic, hyper-realist film in which sand is in perpetual motion. These grains, illuminated by the sunlight and displaced by the force of the wind, interact with the photochemical grain of the emulsion. When they shine against a dark background, the cosmos is inevitably brought to mind.

Migra (1994) by the Catalan filmmaker Toni Serra focuses on the surface of the desert, offering a personal journey in which the landscape and texts recited aloud signal a rite of passage. The dry, often cracked terrain is filmed in video images with fleeting frontal and lateral movements, taken in an overhead view (Image 2). All these images reveal a poetic cadence that is progressively increased by the written word. The synopsis, written by the creator himself, reads: "Landscapes like texts to be read. The desert is our friend, migrations of the mind." Juxtaposing landscapes of desert and plant life with images of printed pages, Serra reflects on the locations visited, the role of vision and the transmission of knowledge. According to Serra, "to decolonise the vision would be to give it back, to integrate it into the body and the other senses, to integrate it into the place, into its forces and voids... To rescue it from the tyranny of the merely optical in order to open it up to the other eyes of the body and spirit, to make it whole" (2018: 90). This is a way of signalling how thought flows when it is allowed to submit to ocularcentrism. The music in *Migra*, composed by Barbara Held, is a sound piece titled "Desert Wrap" that combines frequencies of wind instruments with sounds recorded on location. It is an unsettling sonic accompaniment that is well suited to the continuous series of rocky images.

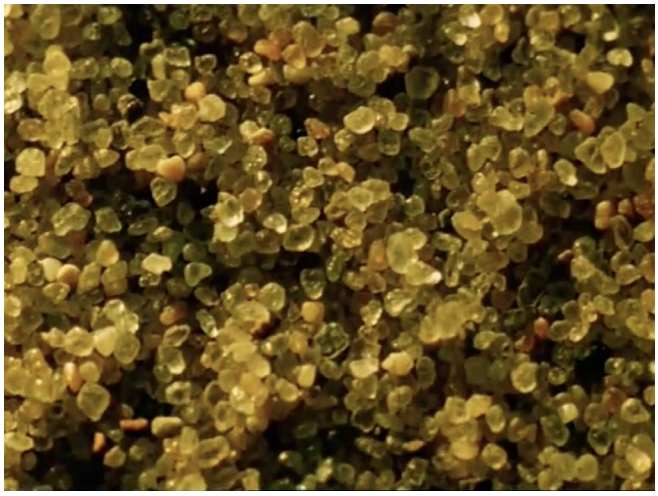


Image 1. *Alaya* (Nathaniel Dorsky, 1976-1987). Source: https://www.centrepompidou.fr/es/ressources/oeuvre/cMjp6x

PONDERING THE MOVEMENT OF THE SAND THROUGH THE FLOW OF IMAGES IS AN ANALYTICAL EXERCISE THAT REVEALS NOT ONLY THE ICONIC NATURE OF FILM IMAGES BUT THE SELF-REFLEXIVE UNDERCURRENT IMPLICIT IN ANY FILMMAKING EXERCISE IN THE DESERT

Jon Behrens turns up the hyperactive tone of the film described above with a nine-minute piece titled *Desert Abstractions* (1997). Multiple exposures captured in the Arizona desert (taken with



Image 2. *Migra* (Toni Serra, 1994). Source: http://www.al-bar-zaj.org/2011/06/migra.html

Steve Creson's help over the course of a week) are the material used to create a piece that functions as a mosaic of chromatic impressions. Here, hundreds of brief moving images fuse with others, juxtaposed with continuous zooms and tracking shots moving to both sides. Different filters of warm colours define shots that convey a kind of visual confusion, despite the specific geological shapes they show. Rubato's music, with its New Age cadence, creates a soporific tone to the beat of endless dissolutions. Beginning with figurative representations (desert landscapes captured from all kinds of distances), Behrens moves with determination towards a quest for abstraction. Like the two films discussed above, *Desert Abstractions* eschews the peacefulness associated with specific visual motifs (sand, rocks) to take us into another dimension, one that offers glimpses of the possibility of entering the past and future of these same locations.

As Pablo d'Ors puts it, "the fascination with sand is none other than the fascination with our origins and, also, what all of us are compelled toward" (2019: 78). The sand of the desert symbolises the presence of an absence. It can also be read as the encapsulation of every desert landscape on Earth. The filmmakers and video artists discussed here appreciate the morphology of sand, which reflects their technical skills when they work with cameras and editing processes. In their pieces, the human figure is located off screen; the human presence is limited to the body behind the camera. The next section explores ways in which human beings are inscribed into the frame in experimental film and video art, in the middle of a desert setting.

DESERT MYTHOS: FROM MINIMALIST FICTION TO ESSAYISTIC DOCUMENTATION

In fiction films, the storyline is generally articulated through quite explicit mises-en-scène and performances of dialogues or the omnipresence of voice-overs. All of this overrides any possibility of the desert playing the central role: the human figure always predominates over the landscape. These are films that use the desert to shape the emotions and dramatic circumstances of their main characters. In documentaries, the educational nature of the information related to the conditions of the desert landscape precludes the possibility of comprehending it without words. For David Jasper, the desert is a "place of wandering, a place to enter into," and also "a place of meeting" (2004: xviii). Although the desert offers the potential for contact with alterity, this meeting is mainly with oneself. In the following paragraphs, I consider how human figures interact with these environments and other beings in three films in which the direction of the actors is reduced to a minimum.

Walter de Maria's *Hard Core* (1969) was filmed in the Black Rock Desert in northwest Nevada in July 1969. This 28-minute film presents the landscape with a series of slow 360-degree pan shots from left to right, filmed using a tripod and a wide-angle lens. The breadth and immensity of this arid territory evokes the Westerns of Hollywood's classical era. In the film, two men dressed as cowboys (the cinematographer Blair Stapp and

THE NEED FOR REFUGE IS MADE FORCEFULLY CLEAR, HINTING AT THE VULNERABILITY OF THE HUMAN BODY WITHOUT EXAGGERATING THE ACTION. IN THE WAITING, THE SILENCE REDEFINES AND FOREGROUNDS THE TERRITORY

fellow artist Michael Heizer) eventually appear in some fleeting detail shots. At the same time, the whole film is accompanied by an intense musical soundtrack, composed by de Maria himself, including two pieces titled Cricket Music (1964) and Ocean Music (1968) produced using recordings of waves on the sea, incessant percussion and instrumentation *in crescendo*. After numerous pans sweeping across the horizon, the two human figures are presented in a frenetic finale: an armed duel condensed into a long series of brief shots of one man firing a revolver and the other a shotgun. It is the epitome of the violence intrinsic to classic Westerns and their mythology associated with the conquest of the American hinterland. Here, the desert plays the main role. In this location beyond the reach of civilisation, impunity is a visible feature. The Italian scholar Francesco Careri points out this filmmaker's interest in the desert when he notes that "[i]n 1968 Walter de Maria made his *One Mile Long Drawing*, two parallel one-mile lines drawn on the Mojave Desert, where in 1969 he shot, for the television gallery of Gerry Schum, the video *Two Lines, Three Circles on the Desert*" (2018: 139).

One Woman Waiting (1984), by the Canadian filmmaker Josephine Massarella, is constructed entirely out of a single static shot lasting nine minutes. It is a work of minimalist fiction in which the creator underscores the recognition of the other. Appearing in a desert landscape of brightly sunlit dunes lit is a young woman who, after tracing a circle in the sand with her bare feet, sits down on the right-hand side of the frame to contemplate the landscape (Image 3). A short time later, a human figure becomes discernible on the horizon in the background: it is another woman, who moves patiently towards the first, greets her and embraces her. With no dialogue, and with ambient music of bells and sonic textures that evoke the wind, the film presents us with a scene marked by dichotomies: distance/proximity, strangeness/familiarity, staging/documenting. All of this is encapsulated in one precise moment: an embrace with metaphysical resonances. In this gesture, the two women exemplify the importance of companionship and respect in a setting as desolate as the one they find themselves in. The need for refuge is made forcefully clear, hinting at the vulnerability of the human body without exaggerating the action. In the waiting, the silence redefines and foregrounds the territory. While the two men in Walter de Maria's film confront each other violently, the two women in Massarella's film offer one another soothing care and mutual understanding. The footprints on the sand allude to the protagonist's indecision and disorientation, in a connection with the short story "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths" (1939) by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, when he establishes a parallel between the labyrinth and the desert,

Image 3. *One Woman Waiting* (Josephine Massarella, 1984). Source: https://lux.org.uk/work/one-woman-waiting



"which has no stairways to climb, nor doors to force, nor unending galleries to wear one down, nor walls to block one's way" (1978: 90).

Zoom (2005), by the Spanish director Elías León Siminiani, constructs a remarkable montage of the process of reviewing a single shot filmed in the Erg Chebbi Desert in Morocco. An expedition of human figures and camels is shown travelling across this region of semi-arid pre-Saharan steppes (Image 4). With a static point-of-view shot and a slight forward zoom, the camera operator focuses on his partner, a young woman from Madrid. At one point, she makes a revealing gesture. With the aid of Luis Callejo's voice, this gesture hints that the couple are at the culminating moment of their romantic relationship. "50 apparent seconds of silence, calm and emptiness... But only apparent" is the synopsis of a video about a zoom-in that gave rise to another more elaborate video: *Límites: Primera Persona* (2009). Completed for an exhibition project titled *Miradas al límite* [Gazes on the Limit], organised by the Artium Museum in the Basque Country and produced by the Pantalla Partida production company, this second project takes a more ambitious approach to the investigation initiated in *Zoom*. The spoken word takes centre stage in an 8-minute video montage focusing on the distant figure of a girl wandering through a desert in Morocco. In a voice-over, Luis Callejo and Siminiani himself reflect on the amateur quality of the images filmed on video and the biased perspective created by the montage. The series of arguments put forward are aimed at restoring the romantic relationship between the video's protagonist, Ainhoa Ramírez, and its creator, Siminiani. As we hear in the voice-over: "if she is searching for him, he is searching for her all the more 'because' all the images he brings back from the desert have her as their motif." The spoken words reveal the degree of self-consciousness applied to this digitally manipulated material, geared towards a particular semantic construction. A few gentle piano notes from a Claude Debussy composition give colour to an audiovisual essay created as a test of love between two Spanish youths. The physical distance between the two bodies—one visible, the other off screen—is the correlative of a video that celebrates the power of the surrounding space. The Saharan dunes are setting for a heterosexual relationship made up of symbolic shots on video, playful montages and gazes to camera.



Image 4. *Zoom* (Elías León Siminiani, 2005). Source: http://plat.tv/filmes/zoom

THE INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THESE PROJECTS ARE DELVING INTO THEIR OWN THOUGHTS; SEEING THEMSELVES SURROUNDED BY IMMENSE LANDSCAPES SHAPES THEIR PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS, TURNING THEM TOWARDS THE SUBLIME

The two fiction pieces studied here eschew the kind of narrative logic associated with commercial and arthouse cinema. The individuals participating in these projects are delving into their own thoughts; seeing themselves surrounded by immense landscapes shapes their personal perceptions, turning them towards the sublime. According to Tynan, in modern culture, the desert is often used "to evoke experiences of placelessness or dislocation, or of what Deleuze and Guattari

call, in their unique theoretical vocabulary, *deterritorialisation*" (2020: 11). In Siminiani's documentaries, this placelessness leaves room for a reflection that ranges from the rational to the ironic. In all three pieces, the desert bears witness to important moments in a relationship between two people. Death, companionship and love are meticulously cultivated in three different settings that in a certain way set their visitors off on a quest for the essential. Ethical disengagement and a loss of one's sense of direction are simply consequences of this powerful longing.

DESERT METAPHYSICS: FROM SPECULATIVE HORIZON TO ETHEREAL MEDIATION

The endlessness of the desert horizon, the vastness of its spaces and the beauty suggested by its desolation confront us with the idea of the void. This nothingness encourages us to conceive of the desert from a philosophical and spiritual perspective. We can thus speak of both a physical or external desert and a mental or internal one; both suggest absolute concepts that inevitably elicit metaphysical considerations. The desert is a metaphor for infinity because, as Pablo d'Ors argues, "it is the place of absolute possibility: the place where the horizon has the breadth that a person deserves and needs" (2019: 63). The titles studied in this section reveal how essential filming the horizon becomes to convey the experience of witnessing deserts for cinematic purposes.

In *Hand Held Day* (1975), the American filmmaker Gary Beydler uses a small rectangular mirror, held in one of his own hands, to reduce the passage of a day to a few minutes. While chronological time is condensed in a series of individual still frames showing different moments of the day, the surrounding space (the Arizona desert and mountains) is reduced to a rectangular composition inside another rectangle of smaller proportions. The variations of light and the vibrations resulting from the slight changes of position of the fingers holding up the mirror are the perceptible changes in a film that captures the path of the sun on two rolls of Kodachrome film. The mountainous horizon reflected in this detail shot contrasts with the spatial expanse of the desert. The mirror concentrates the beauty of the clouds in the sky and the sunset over the mountains while projecting the filmmaker's desire to frame and contain the surrounding landscape. This exercise of speculation on the dimensions of the horizon and its temporal condensation gives way to another exercise underpinned by the notion of the mirage.

Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat) (Bill Viola, 1979) is a video recorded in the Tunisian region of the Sahara Desert. Chott el-Djerid is the name of a large salt lake located in the Tunisian Sahara that often produces mirages when it is dried up. The intensity of the heat caused by the midday sun creates distorted illusions of moving shapes (Image 5). The perpetual movement of ethereal elements perceptible on the horizon and the constant vibration of blurry splotches of colour recorded by the video camera facilitate speculations about the images. The piece documents a vibration that seems to be a constant wave on the arid terrain of sand, sparse vegetation, a few

Image 5. ***Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)*** **(Bill Viola, 1979). Source: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/coleccion/obra/**



buildings, and some camels and humans crossing the scene. These fluctuating spectres are interspersed with shots taken in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan and central Illinois in the United States. Although their climatic conditions are completely different from those of Chott el-Djerid, these prairies filmed at wintertime display similarities related to their disorienting effects. These physical settings create psychological spaces that can inevitably be interpreted as perceptual delusions. Christopher Eamon argues that in his films in the 1970s "Viola immerses the viewer, taking his investigation to a metaphysical level" (2009: 82). Undermining the static notion associated with any horizon, Viola has constructed a video of temporal and spatial ruptures.

With *Altiplano* (2018), the Chilean filmmaker Malena Szlam has created a 15-minute film that takes us to the Andes mountains, travelling over different regions of northern Chile and western Argentina. Atacameño, Aymara and Calchaquí-Diaguita are the regions filmed in a piece named after the Altiplano region of the Atacama Desert. Shot on 16mm film, this work realises numerous technical possibilities associated with this format. Multiple exposures, colour filters, time lapses and other technical strategies allow Szlam to capture the essence of a place shaped by ancient geological features, volcanic deserts and sloping horizons. Taken by day and by night, the shots comprise a montage marked by a chromatic study of the landscape (Image 6). The visual richness



Image 6. *Altiplano* (Malena Szlam, 2018). Source: https://lightcone.org/en/film-11452-altiplano

combines a feverish gaze with a hallucinatory tone. This approach calls to mind an obsession of the video artist Mary Lucier: "[s]ometime around 1970 I became obsessed with the idea that video had been invented to satisfy an ancient longing: to allow the human eye to gaze directly at the sun without damage to the retina" (1990: 457). Szlam's film reflects this longing, in the same way that one of her earlier pieces, *Lunar Almanac* (2014), obsessively captures the light of the moon with multiple exposures. *Altiplano* is a mysterious piece that evokes South America's ancient past while suggesting a future filled with enigmas. As the scholar Ara Osterweil observes, "[m]ade too late to serve as a warning, *Altiplano* shows Szlam using the techniques of a dying medium to instead compose an exquisite elegy to what has been lost—and what might remain" (Osterweil, 2018). Szlam multiplies the lines of the horizon, juxtaposing layers of shots of different locations. The mountain peaks and other desert horizons, with their inexhaustible visual mutations, seem to have a life of their own. This continuous self-formation seems to rebel against the extractivism of human utilitarianism carried out in the name of progress.

THE MOUNTAIN PEAKS AND OTHER DESERT HORIZONS, WITH THEIR INEXHAUSTIBLE VISUAL MUTATIONS, SEEM TO HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN. THIS CONTINUOUS SELF-FORMATION SEEMS TO REBEL AGAINST THE EXTRACTIVISM OF HUMAN UTILITARIANISM CARRIED OUT IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS

The films examined in this section reveal the vastness of settings whose horizons render ex-

plicit the impossible nature of adapting them to a human scale. Reducing the horizon to a mirror image, exposing its constant distortion in mirages and superimposing different shots onto a single frame are ways of exploring its richness. The unique nature of the film and video production techniques used here reveal how audiovisual media can convey meditative states by bringing their documenting potential into play. In their novel *Hermanito*, Ibrahima Balde and Amets Arzallus describe Ibrahima's desert experience: "When I woke up, I sat for a while looking ahead, without knowing where 'ahead' was. I looked ahead in all directions and saw nothing. Only desert. Desert here. Desert there. Desert in all four directions." (2021: 48-49). In the pieces by Beydler, Viola and Szlam, the desert horizon is presented as fluctuating, conveying the uncertainty and the existential nature of spending prolonged periods in such a place. These pieces mediate on the omnipresence of time in locations where past, present and future all seem to happen at once. In a way, all three titles aim to transform the scale, the stillness and the uniqueness of their desert settings. As Graciela Speranza points out, "many artists and writers [...] reconfigure the world in their own way, and without losing their uniqueness, they expand the horizon of the diverse" (2017: 19).

CONCLUSIONS

The desert inevitably evokes the atemporal. The lack of human intervention in its surface facilitates this impression. According to Aurora Carapinha, "[i]n the landscape, space, matter, time (past present, future and biological time) and process are objectively present. They combine and structure one another in multiple interchangeable ways" (2009: 122). Desert settings are located outside time as they enable us to imagine past and future times never experienced. As most of the films analysed here show, the desert encapsulates the feeling described by Robert Smithson when he suggests that the present "must go into the places where remote futures meet remote pasts" (1968). However, human activity also has consequences for deserts. In our era, deserts have been growing due to human-caused climate change, one consequence of which is subtropical drought. As the researcher Germán Esteban Maidana points out, "[i]n just 70 years, from 1882 to 1952, the proportion of the Earth's land surface classified as desert increased from 9.4% to 23.3%" (2017: 144). It is reasonable to assume that this percentage has grown considerably since then.

The film installation *Bending to Earth* (2015) by Italian artist Rosa Barba consists of a 15-minute film—shown in a loop on a 35mm projector—that represents the effects of the arrival of utilitarianism in the desert. Barba shows the human footprint left on the Earth's surface in the name of progress with aerial shots of various radioactive waste storage facilities. Filmed from a helicopter, the different sequence shots show technological structures located in desert regions of California, Utah and Colorado. These nuclear waste management plants are described in a voice-over that explains the toxicity of the mixtures treated in them. The film's soundtrack combines electronic sounds and radio signals created by Barba and Jan St. Werner (a member of the German band Mouse on Mars), with the distorted voice of Letitia Sadier from the British group Stereolab. Cristina Cámara Bello suggests that the sound for this film "situate[s] us once more in another time, a moment of suspense between the nuclear disarmament brought about by the end of the Cold War and the radioactive waste generated by nuclear energy" (2016: 77-78). Viewed from the sky, these structures look rather like models created for dystopian science fiction films. The imposing nature of the projection equipment—with its size, noise and the dramatic nature of its loop—could be associated with the profound transformation

that certain deserts have undergone as a result of human intervention.

Rosa Barba offers a tragic view of the world that gives rise to an aesthetics of waste. The devastation and ruin that characterises the Anthropocene are signs foreboding an apocalyptic future. Yet it is also a future that has a positive reading because, as Pablo d'Ors remarks with reference to the desert, "[a]fter much thought, I have come to the conclusion that what attracts me to the void is the ecstasy of possibility" (2019: 100). According to Tynan, the desert can be understood as something "surprisingly fragile, as an idea of geographical extremism or alterity, as a sacred or accursed site, as a metaphor for nullity, as a subjective or existential terrain, or as an object of sheer aesthetic exultation" (2020: 1). This multiplicity of meanings is perfectly reflected in a group of films and videos that embrace aesthetics derived from their audiovisual constructions while hinting at concerns oriented simultaneously towards the whole and towards nothingness. Using film and video production techniques, these relatively inaccessible territories can be grasped as regions filled with life. As Tynan suggests, the desert "becomes a stage on which a new awareness—a new semiosis—of life becomes possible" (2020: 3). As can be seen in the audiovisual works analysed here, despite the alienation, solitude and unease it elicits, the desert is shown paradoxically to be an ideal geographical location for the imagination. Conveying experiences and suggesting atemporal encounters are the common features of these artistic explorations in which the desert reveals its cinematic power. ■

NOTES

* This work has been carried out within the framework of the Consolidated Research Group: IMARTE. Investigación en procesos artísticos y nuevas tecnologías (2021 SGR 01090) of the Facultad de Bellas Artes of the Universidad de Barcelona.

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CINEMATIC DUNES: THE CONFIGURATION OF THE DESERT IN EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO ART

Abstract
Deserts have influenced a number of experimental filmmakers and video artists who have visited them to make audiovisual pieces offering glimpses of unusual aesthetic connotations and unique epistemological considerations. The works analysed in this article place the desert in the main role, eschewing the informational objectives associated with conventional documentary and rejecting the functional quality assigned to the desert as a dramatic location in fiction feature films. These artists offer a different configuration of the desert, focusing on the sandy abstraction of its dunes, exploring the insignificance of the human figure in the face of its vastness, and imagining possible temporal representations of its horizons. This article considers the poetic, mythical and metaphysical nature of the desert through the analysis of various experimental films and video creations that study the idiosyncrasies of its landscape, reflecting on the existential connotations suggested by desert regions and testing out the multiple options offered by audiovisual techniques. These are pieces that range from lyrical abstraction to autobiographical testimony, from minimalist fiction to self-reflexive essay. The analysis of a film installation with an environmentalist discourse concludes this study of sounds and moving pictures that imagine new readings that can help us understand the importance of the desert.

Key words
Desert; Experimental Film; Artists' Video; Landscape; Horizon.

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Article reference
Alcoz, Albert. (2024). (2022). Cinematic Dunes: The Configuration of the Desert in Experimental Film and Video Art. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 147-160.

DUNAS CINEMÁTICAS. LA CONFIGURACIÓN DEL DESIERTO EN EL CINE EXPERIMENTAL Y LA VIDEOCREACIÓN

Resumen
El desierto influye en una serie de cineastas experimentales y videocreadores que se acercan a él para realizar piezas audiovisuales que vislumbran connotaciones estéticas inusuales y consideraciones epistemológicas singulares. Los trabajos analizados en este artículo toman el desierto como protagonista principal; esquivan la voluntad informativa asociada al documental ortodoxo y rechazan el carácter funcional del desierto como localización dramática en largometrajes de cine de ficción. Estos artistas configuran el desierto concentrándose en la abstracción arenosa de sus dunas, deteniéndose en la insignificancia de la figura humana ante su basta dimensión y elucubrando posibles representaciones temporales de su horizonte. El carácter poético, mítico y metafísico del desierto queda argumentado a través de un conjunto de films experimentales y videocreaciones que estudian la idiosincrasia del paisaje. Lo hacen pensando las connotaciones existenciales derivadas de los territorios y perfilando la pluralidad de opciones de las herramientas audiovisuales. Son piezas que van de la abstracción lírica al testimonio autobiográfico, de la ficción minimalista al ensayo autorreflexivo. El análisis de una instalación fílmica de discurso ecologista concluye una investigación en la que los sonidos e las imágenes en movimiento imaginan nuevas lecturas con las que comprender el valor del desierto.

Palabras clave
Desierto; Cine experimental; Videocreación; Paisajismo; Horizonte.

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Referencia de este artículo
Alcoz, Albert. (2024). Dunas cinemáticas. La configuración del desierto en el cine experimental y la videocreación. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 147-160.

recibido/received: 15.09.2022 | *aceptado/accepted:* 20.06.2023

Edita / Published by

Licencia / License

ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

HUMANISM, LANDSCAPE AND THE SEQUENCE-SHOT IN BÉLA TARR'S *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*

CARLOS RUIZ CARMONA
ANA CATARINA AGUIAR

THE TOTALITARIAN STATE OF *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*

Sátántangó (1994), by Bèla Tarr, has a duration of four hundred and twenty two minutes, with only one hundred and fifty shots. It is based on the novel by László Krasznahorkai, a writer, also Hungarian, a contemporary of Tarr. The work, *Sátántangó*, was published in 1985, four years before the fall of the totalitarian communist regime. At the heart of the narrative are the inhabitants of a rural community in southeastern Hungary. During the post-Stalinist period, between the mid-1950s and mid-1980s, these communities represented an appeal to people's autonomy, allowing them to build their own home, while establishing a community based economy. At the end of the 1980s, due to the overall economic and political state of the country–since the end of the 1960s, a kind of *market socialism* was being experimented with, a limited model of economic reform without political reform–some of these communities were not profitable for the new market economy. Consequently, these places were abandoned and condemned to a slow death and the workers of this socialist model became miserable.

Most of Tarr's characters are not only socially marginalized, but they also choose to be passive assuming an observer position, without the power to induce change in the system. These characters seem to reflect the second period of stagnation of the socialist regime. Unlike the older generation, the last younger Soviet generation had a common identity, formed by a shared experience of the normalized and unchanging discourse of the Brezhnev years. Tarr's characters can be situated as part of that younger generation that was born between the years 1950-1970 and came of age between the years 1970-1980 (Samardzija, 2020).

The novel focuses on the internal espionage network of a totalitarian communist state. It begins with a complex plot: the villagers' only livelihood, livestock, is sold and the villagers prepare

to abandon the property for a better life elsewhere. However, they give up on the idea when they learn that two former inhabitants–Irimiás and Petrina–who they thought were dead, are returning to the community. As they come from the neighbouring city and make the journey on foot, it is during the waiting interval that some of the stories in the film are developed. The villagers are anxious about their return, even considering one of them, Irimiás, as a kind of saviour, ignoring the fact that both are now working for the State, as undercover informants. The environment described is deplorable, the rain falls uninterruptedly and the characters that usually walk appear buried in the mud. The general trait of the characters is, on the one hand, to be socially and psychologically vulnerable and, on the other, morally reprehensible. They are villagers, including the innkeeper, a woman with several children, two of them teenagers, prostitutes–a younger one and a demented girl–, the doctor, the teacher and a police captain. They live in dilapidated houses, without basic sanitation and they gather in the village tavern, infested with spiders, to dance, drink and forget their miserable condition.

IN BÉLA TARR'S *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*

Tarr's work can be divided into two periods: the initial period, where Tarr has a more demanding and expectant attitude towards change and produces films with themes linked to the social problems of socialist Hungary. During this period, his work testifies, for example, to the difficult living conditions of factory workers and the difficulties of people in accessing housing. In the second period, his films follow the decline of the communist system and the emergence of capitalism. These are increasingly pessimistic films, where politics is reduced to a promise, a manipulation, as is the case of *Sátántangó*, which illustrates the end of hope for a new world of freedom and equality, and the disenchantment with the capitalist promise that followed the collapse of the socialist era. Structurally, *Sátántangó* is the most complex of all Tarr's films, owing this complexity to a non-linear narrative where events are not always represented chronologically. The structure is divided into twelve chapters: I-VI and VI-XII, six forward and six backward, like a tango.

There are few studies available on *Sátántangó*, despite being considered by many critics as Béla Tarr's masterpiece. The reasons are diverse and the most important may be related to the long duration of the film, a characteristic that makes it difficult to disseminate and distribute in the international circuit. The most extensive publications on Tarr, and specifically on this work, belong to Jacques Rancière and András Kovács and point in different directions. Ranciére (2012), in a poetic-philosophical essay, seeks to translate the images and atmosphere of the film into words, aiming at the ethical, political and social meanings; in turn, Kovács (2013) focuses his study on formal issues, aspects of light, movement, color, sound and, above all, on the analysis of the time of the shots. Lidia Mello (2015) also carried out a study on the last five films by Béla Tarr, from an aesthetic-philosophical perspective, with the aim of making the author known and exploring his cinematography through the idea of repetition. Meanwhile, Tiago de Luca (2016) contextualizes Tarr in slow cinema, considering him one of his greatest precursors in contemporary Hungarian cinema. Also Heck (2020), in his book *After Authority - Global Art Cinema and Political Transition*, recognizes in *Sátántangó* a response to the political transition of Hungary's post-communism, through the construction of a democratic image, a cinema that positions itself as anti-communist, anti-authoritarian, free from a determining role of the authority of governments. Finn (2022), in his work *Cinematic Modernism and Contemporary Film*, argues that cinematic modernism resurged in the late 1980s, extends to the present day. It is both the political response to a new capitalism crisis and also a new formal and stylistic category, countering the cultural imperialism and

eclecticism of postmodernist art film. Tarr's work is included in this movement, through neo-Bazinian realism, with narratives relating political betrayal and existential angst of the individual and the collective, starting on the particular and going to the universal (Finn, 2022: 216).

Tarr's films evoke discourses of nostalgia because they are persistently shot on black-and-white using the sequence-shot as discourse. The monochromatic image is central to the dark atmosphere that Tarr creates and its consistency is reminiscent of other black and white films, from German expressionism, through Italian neo-realism to the the 50s and 60s' modernist wave. The historical effect of this choice is not mere coincidence since the image somehow evokes a sense of the past. The sequence-shot does not exist solely to create a specific environment or to represent a certain theme, but rather as an emotional and psychological *matter*, that intends to provoke different experiences in the spectator. It is from these experiences that Tarr brings the spectator closer to the reality the characters live in his narrative.

Sátántangó situates itself within the Hungarian post-socialist cinema, Black Series, being one of its most emblematic films. According to Batori (2018: 146), Black Series films are characterized by the presentation of unemployed or crisis-ridden characters, who do not fit into society, living far away from urban centers, in unknown or abandoned environments. This tendency evokes the narrative mode of the parables of the 60s in an aesthetic continuity between the productions made in the socialist era and the 90s. Tarr argues that *Sátántangó* does not intend to adapt the novel to cinema, but rather to take it on a stage. The *Puszta* (arid land), the *Tanya* (dispersed rural property) and the *Alföld* (great Hungarian plain) become the epicentre of decadence and a symbol of lost national values, contributing to Tarr's aesthetic definition, by establishing a closed and abstract universe that, while mirroring freedom, imprisons the characters (Batori, 2018).

TARR ARGUES THAT *SÁTÁNTANGÓ* DOES NOT INTEND TO ADAPT THE NOVEL TO CINEMA, BUT RATHER TO TAKE IT ON A STAGE

Tarr and Krasznahorkai (2018) agree that the most important element of *Sátántangó* is not any theme or topic, but the way of approaching the human condition. For Tarr, it is very important to be on the side of the most vulnerable, representing them in his cinema and trying to give them dignity (Maury & Rollet, 2016). However, *Sátántangó*'s characters are rigid throughout the film, making it difficult for the viewer to establish relationships of identification or create empathy. The social situation in which they find themselves is precarious and they do not have cognitive or moral tools capable of improving their situation. They are vulnerable characters, psychologically and socially, incapable of cooperating in the construction of a common good.

This statement about protecting human dignity, causes us a conflict since, *a priori*, we cannot find aspects in which human dignity is defended there. For this reason we have focussed our research on understanding how Béla Tarr, uses the sequence-shot to defend the dignity of his characters in *Sátántangó*. Is it possible to identify a specific stylistic pattern in his representation of the human condition? How does Tarr approach the staging of the long take to represent a point of view of humanity? What kind of relationships Tarr establishes between scenarios and characters through camera movement and composition? How these conceptual relationships contribute to presenting a point of view of the human condition? Although we have analyzed Tarr's filmography and, above all, the film *Sátántangó*, for the purpose of this article we have selected a number of specific sequence-shots that take place in the central settings of the narra-

tive: the *Puszta*, the *Alföld*, the *Tanya* and the *Koscma* (tavern). The analysis includes a detailed discussion of how the director employs framing, camera movement, and the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound to represent the human condition.

THE *ALFÖLD*'S PRISONERS

Tarr located most of his stories, from the second period of his work (1988-2011), in the vast land of the *Alföld* and its forgotten villages. In addition to playing a key role in agricultural production, the landscape of southern Hungary was home to some of the most important historical events related to the nation's independence, becoming a national symbol, a rural heritage and a metaphor for the right to self-determination (Batori, 2018). Considered practically a treeless desert–which is why the territory is often referred to as *Puszta*, which means *barren* and *wasteland*, in Hungarian–the flooded parts of the *Alföld* were slowly being converted into arable land, meadows, fertile fields, pastures and vineyards, thus establishing a strong, self-sufficient and export-oriented agricultural sector.

In the first sequence-shot analyzed, Tarr follows the start of Irimiás and Petrina's journey to the police station (00:43:54 - 00:45:396), where the two will be notified that they will have to work as informants. The sequence-shot begins by framing a deserted street with buildings on both sides and lots of garbage (figure 1). Irimiás and Petrina appear on their backs and, as they advance, the rubbish envelops them in their walk (figure 2). The street occupies two thirds of the frame, leaving the sky and the horizon line lost in the background. It rains heavily, the wind blows and drags the surrounding rubbish, and we hear the sound of debris and characters' footsteps. The environmental sound presents an inhospitable atmosphere that contributes to evoking a feeling of hopeless misery. The sound volume seems artificially high causing a considerable dramatic charge, which configures one of Tarr's fundamental characteristics in sound treatment–the extrapolation of reality through ambient sounds–. Here the overall sound treatment evokes the desolation of the landscape that amplifies the loneliness and impotence of the characters who seem to walk mechanically, aimlessly, adrift as if pushed by the wind. They walk backwards, not caring about the rain or the wind, defeated, as if accepting their condition. The camera follows them patiently respecting the rhythm of the walk until it finally gives up and stops leaving the characters to their fate. The silhouetted bodies are finally swallowed by the landscape, suggesting that the characters' misery is the result of the spatial context in which they live in.

Figure 1



Figure 2





Figure 3

There is a similar sequence-shot (06:32:30-06:34:08), where Tarr follows the departure of the return to the city of Irimiás, Petrina and Sanyi (figure 3), after they have led the villagers at the railway station, at which time each one received an indication of the place where they would work and sleep.

In the two long-shots, Irimiás walks in a deserted, desolate street, however, in the background of the latter, there is less rubbish and a third element, Sanyi, appears (figure 3); this difference seems to suggest that a new order is being inaugurated, highlighting the power of Irimiás. In fact, this shot must be understood as the record of Irimiás' action, because it is the last shot of the film in which the character appears and because it can be seen that the environment changed five hours and thirty-seven minutes after the first shot (figures 1-2). Irimiás' promise of building a community project represents an idea that villagers know that has failed, however it also means a return to a past that it is consistent with the utopic ideals of solidarity. But Irimiás and his capitalist leanings, by keeping the money and promises of positive returns on investments, proposes the opposite. Irimiás is at the crossroad between communism and capitalism. This is the impasse that Tarr hopes to extend throughout the seven hours of film, and the way to complete this task is to lengthen the sequence-shot.

THE OVERALL SOUND TREATMENT EVOKES THE DESOLATION OF THE LANDSCAPE THAT AMPLIFIES THE LONELINESS AND IMPOTENCE OF THE CHARACTERS



Figure 4



Figure 5

After the suicide of Estike–a mentally disabled girl, who is portrayed as the most innocent character in the film and has been deceived and abandoned by her relatives (04:56:29-05:03:02), (Hidalgo, 2023: 131)–, the villagers return home to pack their belongings in preparation for leaving the village (refer to figure 4 and 5). The things they cannot pack, they destroy, so that the gypsies will not be able to enjoy them. In this emblematic sequence-shot, the villagers reach the road, starting the long walk to the new mansion, *Almassy*.

The camera first follows the group from behind, keeping a constant distance between Futaki, the last character walking (figure 4) and the position of the camera. Halfway through, the group pauses, and the camera, moving around 180 degrees, changes its position and captures the group through a frontal position (figure 5). Due to the length of the camera movement, by this time, it is only the outline of the characters that can be seen: they are backlit and their dark clothes merge into a single stain in the darkness of the landscape. In this scene, the weather conditions are less adverse than in the two previous sequence shots with Irimiás (figures 1-3), where the body is subjected to rain and cold. However, the villagers' path is also difficult, and Tarr demonstrates it otherwise, through the slowness of their movements; the drama of the scene aims to recreate, in the spectator, the real experience of walking. The fact that the camera captures them from the front and from the back, allows the viewer to access a full view of what is around the villagers. This 360-degree perspective visually confirms and amplifies the sheer desolation that surrounds the villagers. They are completely alone, left to their own devices, and around them there is nothing and no one to support them. It's a long walk that evokes a funeral march and their tired bodies walk as if dragged by the fate of failure. These endless walks along the *Puszta* landscape situate the characters in a closed position which, in the case of socialist parables, imprisons the characters. If, on the one hand, the characters are lost and don't feel well anywhere–since all the places they inhabit are inhospitable–, on the other, moving around is part of life. However, it is a passive move; wherever the characters go, they always end up at the same point, in the same social situation from which they departed.

THE ESCAPE THROUGH *KOCSMA*: DRINK TO FORGET

In the early years of socialism, *Kocsmas* (taverns) hosted cultural gatherings for all levels of society. However, social and cultural changes and economic difficulties, after the change of the political system in the 1990s, emptied them of this

content, making them only places dedicated to the cheap consumption of alcohol. The interior was structured to accommodate the largest number of individuals in the smallest possible space, primarily around the counter. In this way, with their affordable prices, they have become places chosen by the unemployed and other precarious strata of society, as spaces of escape and alienation. Thus, *Kocsma* became evidence of moral decay and lost hope.

In the first scene of the tavern (03:57:45-04:08:38), while waiting for Irimiás and Petrina to arrive, the villagers begin to interact and drink (figure 6). The music that comes out of the accordion is a melody that repeats itself over and over, while the bodies sway, dancing. The characters alternate their moods, sometimes showing themselves irritated, sometimes celebrating, happy. The sequence-shot begins with a frontal general view of the interior of the bar with the villagers being the main elements of the composition. Inside the bar we find tables, chairs, a small counter and some cupboards with drinks at the back and an interior door. To the right of the shot is Futaki, seated at a table with his back to the camera; on the left, a man plays the accordion, sitting on a chair, also with his back turned, and Mrs. Kranér; at the back, behind the counter, is the innkeeper; at the center of the action, Madame Schmidt dances with Hálics and Kranér with Madame Hálics. The camera approaches, towards the characters, while Kéleman enters the frame and pulls the accordionist to the center of the action, where the dance takes place and the camera waits and observes for a few moments (figure 7). The accordion melody serves as a unifying element of the dramatic construction, conceived by Tarr, reinforcing the idea of repetition and monotony.

The villagers appear dancing in an exaggerated way, looking intoxicated, repeating the movements, with small variations. They knock objects on the tables, incessantly, or else they whirl, bumping into each other. Benches and chairs fall, but the dance continues. Alcohol, misery, the cold have turned them into some kind of mechanical, alienated creatures. All this happens without exchanging words. Throughout the sequence, the camera has an omnipresent presence, regardless of the action taking place in the space. Sometimes it is in constant motion, other times it is almost

KOCSMA BECAME EVIDENCE OF MORAL DECAY AND LOST HOPE

Figure 6



Figure 7







Above. Figure 8. Below. Figure 9

stopped, however none of the camera movements are motivated by the actions of the characters. Tarr's staging of the sequence-shot suggests that all elements seem to have the same importance (empty glasses, sleeping bodies, muddy surfaces or degraded buildings), because they are all part of the scenery, just like human beings in a relationship of equality. Thus, an object, the repetitive sound of the clock, a movement, acquire an undifferentiated density: they have a space and a time, and it is the duration of the shot that outlines the dramatic power of each element.

The second long shot in the tavern (03:38:35 - 03:45:14), corresponds to the moment before the dance, in which the villagers distribute the money among everyone and, later, start to spend it, drinking uncontrollably.

The camera appears behind a stove as a kind of hidden observer, capturing the tavern keeper in a fixed sequence-shot, while he adds wood to the fire; at the bottom of the frame, the remaining characters distribute the salary they received (figure. 8). Then, the camera rises from its low position and slowly approaches the door that the tavern keeper has just closed behind him (figure 9). He opens it again and, although other characters enter the picture, who gather at the counter, the camera keeps its focus on the tavern-keeper (figure 10).

When Futaki appears in the frame, asking for a bottle (figure 11), the camera chooses to follow him as he joins the Schmidts' table (figure 12). At that moment, the frame is blocked by the stove again. There, the camera approaches the charac-

Above. Figure 10. Below. Figure 11







Figure 12

ters providing the viewer with the opportunity to attend their intimate conversation, as if sharing the same space. The claustrophobic framing also evoques a dimension of the characters' imprisonment in the space.

This can be considered a vertical enclosure, unlike what happens with the walk scenes, where the characters are trapped in the horizontality of the Alföld.

At one point, Futaki says, "I shouldn't drink. When I drink, all I think about is coffins." In Krasznahorkai's book (2018), this moment is accompanied by numerous questions from Futaki that he deposits on the arrival of Irimiás and Petrina. However, Tarr only selects this phrase from the character's lines. In doing so, he intentionally removes other thoughts and desires from the villagers' lives, reinforcing the idea that all the characters live trapped in their own miserable condition; rain, money, food and drink are the only cross-cutting issues he presents in the film's dialogues. Without spiritual or poetic order, the characters assist to their own lives like passive spectators for they are lost in a life without meaning or direction.

Figure 13



Figure 14



Some time later, the innkeeper appears again in the image (figure 13), and at that moment the camera leaves the table of Futaki and the Schmidts and follows the innkeeper to the counter (figure 14), not fully framing him, since there are other characters that block the view. Then, the camera moves from the tavern keeper to the Halics couple (figure 15). When Halics brings a glass to his mouth to drink, the woman looks at him reproachfully and he stops. There is no dialogue between them.

In *Sátántangó*, no intimate human relationship is portrayed, nor is the desire for it. There are a few couples among the villagers, but Tarr doesn't portray them in much detail, rather as cold, alienated, rude and aggressive relationships that don't change over the course of the film. *Sátántangó* does not reveal the interiority of the characters, where they come from and how they got there. However, they are played by unique people and faces, who carry life stories, which contribute to the way the characters express themselves.

In this aspect, the director seeks to capture the uniqueness of these faces and bodies, people to whom the story they interpret could have actually happened, even if it didn't. His films evoke testimonies of poor and marginalized people and the author gives them this spotlight because he feels a deep compassion for them, the Hungarian people. The stories are always about a (lost) time of waiting, waiting for something that would come to change people's lives, even though this change never happens. Human dignity means the same thing in the depths of hopelessness as in the most favourable circumstances; maintain the same values and principles regardless of what happens around them. Tarr's characters represent the ongoing effort made for human dignity. They are on the verge of giving up, feeling unable to provide for their survival; they do not depend on them-

Figure 15





Figure 16

selves, but as long as they live, they try to save their dignity. At the end of the sequence-shot (figure 16), the camera rises to the eye level of the characters, seeming to transform itself into a human eye that watches–just like the socialist regime–confronting people in the *Kocsma*, who remain static for a few seconds. The paralysis of the characters gives the scene a dramatic charge, accentuating the villagers' expectation for the arrival of Irimiás. Tarr's conscious choice to make drinking spaces the center of the spatial unity of the narrative reinforces the idea of the decadent social environment in which the characters are immersed. The fact that these taverns are located in the *Alföld* also confers them a particular quality that signals the transformation of the national space into a place for drinking, alienated and disorganized, full of misery and agony.

TANYA AND THE POWER GAMES

In addition to the wide and uninhabited horizons that characterize the rural exterior and the meeting spaces, *Koscma*, the landscape of the *Alföld* is also integrated by several scattered rural properties, designated by the Hungarian term *Tanya*. Over time, rural property in Hungary suffered a decline, which began with the introduction of the socialist economic model and its collectivization in 1949. However, as these housing spaces were located far from the cities, they were not so easily monitored by the government. State and, consequently, *Tanya* was never fully integrated into the socialist collectivity model. The initial depopulation led to an influx of people from various cities who saw these abandoned houses as an opportunity to achieve economic autonomy and improve their family life. Thus, in this return to the rural world, the Hungarians kept the old traditions, in terms of housing conditions and independent ways of life, thus preserving the architectural formula of the *Tanya* houses and their communities. In *Sátántangó*, *Tanya* is represented by a destroyed territory, in the aftermath of what the colonizing process consisted of, showing the rural

Above. Figure 17. Below. Figure 18





dwellings and the desolate environment. This type of construction, which initially housed the animals of the *Puszta*, later became small communities inhabited by several family generations of farmers. These families subsisted on the resources provided by the *Puszta*, making these settlements and the *Alföld* itself a type of artisanal life. In this sense, *Tanya* has a strong emotional value in the Hungarian context, as it defines the country's identity and explains the origins of the country's rural character in architecture.



Figure 19

In one of these rural properties, we witnessed a dialogue between Schmidt and Futaki (00:30:46-00:38:12), as they negotiated the embezzlement of the community fund. In this sequence, the focus is on lying and deceit, aspects that characterize human relationships in the universe of *Sátántangó*.

The sequence-shot starts with Futaki and Schmidt sitting at a table, but we can only see Futaki's face, because Schmidt appears from the back (figure 17). Lasting approximately five minutes, the sequence-shot moves into a close-up of Futaki's face (figures 18-19). The camera lingers in the rotation around his head, until it frames his back and we finally see Schmidt, on the other side of the table; Schmidt's wife is also framed, in depth, by a window (figure 20).

The moment they decide to split the money, Ms. Schmidt enters the frame and presents the money she had kept hidden in her breasts. The camera slowly frames a close-up of Schmidt's hands as he shares the money with Futaki (figure 21). We realize that the division is not made equally, however Futaki does not protest. While each character counts the money, the camera resumes its circular choreography around Futaki (figure 22), again framing him from the back. At that moment, they are surprised by Mrs. Kráner knocking at the door; Hastily, they return the money to Ms. Schmidt and she hides it back

Figure 20





From left to right and from top to bottom. Figures 21, 22, 23 and 24

in her breasts as she heads for the door (figure 23, 24). At that moment, the camera stops its circular trajectory, around the two characters, to accompany Ms. Schmidt, who heads towards the exit of the space where they are, closing the door (figure 25).

The sequence-shot will last a few more seconds while Ms. Schmidt talks to Ms. Kráner, already off-frame, and we wait (figure 25). After Ms. Schmidt exits the frame, the camera continues to record the door. We have no access to the conversation that is happening on the other side of the door, and after a few seconds, Futaki's voice is heard off frame: "Your wife is taking a long time", to which Schmidt replies "I break her face! ..." (figure 25) The static character of the sequence-shot by the door underlines *the idea of the camera-spy* which acts independently of the characters' actions and motivations. At the same time, the shut door evokes secrecy and imprisonment which together with the dialogue off frame amplifies the deceit nature of the scene. In fact, the dialogue clearly states that neither of them trust Ms. Schmidt or each other exemplifying the manipulative and deceitful atmosphere the characters inhabit.

While they negotiate the embezzlement, there is a specific framing in the sequence-shot (figure 20), which resumes the manipulative and deceiving nature of the human relationships in *Sátántangó*. In this composition, Schmidt smiles ironically at Futaki. In turn, Ms. Schmidt, who watches the scene, also reveals a jocular expression. Let's remember that, a few minutes earlier, she had sex with Futaki, deceiving her husband. In this way, the composition unfolds several layers of deception: the woman who betrays her husband with Futaki; Schmidt who tricks Futaki with

the irregular division of the money; and, finally, the incorrectness of the three characters, when dividing between them the money belonging to all the members of the community.

Another example of the camera's circular motion is the sequence at the police station in which the two officers correct Irimiás' report on the villagers (06:34:19-06:49:53). In this case, the camera makes four full circles and two more semi-circles around the space (figures 26-27). This circular strategy is repeated in other scenarios in the *Tanya*, namely in the Steigerwald tavern, when Irimiás writes the report on the movement of villagers to deliver to the police (05:46:17 - 05:49:26).

The circularity of the sequence-shot creates the illusion of the possibility of a way out of the social *trap* in which the characters find themselves. This is because the circular camera movement seems to be searching for an exit in the filmic space and suggests that the characters' efforts are

Above. Figure 26. Below. Figure 27







Figure 25

directed towards dismantling some sort of order that keeps villagers trapped in a given situation. This process involves the embezzlement of the community fund, lying, deceit, as the characters are in such a miserable position that they deem it impossible that regular or legal actions can improve their living condition. They feel condemned to fail from the beginning and they consider themselves prisoners and powerless against those who cannot win: the order established in the figure of the State. However, the sequence-shot closes the circle without exposing any possible exits amplifying a sense of imprisonment and hopelessness. The closed circle also alludes to the eternal circle of history, where everything returns to the zero point of events underlying the fact that the characters, however much they move around, remain always in the same position and under the same miserable circumstances. Nothing can change for there is nowhere to go. The four hundred and twenty two minutes of film prolong indefinitely the moment of transition between two political regimes in Hungary; the objective is not to return to the past in a kind of nostalgia for communism that ends, but to prolong the time of indecision. Tarr asks the viewer to see the democracy that arrives, in a moment before its arrival, presenting the human condition as the only point of reference in the narrative, with misery as an indignity, validated and reinforced by the State.

AESTHETICS AND HUMANISM IN BÉLA TARR'S *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*

Sátántangó presents a simple but compelling thesis: in the world where villagers, the State and Irimiás live, the poor, in order to subsist, have to deceive one another. Poverty as social vulnerability is a state of expectation, of *tomorrow may be different*, of anticipation, while deprivation can be associated with rebellion and spiritual disintegration. Human response to this situation on the part of the characters often appears in the form of reactive, disorganized explosions, constituting a sort of counterpoint to the established order. The villagers are isolated on the plain, isolated in the tavern and despoiled in the scattered properties because all these locations are not places of hope, they are scenarios where poverty and misery perpetuate human indignity. The only solution *Sátántangó* offers is death, examples of which are the characters of Estike and the doctor. Both are situated at the extreme poles of human decadence and ruin: the first committed suicide with a rodenticide; the second, through a conscious giving up of life that, at the same time, can be seen as an act of resistance, representing those who choose to remain in the places where they belong. The remaining deceived characters appear represented as primitive basic animals that just survive. In fact, what is at stake is survival and, for this reason, dehumanization is not innate to the characters: if the external conditions (caused by abandonment and lack of freedom and support from the State) were different, people would certainly be different. Here emerges the essential need for the staging of the sequence-shot, to associate the desolation of the scenarios with the degradation of human beings. Their faces are filmed as landscapes, merging with the spaces they inhabit, perpetuating their miserable existence and the villagers respond by manipulating and deceiving others, as they themselves are being exploited by the State and by Irimiás; it is a behavioural circular repetition that perpetuates their condition of life. The contemplative and omnipotent images in *Sátántangó* contribute to our understanding of the social problems present in the broken community landscape. The narrative presents a negative portrayal of irresponsible political exploitation and behaviour and its consequences. Through the actions of the characters, we see how people motivated by greed can seriously harm others around them, thus contributing to reinforcing political exploitation and social irresponsibility.

TARR NEVER OFFERS THE POINT OF VIEW OF ANY CHARACTER, ON THE CONTRARY, THE SHOTS APPEAR AS INDEPENDENT SECTIONS THAT FORCE US TO SEE THE NARRATIVE ACTION IN A TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP–CHARACTERS, SPECTATOR AND CAMERA

Tarr never offers the point of view of any character, on the contrary, the shots appear as independent sections that force us to see the narrative action in a triangular relationship–characters, spectator and camera. The spectator has access to diegetic and non-diegetic information, and can be said to have an omnipresent perspective through the camera's aerial view of the community–this is where the film's great power lies. The camera assists to isolated episodes of the characters' lives, interspersed, but it doesn't particularly identify with any of them. This mismatch is due to the fact that Tarr does not portray them with great psychological depth, showing that the relationships they establish are based on manipulation and power games, and not on the exchange of ideas or the expression of feelings. For this reason, their real personality remains hidden. Tarr's omnipresent camera conveys the unjust and oppressive order of *Sátántangó*'s universe by provoking an emotional experience rather than telling a story. The

long duration of the shots amplifies the repetition of the characters' pointless actions, condemning them to resign themselves to their condition. The sequence-shot serves as a resource for temporal exploration, in a delimited space, capturing the choreography of the characters and converting the national space into the allegorical of a national prison. No matter what they do or how far they walk, they get nowhere.

Deprivation of basic human needs and material and spiritual poverty have socio-historical significance; the most striking signs of this poverty are the passivity, inertia and lack of goals of the villagers when they are abandoned to their fate. They do not live, they survive, and this fact, combined with the harsh living conditions and extreme poverty, makes them indifferent to their surroundings. Tarr makes an integral and realistic follow-up of this disarticulation of their lives, showing the spectre of the process of oppression (police) as a way of silencing their misery. The end of the totalitarian, communist regime left them orphans, without teaching them, or leaving them ingrained, any values of solidarity, despite living in community.

In a world where communism fails, as an ideal model of community life and political utopia, Tarr and Krasznahorkai choose to show us the end of the post-communist identity itself, through the vision of those who suffer, the true workers, and not of those who created this oppressive society. This is where the film's great humanist power lies by showing us how human beings are capable of succumbing to their own misery, but then Tarr rescues them by filming their faces as if they were landscapes. This aesthetic approach to human dignity translates into a profound equality, in the same type of movement and taking a similar time to what it would take to represent a landscape. The long time we spent in front of the characters, with no other subject in the image, evokes feelings of compassion for those represented. And this is where the director gives them dignity. It is through the representation of people, in their historical, political and social contexts, that Tarr shows us human fragility and dignity. In Krasznahorkai's novel, there is a circular narrative structure, as in the film: the narrative begins in the community, with the villagers leaving it. At the end of the novel, the villagers return exactly to the starting point of the story (the community), and in the film, the villagers are scattered and left to their fate; however, in the latter, the narrative ends in that place (the community), in the scene in which the doctor shuts himself up, closing the window, which symbolizes the end of the story in the novel, as well as in the film. ■

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HUMANISM, LANDSCAPE AND THE SEQUENCE-SHOT IN BÉLA TARR'S *SÁTÁNTANGÓ*

Abstract
Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994) has been been studied from an aesthetic, political and philosophical perspective, but not from what Tarr and Krasznahorkai consider to be the most important element of their work: the representation of the human condition and dignity. This paper explores how Tarr uses the sequence-shot to represent the dignity of his characters in Sátántangó. Is it possible to identify a specific stylistic pattern in his representation of the human condition? How does Tarr approach the staging of the long take to represent a point of view of humanity? What kind of relationships Tarr establishes between scenarios and characters through camera movement and composition? How do these conceptual relationships contribute to presenting a point of view of the human condition?

Key words
Sequence-shot; Béla Tarr; Slow cinema; Hungarian cinema; Film narrative: Film analysis.

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Article reference
Ruiz Carmona, Carlos, Aguiar, Ana Catarina (2024). Humanism, landscape and the sequence-shot in Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *33*, 161-178.

HUMANISMO, PAISAJE Y EL PLANO SECUENCIA EN *SÁTÁNTANGÓ* DE BÉLA TARR

Resumen
Sátántangó (1994) de Béla Tarr ha sido estudiado desde una perspectiva estética, política y filosófica, pero no desde lo que Tarr y Krasznahorkai consideran el elemento más importante de su obra: la representación de la condición humana y su dignidad. Este artículo explora cómo Tarr utiliza el plano secuencia para representar la dignidad de sus personajes en *Sátántangó*. ¿Es posible identificar un patrón estilístico específico en su representación de la condición humana? ¿Cómo aborda Tarr la puesta en escena del plano secuencia para representar el punto de vista de la humanidad? ¿Qué tipo de relaciones establece Tarr entre escenarios y personajes a través del movimiento de cámara y la composición? ¿Cómo contribuyen estas relaciones conceptuales a presentar el punto de vista de la condición humana?

Palabras clave
Plano secuencia; Béla Tarr; cine lento; cine húngaro; narrativa cinematográfica: análisis fílmico.

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Referencia de este artículo
Ruiz Carmona, Carlos, Aguiar, Ana Catarina (2024). Humanismo, paisaje y el plano secuencia en *Sátántangó* de Béla Tarr. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 161-178.

recibido/received: 08.10.2022 | *aceptado/accepted:* 15.06.2023

Edita / Published by
associació cineforum L'ATALANTE
EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

DISMANTLING THE *VOYEUR*'S INTRUSION: THE POSITION OF THE GAZE IN THE FILMS OF CHANTAL AKERMAN

ARIADNA MORENO PELLEJERO

INTRODUCTION

The *voyeur*, the figure who watches others without being seen, has been represented in art forms as diverse as painting, engraving and literature at various times over the course of art history. However, the term has only been used since the end of the 19th century in literature, and more recently in fields such as painting and cinema.[1] The *voyeur* is usually depicted as a man who gets pleasure out of the erotic experience of observing a woman in her private activities. In classical cinema it has often been associated with spies, reporters, psychiatrists or police investigators who are following a woman (Denzin, 1995). The gazes of these *voyeurs* may be used as a vehicle for the gaze of the spectator, who is placed in the position of the *voyeur*-character, and indirectly in the position of the *voyeur*-director. This trope has led feminist film theorists, especially since the 1960s, to question the way the gaze is directed on women, who are presented as eroticised objects in so much mainstream cinema (Mulvey, 1989 [1975]: 16-17).

In recent years, some theorists have also identified a form of mediatised *voyeurism* based on invading the privacy of the Other on social media. This Other participates in a kind of public exhibition of their private life for the purpose of entertainment, while the observer is given apparently real images and information without having to interact with them (Calvert, 2004: 8; Sanabria, 2008: 164).[2] In this way, television and social media platforms have become *voyeur*istic spaces where we can expose private moments of happiness and personal gratification to others, turning ourselves into observed *voyeurs* who create and consume media autobiographies based on collective models such as selfies, potentially leading to the projection of a whole range of asymmetrical passions like admiration or envy (Guardiola, 2018: 83; Mesías-Lema, Eiriz, 2022: 2).

The films of Chantal Akerman, on the other hand, achieve a ritual form that reveals what otherwise might go unnoticed based on her personal quests as a woman filmmaker and the daughter of Auschwitz survivors (Moreno Pellejero, 2023). In all her work, Akerman is conscious of the importance of the position of the gaze for changing how she approaches the Other and how she presents herself, allowing spectators to distance themselves from her gaze and the gaze of her characters. In this way, she dismantles some of the constructs that have relegated women to the background in cinema and presents an alternative to the way we normally relate to virtual images.

Research on Akerman's oeuvre has focused on questions of gender and hyperrealism (Margulies, 1996), self-representation (Otero, 2007), and post-modernity (Pravadelli, 2000), without exploring the reflection it offers on *voyeurism*. None of the many studies of and tributes to the filmmaker have considered this question, despite their recognition of a shift in the gaze towards women in her films (Delorme, 2015; Uzal, 2021; Ruby Rich, 2016; White, 2019; Mazière & Reynolds, 2019; Schmid & Wilson, 2019; Algarín Navarro, 2020). However, Ivone Margulies points to the possibility of understanding Akerman's filmography in anthropological and ethnographic terms with her observation of the distance at which Akerman positions the camera and films everyday life (Margulies, 1996: 7). Similarly, in a study of experimental cinema that includes *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1976), Catherine Russell refers to the possibility of defining certain films that arise from their directors' personal searches as "autoethnographies" that could form part of *microcultures*, broader historical processes or social issues. This is a notion that has subsequently been applied to Akerman's work by various theorists (Russell, 1999: 17, 277, 311; Kiani, 2018; Moreno Pellejero, 2021), who dismiss the conception—originally questioned by B. Ruby Rich (2005 [1978])—of the ethnographer as a clinical, objective observer of reality, as well as the association of ethnography with a *voyeuristic* gaze that leads to an impulse to tell stories about the modern "self" in cinema, to look at but not really listen to the Other (Denzin, 1995: 211).

AKERMAN IS CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POSITION OF THE GAZE FOR CHANGING HOW SHE APPROACHES THE OTHER AND HOW SHE PRESENTS HERSELF, ALLOWING SPECTATORS TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM HER GAZE AND THE GAZE OF HER CHARACTERS

Right from her earliest films, Akerman offers us the opportunity to reflect on how we gaze and how we show ourselves. In *Saute ma ville* [Blow Up My Town] (1968), amid the chaos and disorder in her parents' kitchen, Akerman sees her reflection in a mirror and reacts to it as if she were reacting to a person who was able to watch her secretly. In her second short film, *L'enfant aimé ou je joue à être une femme mariée* [The Beloved Child or I Play at Being a Married Woman] (1971), the character portrayed by Claire Wauthion looks at herself in the mirror while identifying parts of her body in a performative act of self-affirmation and recognition; Akerman would use this scene again years later in her installation *Dans le miroir* [In the Mirror] (2007). In the first episode of *Je, tu, il, elle* [I, You, He, She] (1974), Akerman plays Julie, who, while lounging naked in her bedroom, notices a man watching her from outside; she responds by getting up and returning his gaze, in a revealing moment of confrontation with the *voyeur*, who awkwardly flees the scene after being discovered. On the other hand, in *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), the camera is positioned to show the domestic space from various angles that are repeated with the introduction of

different variables over the three days that the protagonist is shown carrying out her household chores.

However, in this study the focus of analysis will be on three films in which Akerman dismantles the *voyeur*'s intrusion with the way she positions the camera to capture the scene or in which the person observed in the scene returns the *voyeur*'s gaze. The three films, *Hotel Monterey* (1972), *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna,* [Meetings with Anna] (1978) and *La Captive* [The Captive] (2000), have not received much scholarly attention and yet are especially significant for the director's way of approaching the Other, for the female character's confrontation of the *voyeur*'s intrusion, or for exposing the psychological complexity entailed in the figure of the *voyeur*.

HOTEL MONTEREY: AKERMAN'S FIRST APPROACHES TO THE OTHER

In *Hotel Monterey* (00:13:23 to 00:19:14), we meet some of the guests in this hotel in New York City where Akerman stayed in 1972. Akerman's fourth film employs a structure based on slowly sequenced camera movements and serial repetitions of different areas of the hotel that contribute to the creation of an immersive experience, fostered by the silence of the austere corridors and hotel rooms, and the motionlessness of the guests that Babette Mangolte's camera finds there. After a sequence of shots of the hotel lobby and another of the movement inside a lift, we come to the sequences in the guest rooms, where the director carries out her first stylistic experiments with the prolonged frontal shots that would be characteristic of her later work, influenced by the importance given to form in the structural films of directors like Michael Snow.[3] These shots present spaces that are empty or occupied by guests, who are presented in painterly portraits from a certain distance.

Particularly noteworthy is a symmetrical full shot of a hotel room with a bed in the middle, in a motionless image that is sustained for around 42 seconds. After a cut, we see the room with the bed in a new arrangement, and Akerman appears sitting with her back to the camera, in a shot that lasts for around 24 seconds. This is a shot that makes the camera's presence evident to the spectator, although the person portrayed pays no attention to that presence [IMAGE 1]. In the next shot, the camera is positioned behind a door, with an intrusiveness suggestive of a *voyeur* as it shows

Image 1. Akerman caught by the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



Image 2. Shot in which the *voyeuse*'s gaze is interrupted by the door closing in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



what seems to be the filmmaker herself under the sheets of the bed in the room shown previously. But the door is closing, interrupting the camera's (and spectator's) invasive act of spying on the woman in the privacy of her bedroom [IMAGE 2].

The next guests shown in their rooms are positioned in front of the camera. One is an old man who is aware he is being watched; he is shown seated, looking at the camera with a slight smile in a full shot [IMAGE 3]. The posture and dignity of this elderly man recalls the stateliness of the portraits painted by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, such as *Monsieur Bertin* (1832), although Akerman's portrait conveys a somewhat more friendly and less stern character than Bertin. She also makes use of the movement and extension over time offered by the cinematic medium, recalling the portraits that come to life in Andy Warhol's work. However, in Akerman's film we glimpse only a momentary flutter of the eyebrows or a slight movement of the hand of the anonymous protagonist, while Warhol shows stars carrying out an action, such as Robert Indiana eating a mushroom for approximately 45 minutes in *Eat* (1963), a film that influenced the temporal focus of Akerman's work in New York (Moreno Pellejero, 2023: 136).

We also meet a pregnant woman in her room, occupying the centre of a full shot taken from the hallway. The camera's position gives depth to the image and uses the threshold of the door to frame the young woman, who is illuminated by a light source inside the room to the left, outside the shot [IMAGE 4]. The door is completely open and appears inside the shot rather than being concealed, evoking the domestic scenes of 17th-century Dutch painting. Along similar lines, Corinne Rondeau compares the inside and outside views captured in the corridors in *Hotel Monterey* to the numerous rows of doors and lines characterising the composition of the scenes of women reading letters indoors in the paintings of Johannes Vermeer (Rondeau, 2013: 72). In works like Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (1657-59), a young woman reads a love letter while facing an open window on the left, through which daylight floods the scene. Although we are being given access to the intimacy of a domestic setting, the curtain in the foreground reminds us that we are witnessing a private moment, and that she could hide herself from view.

Above. Image 3. A guest poses for the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Below. Image 4. A young pregnant woman is captured by the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman





AKERMAN TRIES TO APPROACH THESE PEOPLE THROUGH THE OBSERVATION AND EXPERIENCE RESULTING FROM THE PASSING SECONDS AND MINUTES THAT SHOW IN THEIR FACES AND BODIES

In Akerman's film, the woman does not look at the camera, but she is positioned in front of it in a moment of private solitude inside her hotel room. She pays no attention to the spectator, but the camera confirms her presence with the stillness and duration of a shot lasting for approximately 57 seconds. As the camera is not concealed and the door is not closed, she is probably aware that she is being watched. This maintains something of the *voyeur*'s intrusion, but it also reveals the director's and camera operator's position in relation to the spectator and the people portrayed, without resorting to the eroticising of the woman's body or the pretext of a love story, to show the inside of a room with a person occupying it in a reflective posture.

Akerman tries to approach these people through the observation and experience resulting from the passing seconds and minutes that show in their faces and bodies. She seeks to trigger her spectators' senses in response to what they are witnessing without imposing a particular message; in this way, she can move our sensations towards places never before visited (Martínez Morales, 2022). In her way of approaching the Other of herself, Akerman is profoundly influenced by the ethical perspective of Levinas, for whom she felt a special affinity as a Jew and the child of Auschwitz survivors. The Desire for the Other, in the Levinasian sense, leads her to try to understand the faces of those she meets on her travels, observing them, overcoming the silence or the lack of verbal comprehension, seeking some kind of humanity in the portraits of the Other. In opposition to the selfhood that has characterised Western European philosophy, Levinas proposes alterity, a different gaze upon the face of the Other (Levinas, 2002).

Akerman quotes Levinas: "When you see the face of the Other, you already hear the words 'Thou shalt not kill'" (Akerman, 2011b). This ethical principle is expressed in the positioning of the camera and the gaze in her films when it is placed at the service of alterity, understanding the Other as the face through which to give something without imposing oneself; this gives rise to the appearance of the Other, where the face is the site of vindication of the essence of humanity (Levinas, 2002: 232). Contributing to this is the stillness of the camera and the respectful manner of approaching the characters Akerman encounters on her journey, evident in the distance the camera maintains from the privacy of the subjects portrayed in quiet reflection and in the use of full shots. All this gives the spectator the position of an outsider, while the subjects are at the spaces they inhabit despite the transitory nature of hotels as places of temporary accommodation.

LES RENDEZ-VOUS D'ANNA: CONFRONTING THE GAZE WITH SELF-AFFIRMATION

In the fourth shot in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, the title character arrives at the reception of the first hotel she will be staying at in Germany on a tour to present her new film (00:04:42 to 00:05:10). Played by Aurore Clément, Anna is presented as Akerman's alter ego, based on her own experiences travelling for work.[4] The protagonist is thus a recognised filmmaker visiting different European cities to promote her most recent film. *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* was made during a more advanced period in Akerman's career than *Hotel Monterey*, when she was combining the formal style of the avant-garde structural film with a narrative focusing on everyday questions of modern European cinema.



Image 5. Anna catches the voyeur watching her in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

The image in question is a medium frontal shot taken from the hotel reception desk. In the foreground we see Anna in the lobby, facing the camera, and in the background a stranger is watching her [IMAGE 5]. At one point she seems to sense his presence, prompting her to turn around while the receptionist is attending her, and she sees the man who has been observing her (00:04:52 to 00:04:54). When he realises that he has been caught, the *voyeur* pretends to sip at his drink (00:04:53 to 00:05:03) and remains sitting awkwardly in the background until a change of shot when Anna heads for the lift. With this response she not only interrupts the *voyeur*'s act of spying on her but also inverts the role of *voyeur* subject, turning him into the object observed by her.

ANNA NOT ONLY INTERRUPTS THE VOYEUR'S ACT OF SPYING ON HER WITH HER CONFRONTATION BUT ALSO INVERTS THE ROLE OF VOYEUR SUBJECT, TURNING HIM INTO THE OBJECT OBSERVED BY HER

Darren Hughes identifies a rupture with the perfect symmetry of the film's opening shots (at the train station and the hotel entrance), in which Anna occupies the centre of the image at a 90-degree angle, at the moment in this shot when she confronts the stranger's gaze (Hughes, 2010). In this fourth shot, Anna is to the right of the centre of the frame facing the camera, while the *voyeur* is positioned in the background to the left, thereby breaking the symmetrical perfection to reveal a battle between the two characters over the centre of the shot (Hughes, 2010).

Akerman's approach in this film also allows us to identify the *voyeur* by witnessing the whole scene with both characters contained in our field of view, rather than placing us in the *voyeur*'s position. This in turn constitutes a change in the way of directing the gaze theorised by Mulvey, in relation to the visual pleasures offered by a certain style of classical cinema that depicted the woman as the *leitmotiv* of erotic spectacle while the man played the active role identified with the male spectator who sees himself reflected on the screen (Mulvey, 1989). However, one of the criticisms made of Mulvey by other feminist film







From top to bottom. Image 6. Anna listens to the first man she meets on her travels in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Image 7. Anna marks her position in the centre of the image while saying goodbye in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Image 8. In her last meeting Anna listens to her lover, whose reflection is visible in the glass behind her, in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

theorists is her failure to consider that the female spectator may identify herself with the active role of the man on screen, or adopt a critical perspective on the scene observed (Doane, 1999: 240).

Teresa de Lauretis argues that the female spectator's identification with the scene observed is complex in much mainstream cinema. The female spectator might identify, on the one hand, with the passive object (the woman, the body, the landscape), or on the other, with the active position (the man's and the camera's gaze). Nevertheless, de Lauretis suggests that films like Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), instead of assigning the woman a role of erotic object, give the female spectator the opportunity to recognise the image, stop to contemplate it and try to make sense of what escapes her (de Lauretis 1992: 228; 1987: 142).

In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, Akerman also dismantles the *voyeur*'s intrusive, non-consensual gaze explicitly through the confrontation described above, although this does not keep Anna from acknowledging her own sexuality. She can desire or look with longing at a man or at another woman, or she can be the object of desire of another who is in turn the object of her desire. This ties in with Jackie Stacey's perspective on Mulvey's theory when she posits the possibility that women, as subjects of the story, may gaze erotically at a man or another woman, and that this may be extended to the gaze of female spectators (Stacey, 1999). Anna encounters different lovers at the stops she makes on her journey and maintains a rather more intimate relationship with a woman we never see, although she talks about her to her mother.

Despite this, Anna's intimate encounters with the men shown in the film are unsuccessful, like the first encounter on the night in the hotel she arrived at in the shot described above. The next day, Anna goes to the birthday party of the man's daughter, where he talks to her about his wife leaving him and about Germany's past. At one point, a symmetrical full shot shows both characters, the man on the left and Anna on the right, looking at him in an attentive posture (00:30:43-00:34:15). She is shown to be listening to the sto-

ries of his life, establishing a certain degree of reciprocity between them, albeit not romantic (IMAGE 6). Anna's emotional separation is more obvious when she is about to leave his home, as she occupies the centre of the full shot when they say goodbye (00:34-54 to 00:37:08). He tries to convince her to stay, but she asserts herself and takes possession of the centre of the image before going on her way (IMAGE 7).

In her last encounter with a lover, in Paris, Anna once again adopts an attentive posture while he talks to her about his exhaustion (01:42:38 to 01:43:14). Instead of viewing the scene from the perspective of one of the characters, we see a medium shot of Anna in a bathrobe facing the camera, looking at her lover, whose figure is reflected in the glass behind her (IMAGE 8). For Levinas, listening is as essential as looking, as in the act of listening we attain the "living presence" of the Other, which teaches us something (Levinas 2003: 148-149). Anna listens to the men she interacts with on her travels, just as she listens to a family friend, and her mother listens to her. In the same way, the director, reflected in Anna, and the spectators listen to the stories of her characters.

Maud Ceuterick describes *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* as the kind of film that rewrites the space, power and body of the woman in the travel narrative, which has traditionally been largely a narrative of men (Ceuterick, 2020: 23). This is reflected in the dominance of a strange nomadic quality in the film that Gilles Deleuze associates with the literature of Virginia Woolf, as he suggests that in the work of both women the states of the body undergo a slow ceremony whose attitudes he defines as a "feminine *gestus*" capable of capturing the stories and the crises of the world (Deleuze, 2010).

Essential to this *gestus* is not only Anna's movement in her erratic wanderings, but also the positioning of the camera or of Anna in relation to the other people she meets. There is a self-affirmation in that positioning that gives her a quality similar to the "nomadic subjects" theorised by Rosi Braidotti, subjects in a state of constant change and movement with their capacity to expand their thinking in the recognition of their identities and differences, where there is room for multiplicity (Braidotti, 2000: 189-202). Anna is portrayed as a nomadic subject and the way Akerman presents her gives spectators the opportunity to expand their thinking and their gaze in an unintrusive direction.

Image 9. Simon watches Ariane and Andrée in a home movie in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



LA CAPTIVE: REVEALING THE *VOYEUR* TO THE SPECTATOR

In *La Captive*, Akerman draws on the characters of Albertine in Marcel Proust's *The Prisoner* (1923), whose name she changes to Ariane, and the story's narrator, who in the film becomes Simon. The result is a free adaptation of the story of control and vulnerability, of Simon's domination of Ariane and of the little spaces of freedom she finds. *Voyeurism* already plays a central role in Proust's novel, as the story is shown through the narrator's investigative eye (Bolla & Gómez, 2015: 3).[5] However, although *voyeurism* is a constant in Akerman's film, the story is not told from Simon's perspective. Instead, it is shown by Akerman, whose gaze is differentiated from Simon's by mar-

king her presence behind the camera while he is on screen.

Albertine's absence marks the narrator's memory that serves as the source of the story in *The Prisoner,* just as Ariane's absence does at the start of the film, which begins with the same sound and image of waves with which it ends. Following this opening, we are shown footage of Ariane with a friend on the beach, although the spectator does not yet know who either of the young women are. We then cut directly to a medium shot of Simon, who is watching this home movie projected on a screen (00:03:33 to 00:03:38). Simon repeats the words "to me", "to me", "to me really…". We then see the footage of the young women while we hear Simon repeating in a voice-over "to me really…", "to me really…" as if he were trying to decipher these words in Ariane's face.

Simon's shadow appears in the frame and blocks out a part of the home movie projection (IMAGE 9). His dark silhouette remains there for a few seconds, until the young woman in the footage runs towards the sea (00:03:42 to 00:03:56). The placement of Akerman's camera is not in the position of the *voyeur* but behind his back, allowing the spectators to see him in the act of watching, so that instead of a story about the eroticism or beauty of Ariane's private world, what we will witness is a story about her captivity and that of a *voyeur* incapable of escaping his own obsession.

THE PLACEMENT OF AKERMAN'S CAMERA IS NOT IN THE POSITION OF THE VOYEUR BUT BEHIND HIS BACK, ALLOWING THE SPECTATORS TO SEE HIM IN THE ACT OF WATCHING, SO THAT INSTEAD OF A STORY ABOUT THE EROTICISM OR BEAUTY OF ARIANE'S PRIVATE WORLD, WHAT WE WILL WITNESS IS A STORY ABOUT HER CAPTIVITY AND THAT OF A VOYEUR INCAPABLE OF ESCAPING HIS OWN OBSESSION

After this opening sequence, we are taken back in time to a Parisian square where we hear the sound of a pair of high heels (00:03:57 to 00:04:17). The young woman we saw previously in the footage of the beach then appears on screen. In the next shot, we see her getting into a convertible, and a slight camera movement reveals Simon inside a car parked behind the one Ariane has just climbed into. We hear her car start up and once she begins driving Simon follows her, to the sound of Sergei Rachmaninoff's symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead* (1909). This begins a chase sequence that takes inspiration from a similar scene in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), when Scottie follows Madeleine in his car through the streets of San Francisco, accompanied by a musical composition by Bernard Herrmann.

The sequence in Akerman's film has a duration of 5 minutes and 33 seconds and comprises 25 shots (00:03:57 to 00:09:32). This is more typical of a classical cinema narrative than her usual style of filmmaking with shots lasting for several minutes. Nevertheless, it falls far short of the approximately 160 shots that Hitchcock uses the first time Scottie stalks Madeleine in *Vertigo* over the course of 13 minutes and 15 seconds (00:17:46 to 00:31.01). Hitchcock's sequence covers a longer period of story time than it does in Akerman's film, and it is enhanced by shots of a wide variety of locations, from the plaza and the initial chase in the car to the hotel that Madeleine finally arrives at, passing by a cemetery and a museum along the way.

In Akerman's film, full shots taken from the car driven by Simon, showing Ariane's convertible and the bonnet of Simon's car (IMAGE 10), alternate with medium shots of Simon's pale, sad and worried face while he follows her (IMAGE 11). Shots of Simon's face appear five times, adding intensity and tension to the chase sequence (00:03:57 to 00:06:53), while *Isle of the Dead* vests the moment with greater significance, and the

complexity of the editing gives shape to a suspense sequence that takes inspiration from *Vertigo* without adopting a classical cinema style (Atherton, 2020). Rachmaninoff's melody is repeated throughout the story, reappearing when Simon stalks Ariane without being seen, underscoring his obsession and contributing to the tension.

The chase continues with a pallid Simon following Ariane hypnotically up a narrow flight of stairs while the music turns up the tension of the scene. The sound of Ariane's heels echoes in Simon's mind; he is present in all the shots, always entering the frame behind her (00:06:54 to 00:07:53). We see Ariane talking to the receptionist at a little hotel, and then turning to the left and walking out of the frame, in an image dominated by Simon's shadow while he watches her (IMAGE 12). Simon himself then quietly approaches the receptionist and asks for Miss Ariane Rey; after this, we see him rushing down the stairs, we hear a car start up and Ariane drives out of the frame, ending the initial chase sequence. In the next one, we are privy to Simon's rather asphyxiating relationship with this young woman, who lives with him in one of the apartment buildings constructed during the Haussmann renovation of Paris in the 1860s, and laid out according to the lodgings described by Proust (Mangolte, 2015). Here he welcomes his friend, Andrée, whom he asks to accompany Ariane on her activities, even suggesting to her what they should do during the day.

In Hitchcock's film, the *voyeur*'s presence and gaze are revealed on screen to the spectator in a story geared towards suspense. However, the *voyeur* stalks the woman with what is apparently just cause. In the second part of the film, this justification is contrasted with the suspicious behaviour of the female character and the old friend who had been hired to stalk her, who, unlike the young woman, will not be punished for his actions. This storyline is very different from the state of captivity resulting from Simon's constant attempts to control Ariane in Akerman's film, in



From top to bottom. Image 10. Ariane is followed by Simon, whose car bonnet is visible in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Image 11. The images of the car bonnet in the foreground and Ariane driving away in the background, alternating with shots of Simon's face inside his car in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Image 12. Simon's body in the darkness emphasises his voyeur status as he follows Ariane when she enters a small Parisian hotel in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

which the male character's *voyeurism* and obsessive desire are not employed as traditional Hitchcockian mechanisms of suspense and surprise, but instead are presented mainly as an expression

of the character's neurosis (Beugnet & Schmid, 2002).

Akerman presents Simon's jealousy and obsession from a distance in the film, although she also focuses on his weakness, which is the causal factor behind his and Ariane's captivity, and something that Akerman herself identifies with. In an interview with Elisabeth Lebovici, she mentions a conversation she had with her cousin, who told her that in America they would never accept a weak man as the main character in a film; Akerman thus suggests that her work is also about gender definitions (Akerman, 2011b). Martine Beugnet takes a similar view in her description of *La Captive* as an extraordinary critique on and subversion of the myth of gender stereotypes (Beugnet, 2007: 132). Despite the distance taken from the *voyeur*'s gaze and the depiction of his desire to possess Ariane, Akerman presents a weak and vulnerable character on screen, thereby contributing to the dismantling of the binarism that associates the male with an idealised ego. Sharon Lubkemann makes a similar argument when she suggests that Akerman's work transgenders the camera's gaze (Lubkemann Allen, 2008).

A *VOYEUSE* WHO REVEALS HER PRESENCE IN AN ATTENTIVE APPROACH TO THE FILMED SUBJECT

While Akerman offers her spectators the opportunity to adopt a gaze outside the traditional structures that tend to relegate women to the role of object of desire, she also engages them with her films through the distance and alienation produced by her full frontal shots. In this way, she portrays the face-to-face confrontation between two individuals on an equal footing, inviting the spectator to occupy a real place in relation to what is being shown on screen (Akerman, 2011a). This approach is reminiscent of the face-to-face relationship with the Other in Levinas's work, which Akerman draws on to invoke the spectator's sense of responsibility towards the Other encountered in the film. This is what Akerman considers her ethical stance, which involves ensuring equality between image and spectator (Akerman, 2011a).

Akerman is a *voyeuse*, but unlike the *voyeur* who appears at different times in art and film history, she does not hide. Instead, she exposes her own presence in a respectful, reciprocal relationship with her Other, while trying to create a relationship between equals with spectators, who are invited to view her films from a certain distance, recognising their position as outsiders in relation to what they see. And vitally important in all of this is the place where she positions the camera, sensitive to the Other of herself, and the actress's way of dismantling the *voyeur*'s intrusion.

Akerman cares about ethics in the aesthetic of her films, both in those closer to fiction and in those more aptly defined as structural films. She proposes alternatives to the traditional way of making films and of showing the Other that are quite distinct from the images that dominate the mass media, social media platforms and much mainstream cinema. At the same time, when Akerman *represents herself*, either through her work as an actress, her alter egos or her connection to the people she encounters on her nomadic wanderings, she takes the most intimate approach with an honesty that connects with the subjective experiences of her spectators, far removed from the longing to be looked at and the idealised exhibition so common in contemporary virtual media (Mesías-Lema, Eiriz, 2022). Akerman's films propose a gaze respectful of diversity through an approach that allows her to take what she feels to be a part of herself as her starting point. ■

NOTES

1 Florence Fesneau points out that the first time the word *voyeur* as we understand it today was used was in 1898 by Alphonse Daudet, while the notion of *voyeurism* would not enter the lexicon until 1955, when

it was coined by the psychologist Henri Piéron. In the chapter "Fin de Bal" in *Soutien de famille: moeurs contemporaines*, Daudet uses the notion of the *voyeur* with reference to a man who observes his stepdaughter in intimate circumstances with excessive and suggestive affection. Despite the predominance of male *voyeurs* in the arts, Fesneau notes a few *voyeuses* who exhibit obsessions and desires similar to those displayed by their male counterparts. She identifies an early example in Plate XIV of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* in the 18th century and highlights its appearance around the same time in the paintings and engravings in *L'Art de jouir* (Fesneau, 2018: 177-178; Daudet, 2014).

2 The scholar Clay Calvert distinguishes four categories of what he calls "mediated *voyeurism*": 1) *vídeo-vérité voyeurism*; 2) reconstruction *voyeurism*; 3) tell all/show all *voyeurism*; and 4) sexual *voyeurism*. The first category is based on the notion of *cinéma verité*, referring to the distinctive quality of non-fiction in which unplanned moments of real life take place before the camera. The second concerns the reconstruction or dramatisation of a real event that the camera was unable to capture when it actually happened so that we are able to view it. The third relates to television programs in which individuals tell private stories, and the fourth is associated with erotic, sexual and pornographic material online. We spectators are in turn mediatised *voyeurs* who do not need to be physically present in the place of the observed event. All of this raises questions about the ethical regulation of this gaze that intrudes upon the privacy of others on new media (Calvert, 2004: 8-9, 205).

3 Akerman met Mangolte when she arrived in New York at the age of 22. Mangolte, who was 30 at the time, had come to the city a while earlier on the recommendation of Marcel Hanoun, who worked with her on *Le Printemps* [Spring] (1971), *L'Été* [Summer] (1969) and *L'Hiver* [Winter] (1969). In New York, Annette Michelson introduced her to Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, Yvonne Rainer and Richard Foreman. With Mangolte, Akerman explored the work of Snow, Andy Warhol, Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage and Ken Jacobs, among others. Both Akerman and Mangolte were fascinated by Snow's *La région centrale* [The Central Region] (1971), in which a camera movement of varying speed shows all the points of a sphere on a Canadian landscape. This experience would inspire *La Chambre* [The Room] (Akerman & Mangolte, 1972), which the filmmakers shot in a friend's bedroom, and *Hotel Monterey* (Mangolte, 2019: 37).

4 Clément recalls meeting Akerman for the first time in 1976 in Rome, when she was working on the film shoot for Mario Monicelli's *Caro Michele* (1976) together with Delphine Seyrig. At that time, Akerman was already developing *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* and it was probably Seyrig who suggested she consider Clément for the main role. Initially, Akerman was not convinced that Clément was the right choice to play the self-referential character, but a year later, Akerman offered her the role after showing her *Je, tu, il, elle*. Clément felt very close to Akerman and they would go onto work on several other projects together and to become good friends (Clément, 2021: 82-84).

5 The theorists Luisina Bolla and Noelia Gómez argue that the *voyeur*'s investigative eye appears in all of Proust's novels. They focus their analysis on the episodes in the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time* dealing with Vinteul's daughter and with Sodom and Gomorrah, which they compare to the ending to George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, a transgressive eye that leads readers to the position of "criminal accomplice" to what they see, in an ambivalence between horror and seduction that vests the eye with a contradictory nature encompassing both pleasure and pain (Bolla & Gómez, 2015: 3, 8).

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DISMANTLING THE *VOYEUR*'S INTRUSION: THE POSITION OF THE GAZE IN THE FILMS OF CHANTAL AKERMAN

Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore alternatives to the *voyeur*'s gaze represented in the arts through a selection of Chantal Akerman's films. In her work, Akerman dismantles the gaze usually associated with a kind of secret intrusion into women's privacy and erotic moments in sculpture, literature and painting, which still today prompts reflections on the gaze in cinema, mass media and social media. Studies of Akerman's work have focused mainly on gender issues, self-representation, hyperrealism or postmodernity in her films, without considering their reflection on *voyeurism*, which is central to her ethical and aesthetic approach in terms of how she looks at the Other, and how she presents herself. The position of the gaze in Akerman's work is explored here by focusing on the films *Hotel Monterey* (1972), *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, (1978), and *La Captive* (2000), analysing how she approaches and presents the Other of herself, how she confronts the *voyeur*-character, or how she reveals him to the spectator.

Key words

Chantal Akerman; Voyeur; Gaze; Feminisms; Gender Studies.

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Article reference

Moreno Pellejero, A. (2024). Dismantling the Voyeur's Intrusion: The Position of the Gaze in the Films of Chantal Akerman. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 179-194.

DESMONTAR LA INTRUSIÓN DEL *VOYEUR*. LA POSICIÓN DE LA MIRADA EN EL CINE DE CHANTAL AKERMAN

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es pensar alternativas a la mirada del *voyeur* en las artes a través de la propuesta de algunas películas de Chantal Akerman, en las que la directora desmonta tal mirada habitualmente asociada a cierta intrusión y secretismo en momentos de intimidad y erotismo de las mujeres en las artes plásticas, literarias y visuales, y que todavía hoy suscita reflexiones sobre la mirada en el cine, los medios de masas o las redes sociales. Los estudios sobre el cine de Akerman han dado importancia a las cuestiones de género y la autorrepresentación, el hiperrealismo o la postmodernidad, sin llegar a centrarse en la reflexión en torno al *voyeurismo*, fundamental en su propuesta ética y estética sobre cómo mirar al otro y cómo presentarse a sí misma. Aquí, abordaremos la posición de la mirada en el cine de la directora, centrándonos en las películas *Hôtel Monterey* (1972), *Los encuentros de Ana* (Les rendez-vous d'Anna, 1978) y *La cautiva* (*La captive*, 2000), en las que analizaremos cómo Akerman se acerca y presenta al otro de sí misma, cómo enfrenta al personaje-*voyeur* o lo evidencia ante las personas al otro lado de la pantalla.

Palabras clave

Chantal Akerman; voyeur; mirada; feminismos; estudios de género.

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Referencia de este artículo

Moreno Pellejero, A. (2024). Desmontar la intrusión del *voyeur*. La posición de la mirada en el cine de Chantal Akerman. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 179-194.

recibido/received: 14.10.2022 | *aceptado/accepted:* 11.06.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

THE FRAMING CURTAIN: THEATRICALITY AS A FORM OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC SIGNIFICATION IN RICHARD FLEISCHER'S *VIOLENT SATURDAY* (1955)

VÍCTOR ITURREGUI-MOTILOA

THE CURTAIN RISES: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In his film *Violent Saturday* (1955) Richard Fleischer takes a sublimated and mannerist approach to construct a story that is a hybrid of film noir and melodrama, in which a theatricalised construction of the mise-en-scène underpins an exploration of the moral duplicity of an American community. Through the arrangement of the characters at specific locations on the set, fenced in by the signifying power of objects whose placement is anything but arbitrary, Fleischer positions scenes between curtains as if to suggest that the events that unfold within the frame they form are lies. Cinema is, after all, an art of space, of what we leave in and out of it, of what falls within and beyond its boundaries, of what the characters say and do under its jurisdiction. The curtain thus signifies representation, appearance, a theatricalising construction in cinematographic language.

This noir melodrama depicts the convergence of two stories: the preparation and execution of a bank robbery by a gang of thieves in a fictional Arizona town, and the personal lives of a number of the town's residents. As if the criminal plotline were not enough, the film's exploration of the townspeople's relationships, conflicts and repressed desires delves into some unpleasant open wounds. Boyd and Emily Fairchild's open marriage, serving as a narrative gateway into the community's dark side, conceals a tragic reality in which they both feel trapped. Despite their efforts to depict their loveless relationship as a happy one, it will soon turn too destructive to survive. The focus of this study will be on the dialectic established between sound and image in certain segments: what we see and hear, and what we do not see or hear but can sense beneath the surface. Taking a paradigmatic example, the analysis of a local form will facilitate the interpretation of the global structural form of the film (Viota, 2020), as

a specific image can encapsulate the thematic essence of the whole story. The clues will be found in the positions of the characters and the distances between them, the layout and symbolic meaning of the dramatic spaces, and the theatrical staging of the set, editing, and use of music.

In short, by means of a cinematic and narratological analysis aimed at extracting the meaning of a text based on its expressive and narrative elements, this article seeks to explain how a thematic idea can be given cinematic form (Zunzunegui, 2016), through the expressive strategies and decisions adopted by the filmmaker to embody tragedy and the (self-)deception of appearances in sound and images in a local case. This idea constitutes the "exploratory hypothesis" (Casetti & Di Chio, 1991: 25) of this research, aimed at confirming the enriching and meaningful nature of theatricality in cinema. The analysis of the narrative structures will also draw on the concepts of focalisation, ocularisation, frequency and order established by Gaudreault & Jost (1995). But first, a brief overview will be offered of the frictions between cinematic and theatrical language, as well as a description of some of the particular aesthetic and narrative features of Richard Fleischer's filmography. In this sense, of all the phenomena of interaction between film and theatre, this study will focus exclusively on the translation of the theatrical mise-en-scène (specifically, the performing stage and one of its traditional elements, the curtain) into cinematographic mise-en-scène. Thus, the aim of this article is not to explore the semiotic dialogue between the two art forms in a general sense, but specifically to analyse a film text that constructs its images by means of a dramatic device.

2. ACT I: PRESENCE, ABSENCE AND APPEARANCE

Although it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive map of the symbiosis between film and theatre, it is worth establishing a few basic points that will serve as a foundation for this analysis. To this end, the entry for the use of textile imagery in Juan Eduardo Cirlot's dictionary of symbols is taken as a conceptual starting point:

> it refers not only [...] to the ideas of linking and increasing through the blending of two elements (warp and weft, passive and active), or to the act of weaving as an equivalent to creating, but to the idea that for a certain mystical intuition of the phenomenal, the given world seems like a curtain that conceals our view of the true and profound (1992: 428).

The polysemous nature of the concept makes it a perfect fit for this study, which is concerned precisely with these two dimensions of the figurative object of the curtain in *Violent Saturday*: on the one hand, the creative nature of weaving, and on the other, the illusory power of what a woven cloth veils or prevents us from seeing in its entirety. The history of art abounds with textual operations of this kind, which are not "simple ornamental details, but signs of a meta-pictorial [or in this case, meta-theatrical] representation" (Polidoro, 2016: 76). Put simply, the interest here is in films that appear to "destroy the mimetic illusion in order to call attention to its mechanisms and invite us to uncover them in the construction of what we believe is real" (Pardo, 2018: 63). In other words, these are films of the late classical period that operate within the parameters of estrangement or distancing (Brecht, 2004: 167-169) that would later be consolidated by modern cinema.

Before going any further, it is important to acknowledge that contemporary theatre studies have moved beyond the definition of theatre as an illusion or an appearance of the real (Lehmann, 2013: 184-192). The images analysed in this study reflect the convergence of three other theatrical concepts: performance, as an involuntary and unconscious act carried out by individuals in their social lives, like characters in a film (Goffman, 1997); performativity, referring to the idea

of "masking" reality (Sánchez, 2010); and staging, understood as the "process of planning" that controls the elements and development of a scene (Fischer-Lichte, 2014: 373). However, for the purpose of this study I also take illusion and appearance into account due to their thematic and narrative relevance to the object of study, without entering into discussions of literary theory.

In the interests of brevity, the two main currents of opinion on the cinema-theatre divide can be placed on two ends of a spectrum. Since the earliest years of film theory and criticism, there has been a debate that has split opinion on cinema's theatrical heritage into two factions. In general terms, on one side is the faction led by André Bazin, whose concept of "pure cinema" argues for the peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment of the two art forms. For Bazin, the supplement of theatricality injected into cinematographic discourse has two effects, as "playing theatre-in-film" (Genette, 2004: 78) accelerated the growth of the latter and ensured the survival of the former. Because cinema—which is by no means a monolith that resists all expressive contamination in the name of purity—ensures "liberty of action in regard to space, and freedom to choose your angle of approach to the action" (Bazin, 1967: 85), it unshackles theatre from its spatio-spectatorial chains.

On the other side of the spectrum, the filmmaker Robert Bresson's aphoristic and effective notion of the *cinematograph* (his filmmaking) has its nemesis in *filmed theatre* (everything other than his filmmaking). As Bresson puts it, "a film cannot be a stage-show, because a stage-show requires flesh-and-blood presence" (Bresson, 1979: 12). From this perspective, it seems more than likely that a "photographic reproduction of a stage-show", as *Violent Saturday* clearly seems to be, is what the man who made *Pickpocket* (1959) would call a falsity of presence. But my analysis here is not concerned merely with theoretical exchanges of accusations. What is of real interest is precisely the point of connection where this film reconciles the two (p)arts, as it is their symbiotic nature rather than a disjunctive "contamination or remediation" (Giesekam, 2007) that films like this one exploit.

In *Violent Saturday*, Fleischer uses theatre as a linguistic resource which, on fusing with reality, becomes false—with all the aesthetic force that this entails. Or at the very least, it becomes doubly illusory, as it is at once a representation and an incision into real space, with no material basis other than the world itself. This does not mean that Fleischer is rejecting the validity of theatre. On the contrary, he draws out theatrical paradigms and inserts them into his cinematic language. Thus, the scene between curtains in this film is not a theatrical representation, but a theatricalising or theatricalised representation, because what it shows us on a staircase between curtains is a very real and operative part of the story. This is the irony and the cruelty to which the filmmaker subjects his characters. Although, as Bazin points out, film not only mobilises "a paradoxical modality of theatre production" (1967: 120) but also takes into account the formal extension of that paradox, the greatest filmmakers have known how to exploit the limitations of theatre, the art of presence, in a slide into the realm of absence that is cinema. In opposition to the negativity of those who believe that "the curtains play only a small perceptual role and their residual symbolic value is trivial and somewhat foolish (attempting to imitate the nobility of the theatre show)" (Aumont, 1997: 86), the analysis here aims to turn a microscopic lens on those films "that turn to the theatre to explore the theme of truth and lies, of representation" (Abuín, 2012: 17).

Further to this discussion, it is worth concluding these theoretical considerations with Christian Metz's reflections on the osmosis between cinema and theatre. Metz understands cinematographic theatricality as estrangement, artificiality, as a "splitting, counterpoint, philosophical reflection and metafictional convergence" (2002:

WHILE DRAMATIC FICTION ALREADY INVOLVES A PROBLEMATIC DIALECTIC BETWEEN THE STAGE AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD, WHEN THAT DRAMA IS EMBEDDED ON SCREEN IN A FILM FRAME, IT PRODUCES A DOUBLE ARTIFICE

24-25). A dialectic operates in cinema between the real and imaginary planes, whereby the real imitates the imaginary. Representation and the thing represented in cinema are imaginary; conversely, in theatre, both these spaces are real:

> as the world does not interfere with the story to constantly disprove its pretentions to establish itself as a world (as occurs in theatre), the diegesis of films can provoke this strange and well-known impression of reality (Metz, 2002: 38).

In other words, while dramatic fiction already involves a problematic dialectic between the stage and the outside world, when that drama is embedded on screen in a film frame, it produces a double artifice. As suggested above, these qualities of theatre and cinema lie at the very heart of the film analysed here.

3. ACT II: MELODRAMA AND FILM NOIR IN RICHARD FLEISCHER'S WORK

Of all the themes explored by Fleischer, the most obvious is the old adage that "appearances are deceptive". To offer a few brief examples, his characters include an Amish patriarch with a violent streak, a puritanical librarian who turns to robbery, a shy banker with voyeuristic tendencies, and a cowardly father who will regain his courage and the love of his children. And the thieves are simply thieves; not very professional, but thieves, nonetheless. Above all the others are Boyd and Emily, who stand out as the only characters, apart from the gangsters, whose story ends with death. But what is of interest for this study is the veil of Maya and its stripping away employed by Fleischer not only for these characters, but also for the spaces they inhabit and the situations and actions that take place in them. In *Violent Saturday*, we hear things that have nothing to do with what we see. The crowning glory of Fleischer's contribution to the film noir genre, this film works with a dialectic "between what each character could be and what they end up being in their interactions with objects and other characters" (Losilla, 1997: 15). Moreover, as "the stylistic scenery is populated with elliptical elements, double meanings, indirect allusions, expressive ambivalences and underground tensions" (Heredero & Santamarina, 1998: 27), the fusion of typically film noir stylistic elements with melodramatic narrative developments turns out to be a highly astute strategy for expressing the opposition between reality and appearance. This is largely due to the fact that "in film noir, shadows and lights pursue characters who struggle in a gloomy 'no man's land'", an illusory space-time where "reality and dream intertwine in an atavistic schizophrenia that reveals much about human nature" (Simsolo, 2007: 19).

In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "making a gangster movie meant taking a leap into the past, assembling a complex—and costly—reconstruction that was not always appealing to bankers and producers" (Coma & Latorre, 1981: 191). Moreover, colour and other technological advances constituted expressive contradictions of the thematic and formal ontology of film noir, with its absence of colour and its shadows. However, Fleischer had good reasons for choosing colour and a widescreen format for this film, although they might at first seem out of keeping with the gloom and oppressiveness of a paradigmatic black-and-white noir film with a 4:3 aspect ratio.

To achieve his aims, the director chose to use CinemaScope, a spectacular system that attempts to "cover a lot all at once" (Viota, 1966), resulting in an unreal, explicit and baroque representation

that instantly elicits comparisons with theatre. Expanding on Viota's perspective, it is worth considering a remark that he attributes to Fleischer in an original, invented interview: "I try to do things as if I was in a theatre."[1] Given that CinemaScope can take in wide open spaces, the contradiction resulting from the incompatibility of this formal decision with the film's narrative function is obvious. The people of the town depicted in the film have a lot of space to move around in on screen, but the story is constantly pushing them into closed spaces and dead ends, such as in the hold-up in the bank, the shoot-out in the barn, or the mock-theatrical setting in the Fairchild residence, discussed below. In this regard, Losilla (1996: 214) points out that in the 1930s and 1940s it was rare for colour to flood the images of Hollywood films, partly because it would have alienated an audience beset with all manner of economic woes who would only accept bright colours in exotic, escapist or fantasy stories. In the more prosperous context of the 1950s, the movie screens became wider and more colourful:

> both the colour and the panoramic screen [...] tended to reinforce an aesthetic that had already been emerging in the previous decade as a reaction against the saturation of the classical style (Losilla, 1996: 215).

With longer takes, the scenery was more powerful, and a wealth of objects and figures were spread all over the screen, expanding life, making it bigger and more vivid. This phenomenon occurred in melodrama, which used these devices to distort and exaggerate reality to the utmost. The "Scope" format introduced the problem of the human figure in the space, in its emptiness and its clutter, in its inhabitability. Its aim was to show everything, and as a result it created an unreality, an explicit, enunciated representation by means of long, rhythmic horizontal shots. The dimensions of the format sought to emulate the boundless, panoramic size of the proscenium stage, but the setting of the drama is open, with no barriers or frames, with no secondary format that captures the actors' performances in any medium other than reality itself.

It is difficult to determine whether *Violent Saturday* should be classified as a melodrama about the problems faced by people in a small town or a canonical gangster movie about a skilfully planned bank robbery that goes awry due to a coincidental convergence of problematic characters on the day of the heist. The seemingly unambiguous yet exaggerated and overwrought clarity (Oroz, 1995: 25) of the images and situations conceals the truth (negative or positive, depending on the character) beneath the town's surface. This may be enough to justify its classification as film noir, but at the same time there are reasons for defining it as a generic drama. For example, despite taking up a substantial amount of film time, the planning of the hold-up is merely a minor cog in the narrative machinery. The police are also largely left out of the story; they are not present to prevent the tragedy and serve no narrative function. Moreover, the gangsters' motivations are unknown and unimportant. The thieves serve the purpose of destabilising the town, of pulling the lid off the shiny Pandora's box filled with secrets of rot and decay on every level. Rooney argues that melodrama has been depicted as a genre that "tends to reinforce the status quo and/or as a mode that generates melancholy and thwarted wish fulfilment" (2015: 2), a description that sums up the plot of *Violent Saturday* to perfection.

In this context, the fusion of melodrama and film noir effectuated in this film serves a very specific function:

> the melodramatic apparatus is founded on the need to break through the visible surface of the text, to explore beyond the appearance of reality, because melodramatic reality is always a physical space with powerful resonances, but also a mask that covers the concealed passion, the hidden morality, or the buried pain (Pérez Rubio, 2004: 104).

In visual terms, *Violent Saturday* is a melodrama, because the cinematography and the imagery have little of the gloom and ambiguity that characterise film noir. The film's bright colours and warm lighting, so dear to Hollywood in the decade from 1955 to 1965, might easily have been designed for a Douglas Sirk picture. And at the same time, dramatically it is pure film noir, fatalistic and with a complex happy ending (or a happy-ending complex). Put simply, *Violent Saturday* straddles the line between noir and deceptive reflection, always evading both, while seeking to construct its discourse on the selection of ingredients of stage drama analysed above.

In any case, as viewers we have to deal with visual information that cannot be easily decoded in a standard reading. This is because the scene analysed below mobilises a series of signifiers whose meaning will only be understood in the key sequence of the thwarted bank robbery. The theme could be summed up as follows: in appearance, "everything is fine", but on that same shiny surface we can find signs of the reality that lies hidden beneath it. It is important to bear in mind that "every (linguistic) semiotic object, and even any of its elements, is vested with a double existence, as it exists both in the form of being and in the form of seeming" (Greimas, 1973: 108). Specifically, the discourse in the sequence in question displays a highly significant mismatch between denotation and connotation. The confusion this provokes is shared between the spectator and the two characters involved: the hold-up is suspense material, while the tragedy of the townspeople's lives and its denouement constitute a surprising twist.

4. ACT III: TRAGEDY ON A VIOLENT SATURDAY

As noted above, the thematic principle of the scene analysed here—and by extension, the film as a whole—is that appearances are deceptive, but there is no reason for this to be limited to the appearances of the characters alone, as it applies equally to the places, and the characters cannot avoid the violence they inflict.

After an evening of flirting, indecent propositions and romantic suggestions with a nurse named Linda, the owner of the local copper mine, Boyd Fairchild, has had a little too much to drink, and he ends up having to be taken home by this same young woman to whom he has shared the details of his troubled marriage. The reason that for a few hours he seems to forget that he is "happily" married to the lofty and liberated Mrs. Fairchild lies in the fact that she has once again failed to show up for the lunch date they had arranged for that day. His married life is an illusory mirror-image that looks perfect to everyone else in town but that for all practical purposes is a lie. This thematic principle of the frailty of an apparently indestructible bond is formally represented in little hints in the mise-en-scène that warn the spectator of what is about to happen a few minutes later. The first of these hints can be found in the single shot showing Boyd's attempt to pick up Linda. The scene takes place in the local bar, where we see all the main characters in the story: Harry, the timid, voyeuristic bank manager; the trio of thieves who hatch the meticulous plot to rob the bank; and the aforementioned Boyd and Linda.

At the height of his inebriation, Mr. Fairchild begins dancing with the attractive young woman on the dance floor. Fleischer uses the transparent composition to slip in a shot showing the bashful Harry as a tiny bust framed in the mirror above the bar, compelled to share the same illusory space containing his fantasies of Linda while she dances with his sexual competitor. The suggestion is that he is unable to find the slightest satisfaction of his frustrated longing even in the illusory world of the mirror, precisely because the reflection there contains his object of desire (Linda) in Boyd's arms. It should not be overlooked here, incidentally, that Fleischer also frames the drunken businessman in a kind of frail curtain of delicate





Above. Figure 1. Below. Figure 2

wine glasses; the shot captures the hugeness of the mirror over the counter of the bar, so that we are offered two specular appearances, the larger, definitively ill-fated one being reserved for the owner of the mine. His life, in addition to being a false reflection, is confined in a framework that could easily be shattered to pieces [Figure 1].

The second image hinting at Boyd's nature and his narrative arc can be found in the scene of an informal meeting with his associate, Shelley. In the scene, Boyd is handling the various components of a photo camera, including the device itself, a flash bulb, rolls of film, and even a small viewfinder. Most of these items are shown together alongside a framed picture of his wife, with Shelley's closed fist looming threateningly over them, in a metonymic shot. These are objects used to capture somebody's image, a visual representation, but it is just a false illusion, a mirage. Everything foreshadows the great degree-zero illusion of the theatrical: fiction in life itself, in which the real and the fake cannot be distinguished. This scene is the first time we see the couple "together", but she is only in a photo, absent, re-presented.

The most interesting aspect of this scene from the perspective of this analysis is the positioning of the actor on screen: standing upright above the picture portrait of his wife, framed by the curtains of his office, Boyd is expressively and spatially distanced from Shelley [Fig. 2]. The composition is split in two, with Boyd standing and Shelley sitting down, and with different backgrounds behind them that also separate them visually. This separation foreshadows the final outcome of their respective narrative arcs: a happy ending for Shelley and a devastating denouement for Boyd. As this scene suggests, the meta-framing of one or more figures with a curtain image in *Violent Saturday* acquires a connotation of theatricality and meta-representation that the characters themselves remain unaware of. In this way, the cinematographic discourse gradually begins to arrange the characters according to its designs. We will obtain the information that reveals the full meaning of these images only after the fact. It is not only the paradigmatic dimension of theatricality but also its syntactic dimension, involving the arrangement and selection of certain elements in the editing process, that gives these images their meaning.

Another equally important sequence takes place at the country club, the location that conveys the unrestrained and carefree personality of Mrs. Fairchild. It is worth highlighting the detail that this is not actually the sequence that first introduces us to Emily, as the story begins with a scene in which she almost runs over one of the thieves just after his arrival in the town, in a moment similar to the shot-reverse shot in *Psycho* where Marion exchanges glances with her boss



Figure 3

just as she is fleeing with the company's money. The images in the country club sequence establish aesthetic contrasts with the scene of the conversation between Boyd and Shelley described above: while the men talk about the work in the mine in a humdrum office, Emily and her lover are enjoying the brisk morning under the shady trees of a golf course. Work is thus contrasted with leisure, the manmade office furniture with the lushness of nature, as a metaphor for Emily's supposed conjugal freedom. And in fact, that freedom is really no more than supposed: while Boyd is hemmed in first by the curtains of his office (work) and later by the rows of wine glasses (alcohol), in Emily's case it is the trunks of the trees that, in this context, leave the adulterous woman with no escape [Fig. 3]. Exploring this construction further, the shadows of the leaves on the characters' bodies add a hint of drama, with lighting that is not as idyllic in the foreground as it is in the background. Fleischer thus conveys the idea of distance between the Fairchilds. It is late in the film when they finally appear together, and when they do it is climactic—and false. In fact, when Emily is killed by one of the gangsters in the hold-up, Boyd is not even present, as if turning the tables on his repeatedly absent wife.

In this way, the discourse connects the couple through the composition, while at the same time the content places them on very different coordinates through the contrast between natural and artificial worlds.

Boyd's drunken return to the Fairchild mansion will provide the spark that lights the tragic, inextinguishable fire of that violent Saturday. After bringing him home, Linda keeps vigil by his side as he sleeps, waiting for his wife to get home and look after him. After a long day of infidelities and disagreements, Mrs. Fairchild is surprised to find a nurse in her living room watching over her husband. Following a heated discussion in which Linda questions Emily's role in a marriage that she is unwilling to give up and actually greatly desires, Emily, furious and proud, drives out her competitor. Judging by the expression on her face and her dejected posture as she climbs the stairs to her bedroom, it would seem that Linda's reprimand has done more damage than she is able to withstand. Despite her objections, she knows perfectly well that Linda is right.

It is precisely at this moment when the stairway framed by huge curtains is revealed to us for the first time in all its splendour [Fig. 4]. This means that the key object of the scene

offered a few shots later is introduced by Emily: the performance has begun. At this point, we need to jump ahead a few sequences to the moment when Boyd wakes up, as Fleischer uses a cross-cutting technique that indiscriminately switches between the various events leading up to the Saturday in question. The decisive scene that is the focus of this analysis thus begins a few minutes later in the film.

In a medium shot at the height of the sofa where Boyd is lying, Emily enters the frame to shake her husband, who wakes up in a daze. In response to his wife's evident concern, he sits up, coming eye-to-eye as if in preparation for the imminent fight. The shot continues without a cut, pulling out to a medium-long shot of the couple. In a dance of shifts and turns, the two figures exchange positions as if disputing the territory, as if their domination of the domestic space will give them the power necessary to claim victory over the other. In this context, Fleischer's use of CinemaScope gives the actors considerable room to move in a seemingly vast frame that nevertheless limits their constant movements to an enclosed space. Although CinemaScope was normally used to create a more natural, realistic effect, as it could cover much more space with more depth, in this case Fleischer, with the help of the set, the duration, the colour and the lighting, manages to give the shot a kind of artificial appearance.

After three minutes sustaining the same shot, the first clear cut occurs, once again spatially splitting the characters with a considerable initial distance, generating a long match cut of gazes that fades as the dramatic tension increases. Moreover, this syntactic decision establishes the two diegetic spaces that underpin the argument here: a) the living room, which is occupied by Boyd, associated with the harsh reality of his romantic situation [Fig. 6]; and b) the grand staircase framed by the huge curtains that so resemble those of a theatre stage, where Emily becomes the object of a meta-representation [Fig. 5]. It is this that gives rise to the pseudometalepsis (or false metalepsis) that sustains this analysis. A metalepsis occurs "when the passage from one 'world' to another is masked or subverted in some way: textually masked" (Genette, 2004: 137). What is curious here is that this technique, so popular in fantasy fiction and metacinema, receives here what could be called a realist treatment. In other words, everything that happens inside the theatrical space of the staircase constitutes a kind of unconscious performance by the characters, in which their acts, promises and

Figure 4





Figure 5



Figure 6

forgiveness will be valid only within the boundaries of the frame—or, to put it in cinematographic terms, only until a fade to black brings an end to the shot and to the scene.[2] Let's explore this a little further.

The camera position marks the threshold between the realm of reality (the living room) and the realm of falsehood (the stairs). The second shot in the scene shows Boyd with a quizzical look in response to Emily's behaviour; he moves towards her at once, although he stops short before stepping into the dramatic space of the stairway (shots 1 and 3). Similarly, the scale of the shots undermines the cruel unreality. The shot-reverse shot dynamic now consists of much closer frames, effectively asphyxiating the characters. An example of the formal expression of this idea of confinement can be found in the fifth shot of the segment, where Emily, who until now has been standing on the stairs holding onto the handrail, sits down on the stairs sobbing, so that she appears imprisoned behind the posts of the banister, which now appear as a metaphor for the bars of a cell [Figs. 7-8]. Before going any further, it is worth highlighting the symbolism associated with stairs. According to Cirlot, the staircase symbolises "the relationship between two worlds" (1992: 187). He also points out that these worlds are signalled not just by two points (middle/earthly and upper/heavenly) but by three (the third point being lower/infernal) (Cirlot, 1992: 187).

If we apply the above idea to this analysis, it seems clear that Emily inhabits the intermediate point between the heavenly ideal they are trying to fabricate—with the idea of escape as a catalyst—and the infernal cesspit of marital breakdown. This division of incompatible spaces persists even when Boyd and Emily share the space of supposed positivity. Thus, Boyd finally enters the theatrical frame of the lie on the staircase, and proposes the idea of leaving town, because "there's nothing to hold us here." This dissonance between what we hear (their plans to get away) and what we see (a "free" woman imprisoned in her own house) could be said to sum up the cruel irony that these images will acquire at the end of the story.

Figure 7



Figure 8



THE SHOT ENDS WITH THIS DOUBLE LAYER OF CONFINEMENT TO WHICH EMILY AND BOYD ARE SUBJECTED: THE ENORMOUS CURTAINS AND THE STAIRCASE/CELL, WITH THE MUSIC SWELLING TO A CLIMAX AND A FADE TO BLACK THAT SEEMS TO SUGGEST THE IMMINENT APPEARANCE OF THE WORDS "THE END"

As the couple are about to consummate their hasty and ultimately thwarted reconciliation, Fleischer offers his penultimate expressive touch prior to completing the construction of the tragedy. Boyd, positioned emotionally in parallel with his wife, moves around to the other side of the banister to join her on the staircase, thereby entering the prison it symbolically represents. Considering once again the division of the stairway into three levels, it is worth noting that upon their reconciliation the couple will remain there, on the middle level. The discourse of the film does not yet tell us whether their future will take them up (to happiness) or down (to separation). In other words, the stairway "is a stable space in terms of framing but unstable in terms of content, with a surface onto which uncertainty is inscribed, in a veritable hallucinatory device" (Stoichita, 2018: 154). In short, both are imprisoned the moment they tell each other "I love you." However, we have yet to come to the final stroke that closes this sequence. With the couple having made what will ultimately prove to be a fleeting reconciliation, the camera begins zooming out. This technique gives the impression that at any moment a theatre full of people will appear in the Fairchilds' living room, cheering and applauding as the curtain framing the stairway closes, manifesting the latent metalepsis discussed above. But the zoom-out stops and the shot ends with this double layer of confinement to which Emily and Boyd are subjected: the enormous curtains and the staircase/cell, with the music swelling to a climax and a fade to black that seems to suggest the imminent appearance of the words "THE END" [Fig. 9].

In this sense, the final image of the scene suspends judgement, although the general thematic context of the film and of this sequence in particular gives us no warning that the direction will be inevitably downward: to death, hell, and tragedy. And there is yet one further touch: although the fade-*out* indicates the end of the sequence, a fade-*in* that immediately follows it interrupts Boyd and Emily's "happy mini-ending". The next image we are shown is of pistols laid out on a bed in the hotel room where the gangsters are staying [Fig. 10], the same weapons that will be fired a few minutes later when Emily loses her life, in the

Above. Figure 9. Below. Figure 10





thwarted robbery of the local bank. This juxtaposition reflects the axiom that editing can sometimes join together more than it separates, although in this case what it joins is a fatal link.

One additional detail worth pointing out is the use of sound at this point in the film. The music that plays at the end of this sequence offers yet another twist in Fleischer's mannerist exercise here. Making expressive use of the classical music score as an emphasising technique, the director brings in Hugo Friedhofer's theme at the exact, meaningful moment when Emily, overwrought with guilt, crosses the line into theatricality, where she will remain through to the end of the sequence. The final notes of the theme are still playing during the fade-out at the end of the scene. With a musical logic, the wide shot of the stairway ends with the tonic chord of the romantic piece, which is held for a moment after the fade to black, as if inviting us into that space of happiness invented by Boyd, Emily and the mise-en-scène. It is at this point that the music should end, together with the scene. But instead, the band continues to play in the dark, and at that moment the tonality changes from major to minor, connecting the two scenes with a dominant chord that generates tension while seeming to place a question mark over everything we have just seen, especially given that the first image that appears after those ominous notes in the dark is of the weapons that will be used by the gang of thieves.

5. ACT IV: A MIRROR IN A DEAD-END STREET

The above description of the formal and narrative strategies of the scene in question points to an immediate conclusion concerning a characterisation at the heart of this analysis, related to the melodramatic elements of Boyd and Emily's pseudo-theatrical scene in particular and of film noir's stylistic techniques in general. Fleischer embeds this melodramatic fragment into the very core of a tense plotline. As exaggerated, theatrical and false as the stairway scene may be, "the introduction of the romantic universe into any given structure is not intended to be offered as formal melodrama" (Monterde, 1994: 57). In other words, this moment in the narrative should be considered a (melo)dramatic insertion aimed at augmenting the tragedy of the story. Theatricality is imposed on two characters who have no idea that the idealised mannerism of their theatrical reconciliation is nothing more than a tragedy disguised as romance. And the spectator only knows (or will find out) when Emily dies.

The characters in the melodrama are fated to suffer a tragedy that they seem constantly to deny or to want to ignore. Doomed to misfortune, the Fairchilds end up being the town's greatest victims. The metonymic device of the curtain in the vast living room of their mansion provides an eloquent "dual framing" that "physically expresses the difficulty of gaining access to the visible" (Stoichita, 2018: 51) of a town that turns into a huge theatre of the absurd. As Boyd himself puts it in the final scene: "It's so stupid and pointless to be alive in the morning and dead in the afternoon." This consolidates the idea of the world as a theatre in which the characters a merely marionettes at the service of a capricious narrator. In this case, the catalysts, the connections between thieves and future victims, Emily's infidelities, the revelation of the secret and subsequent redemption of Shelley as a hero… all of it points to the falseness of the scene: declared in the narrative, enunciated formally and confirmed dramatically.

The couple offers a double performance: one on an extradiegetic level for the spectator watching the film, and the other on an intradiegetic level for themselves and for an implicit spectator. This scene in *Violent Saturday* is a false framed theatre and a cinematographic stage replete with theatricality, not only as a distancing device, but also to mark the enunciation, conferring *knowledge* through *viewing* in a specific way, i.e.,

as theatre. This type of distribution of information, through "a story enacted by the characters that interacts with their everyday existence" (Pérez-Bowie, 2018: 101), results in the hybridising of genres formulated by Fleischer, who creates a melting pot of iconographic motifs, diegetic shifts and structural archetypes drawn from the two classical Hollywood genres preferred by the major studios.

6. THE CURTAIN FALLS: CONCLUSIONS

As has been stressed above, Richard Fleischer's formal approach in *Violent Saturday* brings together the opposing positions in the debate over the lack of communication or compatibility between cinema and theatre. Returning to Bresson's division, in one corner are "those that employ the resources of the theatre (actors, direction, etc.) and use the camera in order to reproduce" and in the other are "those that employ the resources of cinematography and use the camera to *create*" (1979: 11). But Fleischer, a weaver of cinematic fabric, slips easily between one and the other. He reproduces to create, using theatrical language and composition to make cinema.

In the final scene, with Emily now dead, Boyd remarks that it seems like a lie that just a few hours earlier they were sitting in their living room, talking, reconciling, planning their trip. That she was alive and healthy. To be alive in the morning and dead in the afternoon, on a violent, tragic Saturday. Boyd is finally left alone, his back to us, weeping, with the barren, desolate quarry of his copper mine in the background, in a very closed shot that imprisons him, this time in the open air. In the quarry, a kind of stairway or ramp—a structure connecting the upper and the lower—appears to cross through his head [Fig. 11]. And Linda, who tries to console him, has been expelled from the shot: "I don't want you to see me cry," Boyd tells her. Boyd's is the only character arc (apart from Emily's, of course) that does not get a "happy ending". While the stairway symbolises ascent or descent, in Fleischer's work nobody goes up or down; they remain in the middle with no way of getting out.

The theatrical or theatricalising composition of this film signifies duplicity, appearance, suspension of judgement. Through dramatic masking, the scene analysed above tells us: "This is not what it seems; this will not be what it is now."

Figure 11



The happiness of which we are the only spectators (not even Boyd, because he is an actor on two levels in his own scene) will end with a cruel death. If a representation, a story, is something that is neither true nor false but in between the truth and a lie, a representation within another representation—i.e., a series of theatricalised actions within a film—will be doubly deceptive, and doubly meaningful. In this way, Fleischer's film questions us, as Bazin would say, given his observation of cinema's capacity to "transform theatrical situations that otherwise would never have reached their maturity" (1967: 78). *Violent Saturday* is, in short, a paradigmatic example of this positive exchange between the two mises-en-scène. ■

NOTES

1 The writings of Viota cited here were provided by Rubén García López, to whom I am grateful for his kind assistance.

2 It is worth noting that this scene ends with a fade to black after Emily makes several references to living in "the dark".

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THE FRAMING CURTAIN: THEATRICALITY AS A FORM OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC SIGNIFICATION IN RICHARD FLEISCHER'S *VIOLENT SATURDAY* (1955)

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the film *Violent Saturday* (Richard Fleischer, 1955). Specifically, it focuses on the narrative and expressive decisions made by the filmmaker in order to formalise an idea: the idyllic appearance of a small town hides the rotten core of the people who live there. To do this, Fleischer makes use of certain theatrical objects, concepts and compositions whose nature and meaning is transformed when framed in cinematographic language. The complex marriage between cinema and theatre, which has received so much attention from theorists and critics, finds the perfect example of its usefulness in this film: theatricality, defined as duplicity, as illusion, can be used as an element of cinematographic signification. Moreover, these particular qualities facilitate the manipulation of the aesthetic-narrative codes of two of the most overwrought and artificial genres that characterised the rise and fall of Hollywood: film noir and melodrama.

Key words

Theatricality; Classical Hollywood; Appearance; Melodrama; Film Noir.

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Article reference

Iturregui-Motiloa, V. (2024). The Framing Curtain: Theatricality as a form of cinematographic signification in Richard Fleischer's *Violent Saturday* (1955). *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 195-210.

TELÓN DE FONDO Y FORMA. LA PLANIFICACIÓN TEATRAL COMO ELEMENTO DE SIGNIFICACIÓN CINEMATOGRÁFICA EN *SÁBADO TRÁGICO* (1955) DE RICHARD FLEISCHER

Resumen

Este artículo consiste en un estudio de la película *Sábado trágico* (Violent Saturday, Richard Fleischer, 1955). En concreto, se centra en las decisiones expresivas y narrativas tomadas por el autor para poner en forma una idea: la apariencia idílica de un pueblo esconde una esencia corrompida de las personas que idealmente lo habitan. Para ello, Fleischer se sirve de ciertos objetos, figuras y planificaciones teatrales que modifican su naturaleza y significado al entrar en el lenguaje cinematográfico. El complicado maridaje entre cine y teatro, del que tanto han discutido la crítica y la teoría, encuentra aquí un ejemplo perfecto de su utilidad: la teatralidad, entendida como falsedad, como ilusión, puede ser utilizada como un elemento más de significación cinematográfica. Además, estas particularidades ofrecen una manipulación de los códigos estético-narrativos que conforman dos de los géneros más barrocos y artificiosos del esplendor y decadencia de Hollywood: el cine negro y el melodrama.

Palabras clave

Teatralidad; Hollywood clásico; Apariencia; Melodrama; Cine negro.

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Referencia de este artículo

Iturregui-Motiloa, V. (2024). Telón de fondo y forma. La planificación teatral como elemento de significación cinematográfica en *Sábado trágico* (1955) de Richard Fleischer. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 195-210.

recibido/received: 27.10.2022 | *aceptado/accepted:* 22.06.2023

Edita / Published by

Licencia / License

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

THE EMPTIED IMAGE: NEW APPROACHES TO DEAGRARIANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NON-FICTION CINEMA

VALENTÍN VIA

INTRODUCTION

Cinema has the evocative power to transport the spectator into a filmed landscape, a territory on the brink of disappearing or a climate crisis situation. This is not a speculation about the capacity of the cinematographic device, but an established fact of its potential. Scott MacDonald's article "Toward an Eco-cinema", published in 2004, explores the growing concern in documentary and experimental filmmaking about the human impact on the environment at the end of the last century. MacDonald bases his argument on the filmographies of James Benning, Diane Kitchen and Peter Hutton, who use filmmaking technology to create an illusion of preserving *Nature*, or more precisely, to provide a clear "evocation of the experience of being immersed in the natural world" (MacDonald, 2004: 108).

MacDonald argues that the representation of nature or the environment outside the human world has been rendered obsolete by the New Climatic Regime, as this concept is defined by the theorist and philosopher Bruno Latour (2017). *Nature* is not something lifeless or exterior to us, as the effects of our activity on the planet are having repercussions on contemporary societies, as countless environmental disasters make clear. Thus, any description or enunciation based on different data or using images of any aspect of the climate crisis not only informs but also implicitly conveys "a movement, an alarm, a factual statement" (Latour, 2017: 41). In this respect, Latour suggests, we humans can do nothing to change or reverse the crisis, as the power to act belongs to the Earth itself, through non-human organisms as "new invisible characters capable of subverting the order and hierarchy of the agents" (2017: 107). Like Latour and other contemporary theorists, Donna Haraway (2016) points to this restructuring that needs to be carried out by "chthonic entities that can and do join in accelerating double

death provoked by the arrogance of industrializers, supertransporters, and capitalizers—in seas, lands, airs and waters" (Haraway, 2016: 294). Both Haraway and Latour thus posit a kind of invisible or microscopic force, micro-organisms as the agents charged with restoring the Earth and reversing the climate catastrophe.

From the industrialisation of the rural landscape to its total "polyphonic" capitalisation, as described by Anna Tsing (2021: 24), farming has come to a point where it is defined as "commercial agriculture" whose aim is "to segregate a single crop and work toward its simultaneous ripening for a coordinated harvest." The frenetic pace of commercial agriculture has transformed the rural landscape in Spain over the past three decades. The socioeconomic theorist Fernando Collantes (2007: 251) point out that in Spain, "traditional agriculture, based on organic energy sources and low capital intensities" has been replaced "by an inorganic, capitalised agriculture whose fate became increasingly linked to a food system dominated by oligopolistic agribusinesses." What is happening is thus not the consequence of an "empty Spain"[1] but a process of alteration of the rural landscape occurring in three transitions. The first involves the transformation of dietary regimens, the industrialisation of food production and the establishment of global chains supported by a regional division of labour. The second is a demographic transition resulting in ageing societies, expanding the gap between generations and requiring new forms of social organisation and interaction between generational groups. And the third transition forms part of the exponential growth in international mobility that is producing hyper-diverse societies (Camarero Rioja, 2019: 65-66). This article argues that the Catalan filmmakers Gerard Ortín Castellví and Lluís Escartín are products of these demographic and representational transformations, and that their work reflects the change to the agricultural model and the three transitions described by Camarero Rioja.

Both filmmakers place their focus on representing the change to the rural world of Spain. The transformation of dietary regimens, the demographic transition, and the mobility of the masses are all present in their filmographies. The documentaries of these two Catalan filmmakers analysed here are developed as works of "non-fiction"[2] with a highly unique use of formal language and of the filming device, employing a range of narrative and representational strategies to construct an evocation of an environment in the process of changing. Described by Cerdán & Labayen (2014) as "interstitial filmmakers", Ortín and Escartín work outside the industry and their productions exist in a context that transcends their national borders, generating dialogues with other realities. Although both filmmakers have used digital technology in all their films, it is important to consider the relationship they establish with the materiality of the image in their work and its connection to the referent of that image (i.e., what the image depicts). This question is of vital importance because it defines the filmmakers' *gesture* (Agamben, 2001) and shapes their representation of the rural landscape, as well as its relationship with the ecology of images.

There is a set of contemporary experimental filmmaking practices that aim to capture the state of a rural landscape through the mediality of the filming device; in other words, that make use of celluloid in a filmmaking without cameras. Contemporary filmmakers such as Karel Doing, David Gatten and Tomonari Nishikawa find ways to connect their work to *Nature,* "providing a means for the natural world to 'speak' through the medium" (Knowles, 2020: 114). This involves a form of attentive listening and a series of political gestures that facilitate a more effective vision through a "juxtaposition of the microscopic and macroscopic" (Knowles, 2020: 51) that constitutes the state of the planet we inhabit. In this way, these films connect the image to the microscopic elements discussed by Latour and Haraway, respec-

tively. It is therefore important to consider their ability to represent these micro-organisms. If this idea is directly tied to analogue technology, what other possibilities can digital filmmaking offer? Is it possible for the device to be in consonance with that which it represents in images? Images can be recycled, a practice based on archive footage that Catherine Russell (2018) labels using a contraction of the words "archaeology" and "archive" to create the term *archiveology*, which refers to the reuse of images made by other filmmakers in other eras, with a view to configuring a cultural and historical memory. On the other hand, as the German artist Hito Steyerl argues in her manifesto *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009), compressed, low-resolution digital images "testify to the violent dislocation, transferrals and displacement of images; their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audiovisual capitalism." Steyerl thus offers an example of how digital recordings, by being reused, shared or filmed in a standard resolution, can also approximate the constitution of a cinematographic device that can be conveyed in a coherent, connected way.

Adopting this view of the digital medium, the Finnish theorist Jussi Parikka (2011) proposes a study of the medium from a perspective of *"new materialism"*. To this end, he coins the term *"medianatures"* to describe how media technology transmits and processes "culture", based on an interaction of physics, engineering and communication. Parikka thus suggests that the perceptions, actions, politics and meanings conveyed through digital media also belong to an ephemeral world: real, but in a non-solid state. *Medianatures* are also the product of objects that are not tangible, i.e., they contain electric and magnetic modulations and light energy into which power relations are also inserted in their control and capitalisation of these sources of absorption; in extractivist and energy politics. Parikka concludes that the digital medium functions by means of a combination of non-solid, intangible variables to generate an image of something tangible (its referent). In this sense, the medium itself is solid because it contains a compound of transformed and assembled minerals used in visual and audio recording technologies to generate an ephemeral image. The placement of these technologies and the intentionality of connecting them to their referent will give these *medianatures* a material relationship with the intervention in the rural landscape through its recording, but also through its evocation. The filming stage involves an intervention in a tangible, material object from the distance of the medium to capture the rural landscape and create a representation of it.

2. PEOPLE AS EXTRAS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: FROM *TERRA INCÒGNITA* TO *HASTA QUE LAS NUBES NOS UNAN, GUARDIOLA-DIOLA*

In 2005, the Catalan filmmaker Lluís Escartín released a short documentary film titled *Terra incògnita*, which offers a mannerist filmed portrait to examine the disappearance of agriculture and of human contact with the earth. This process of deagrarianisation is the consequence of the technologisation of farming and has resulted in a complete restructuring of the traditional model, with the disappearance of manual labour and the intensive use of greenhouses. Escartín's film shows us a part of Catalonia, specifically the Penedès region, a rural world and a community that is "exposed to disappearance" (Didi-Huberman, 2014: 11). Escartín explores the poetics established through an ethnographic gaze on otherness, documenting an "underexposed people" (Didi-Huberman, 2014: 14-15) to show a group of bodies in a disarticulated language, exposed to a future with no generation to succeed them, immersed in their everyday life of personal stories of the rural environment, offering a series of memories and longing for the past. According to Henri Lefebvre (1971: 30), in a rural community in the process of dissolution, even "in



Image I. *Terra incògnita* (2005). Still frame of an abandoned farmhouse

the most individualised context, neighbourhood relationships are of utmost importance."

The testimonies of the locals and residents of the neighbouring villages constitute a living record of an oral memory that is being lost. As Russell J. A. Kilbourn suggests in his book *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (2010), in the post-modern era there is a clear debate over the representation of collective memory. *Terra incògnita* could be considered to some extent a form of "prosthetic memory",[3] but without representing the theory of postmemory associated with a conflict over the historical importance of the past, as the experiences and stories recorded in this film refer not to a past event but to the present. It is thanks to the technologies of memory (cinema and photography, among other media) that these intimate, experiential memories have been transferred to the collective memory "without access being limited to specific events in which one actually took part" (Kilbourn, 2010: 27-28). The cinematographic device thus allows memory to be reconstructed given that its preservation is not possible, as Jan Assmann argues (1995).

The oral history of the local residents creates a community in the same way that "family and nation are forms that arise, change, develop or perish in conditions determined by the level of the productive forces and the mode of production" (Lefebvre, 1971: 27). Escartín thus presents the gradual disappearance in a constant wandering through a small portion of Catalonia close to his own home, with a highly expressive use of sound. At certain moments, the filmmaker allows a "desonorisation" that allows the image to broaden and connect with other elements in a process of "reflexive expansion" (Català, 2012: 44). It is in this way that Escartín plays with the images and abstracts them from their verbalisation and from the diegetic sound, turning them into a series of silent pictures. He allows them to emerge repeatedly together with extradiegetic Asian music that takes the film into a meditative state of contemplation.

At various points in *Terra incògnita* we see a series of uninhabited landscapes, with abandoned or collapsing houses and farms (image 1). These images of ruins recall Walter Benjamin's discussion in his *Thesis IX* (1940) of Paul Klee's picture *Angelus Novus*, where he argues that the pile of wreckage observed by the Angel symbolises the rule of the oppressors, who push from the present into the future in a rush towards catastrophe. Like Escartín's film, the Angel watches while moving away from what it is contemplating fixedly. The tempest pushes both *Angelus* and Escartín to redirect their gaze toward the fu-

A GROUP OF BODIES IN A DISARTICULATED LANGUAGE, EXPOSED TO A FUTURE WITH NO GENERATION TO SUCCEED THEM, IMMERSED IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIFE OF PERSONAL STORIES OF THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT, OFFERING A SERIES OF MEMORIES AND LONGING FOR THE PAST

ture to which their backs are turned. The emptiness that is given shape in the bodies represented offers these ruins as a spectacle of absence that compels us to acknowledge the language that has disappeared, but without which none of what is recorded would be possible (Català, 2012: 211). *Terra incògnita* marked a shift in Escartín's filmography, where he turned his focus onto a change to the rural model in Spain, a question he would explore once again in his most recent documentary feature film, *Hasta que las nubes nos unan, Guardiola-Diola* (2019).

This later film is an ode to two opposing agricultural models: one that is in the process of disappearing, and another that has not yet been able to develop fully. These models operate in the film as a culmination and unification of two apparently opposite cultures. As the title suggests, Escartín connects his hometown, Guardiola, with Diola, a community in the Casamance region of Senegal, through sound, the presence of song, and his own absence. The filmmaker brings the transnational documentary back to a kind of filmmaking that wanders fitfully through two worlds that are very different but interconnected by a common crisis: the global consequences of geopolitics. He becomes an *ethnofilmmaker* because he alone joins in and observes, collecting information on the community, to film it and understand it from a holistic perspective, "filming whole processes" (Ardèvol, 2006: 149-150). In this case, the process is agriculture, and the gathering of the crops and the celebration of the harvest are the cycles that Escartín captures on film. This *ethnofilmmaker* takes part in the ritual and "films an act from beginning to end, situating that act in its context" (Ardèvol, 2006). Escartín expresses his *gesture* by invoking the bodies represented through his own. In *Hasta que las nubes nos unan, Guardiola-Diola*, he thus explores a very important question: through the people and their faces, he approaches "individual bodies to expose the peoples in a construction capable of sustaining their surrender to the fate of surrendering to the other, in the agony of alienation or in the ecstasy of an encounter" (Didi-Huberman, 2012; 54). In this way, the filmmaker (de)constructs the bodies, associating them with other activities and rituals present in his own culture, but without the use of an *I*, instead establishing the cinematographic device from a different angle. In this film, the filmmaker does not manage to expose both peoples equally. In fact, the Catalan people who also appear in his cycle (the cycle of the vineyard), in very short sequences throughout the film, take a position of underexposure in relation to the other. We might assume that the *ethnofilmmaker* already embodies the Catalan rural space in opposition to the other community, and thus a highly conspicuous absence serves as a symptom and expression of its disappearance.

The silence in the representation of work in the vineyard and the need of the inhabitants of this landscape to use words convey the idea that labour in the countryside is an economic manage-

Image 2. *Hasta que las nubes nos unan Guardiola- Diola* (2019). Still frame of a newborn child in Diola



ment of space. However, the overexposure of the Diola people creates a group of bodies represented as "*figurants*" (extras) (Didi-Huberman, 2012: 156) who disappear over the course of the film. Their collective function is to appear and create a murmur, as in some scenes they are filmed more as an amorphous mass than as a community. The face of a newborn child (image 2) in the film's final sequence opens a gap in the life cycle of the Diola people and contrasts with the complete disappearance of the human face in the village in Penedès, where there is no new generation to inhabit a landscape that needs one for its continuation. Lefebvre (2013 [1974]) uses the term "dominated space" to refer to the situation when capitalism has taken control of farming and the agricultural space has been conquered. When those in power exert pressure that affects the environment, the "dominated space" emerges. The village in Penedès occasionally presented by Escartín reflects this domination, as the extras who populate the landscape are gradually lost in *Terra incògnita*, giving way to the "polyphonic rhythms" of the commercial agriculture described by Anna Tsing (2021) and the accumulation of production.

Taken together, these two films point towards a change that is slowly revealed through formal strategies. The tensions in the representations expose the fragility of an environment and of its mutation. Although Escartín shows the bodies and constructs his work based on their representation, he makes use of the cinematographic device as a technology of memory to film the ruins of a collective memory out of which the emptiness emerges: a dematerialised image of the body to construct a contemplative space and time.

3. TOWARDS AN EMPTIED IMAGE: SIMULACRUM AND SILENCE

The result of the crisis mentioned above, the space between the fracture and the emptiness that emerges between these images, gives rise to another type of image. A change to the gaze is introduced by the lack of a referent in reality that could aid the survival of that former world (the rural world) as it was perceived in so many films in the past. An analysis of the work of another Catalan filmmaker, Gerard Ortín Castellví, can shed some light on this reconfiguration of the image and its referents. His first documentary, the short film *Perrolobo* (*Lycisca*) released in 2017, foreshadows some key ideas that are developed in his subsequent films. *Perrolobo* offers a fragmented journey through the valley of Karrantza Harana; elements structuring the film include a catch dog breeding contest, an automated milking machine, the sound of a conch shell used by a shepherd to frighten the wolf away, and a tourist cave discovered by workers in a quarry. The setting, Karrantza Harana, is shown in two timeframes: the past and the future. The present no longer exists. Humans need the extension of dogs and machines to be able to carry out their work in the country. The wolf is depicted as a threat, but also as a victim, faced with the disappearance of the wooded landscape, into the depths of the earth.

In *Perrolobo*, the oral testimonies become a collective memory recorded using the "technology of memory" that is filmmaking (Landsberg, 2004), but the view of the people as extras is replaced with the constant appearance of the machine as an extension of the human and of the image, performing actions that were once performed by rural workers. The machine fills in for a human bodily absence; it is a "simulation" (Baudrillard, 1978: 8). Consequently, the *machinic* is represented in the image on a recurring basis, and the filming device as a *medianature* is articulated in opposition to another device attesting to the presence of the capitalist policies dominating the rural space. All the images are thus a simulation needed to stand in for the lack of human presence. In this *gesture*, images of the past and the future coexist. The fractured absence reveals the emptiness of these images. It is a process whereby the device turns



Image 3. *Perrolobo (Lycicsa)*, 2017. Still frame of the wolf shown in the final sequence of the film

the images into a continuous past, with no possibility of witnessing a humanised present in the same moment they were recorded, because when the device was placed there the people in question were no longer present, other than a few isolated bodies, scattered and on the verge of vanishing altogether.

The final sequence of *Perrolobo* is a fluid, slow-motion recording of a wolf running in the dark of night. Beyond recording this movement, the intention here is defined by a simulation. This wolf is in fact a tamed animal who, as noted in the credits, belongs to a company that hires out animals for film shoots. With these images, Ortín evokes the animals in latent movement captured on Muybridge's film strips, in a memory reconstructed through the film's oral testimonies, with images of memory that burn and "never stop burning because their aim is to survive over time" (Didi-Huberman, 2012: 42). Just like one of the few wolves that represent the end of the wild in a reenacted freedom, it is also a simulation that evokes an absence (image 3).

In his next film, *Reserve* (2020), the Catalan filmmaker would once again explore the languages of simulacrum, image and representation. *Reserve* constructs a story on the fragile balance of a territory after the disappearance of the predator, where the complex coexistence of humans and non-humans constitutes an anthropogenic ecosystem clearly marked by human presence. In the first sequence of this short film, a drone hums over a black screen that eventually gives way to the appearance of a tree, by which point the shrill noise sounds like a swarm of wasps. The figure of the predator, the wolf, forms part of the film's imaginary, although it is never shown in images because it is a ghost that does not exist in this region. *Reserve* is a story about the fragility of the land and the disappearance of the predator and of the landscape as we knew it before the creation of a realm of simulations.

These elements are not constructed through post-production or digital editing but form part of the film's diegesis. In contrast to *Perrolobo*, in *Reserve* the machine is not the representation of an absence that must somehow be filled; instead, artificial bodies, and the materials of the animal statues used for shooting practice in the film, take over the screen and are presented as traces of their animal referent and of the image. These images are comparable to digital filmmaking and the nature of "virtual images", which Ángel Quintana (2012) suggests are incapable of seeking out the truth of the world because they have renounced the laws of chance that rule nature; they cannot explore the ambiguity of reality because the world

IN THIS *GESTURE*, IMAGES OF THE PAST AND THE FUTURE COEXIST. THE FRACTURED ABSENCE REVEALS THE EMPTINESS OF THESE IMAGES

has become a "mere field of signs that can be turned into processed information" (Quintana, 2012: 274) (image 4). Beyond the question of the natural world or environmental impact, the space is perceived through its dematerialisation; in its complete disappearance without corporeal referents or representations of reality, it is only a space where energies and micro-organisms converge.

Conversely, Ortín's third film, *Future Foods* (2021), presents the culmination of the duality between manual labour and *machinic* reproduction. *Future Foods* revolves around the production of plastic food in the workshops of Replica LTD, one of the few companies based in the United Kingdom that still makes props for films, advertisements and displays. The perception of food items, whose appeal and palatability are based on a constructed image, comes into play in the observation of these artisanal production processes through the cinematographic device.

This tension in the *gesture* begins to create connections between serial production and human participation in the creation of plastic replicas of different foods for assorted uses on film sets. We are shown the creation process for these items while the audio features the filmmaker's

BEYOND THE QUESTION OF THE NATURAL WORLD OR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, THE SPACE IS PERCEIVED THROUGH ITS DEMATERIALISATION; IN ITS COMPLETE DISAPPEARANCE WITHOUT CORPOREAL REFERENTS OR REPRESENTATIONS OF REALITY, IT IS ONLY A SPACE WHERE ENERGIES AND MICRO-ORGANISMS CONVERGE

conversation with the CEO of a Finnish company that used cutting-edge technology to develop Solein, a protein powder made using air, electricity, and carbon dioxide. Solein could facilitate a form of agriculture with no environmental consequences or impact on the countryside. Through this film, Ortín establishes a way of reimagining the future of agriculture and the rural space after its disappearance. It presents the artefacts that facilitate the simulacrum, which are picked apart, assembled, coloured and sorted into cabinets, but it also opens a field of vision on the intangibility and dematerialisation of agriculture itself and its representation. *Future Foods* places us in a frozen

Image 4. *Reserve* (2020). Still frame of the forest where shooting practice on fake animals takes place



time characterised by fluctuating elements of past and future that evoke Walter Benjamin's ruins discussed above.

Replicas materialise a physical referent in images and lose their organic nature entirely, as is the case with these images. The fact that such images of processed foods and meats are juxtaposed with the protein Solein points to the idea that agriculture can easily be de-localised and made feasible and profitable again anywhere in the world, in a tiny portion of suitably conditioned space. There is no impact on the landscape because it can exist without occupying or altering a space the same way that all the images in *Future Foods* are constructed. The cinematographic device is invoked in order to encapsulate questions of importance to the director: it shows us that the meat and all the foods created in the workshop's moulds made up of layers and traces found in the images (Bruno, 2014), opening up a range of focal points on social and environmental issues, and on the impact of these foods on the collective imaginary.



Image 5. ***Agrilogistics*** **(2021). Still frame from tracking shot that creates a temporal ellipsis**

Ortín shows us a layer or stratum that consists of a food product that is not a food product, and an image that is not an image, understood from the perspective of the physical relationship between referent and medium in analogue filmmaking. Like the conception of the image in digital film, this relationship is inscribed in an iconosphere where "the substance of things has been confused with the surface of things" (Quintana, 2003: 295). The culmination of the *machinic* representation and the absence of any human being is of special interest in Ortín's most recent film, *Agrilogistics* (2021). In this film, he manages to transcend the transition of labour and agriculture towards a completely robotic conception of the process. There would not even be any sense in the appearance of a human in a totally automated environment. There is no room here for either the time of the human being or of human flows. Like an apocalyptic world in which only the computerised framework can operate due to its programmed function, *Agrilogistics* explores this idea that conceptualises agriculture in terms of a "Scopic Food Regime" (Ortín, 2022: 16). In this way, the filmmaker analyses the recent technological transformations in contemporary industrial agriculture. Tulip bulbs, chrysanthemum stems, and tomatoes on the vine are processed by the cameras, feeding datasets that regulate their own growth. The film is divided into two parts. The first occurs in the daytime, when the greenhouse is a cinematographic device, an automated film set optimised for the mass production of fruits and flowers. In the second part, at night, the factory stops: the greenhouse turns into an oneiric chamber where plants, animals and machines construct narratives.

The daytime part of the film contains the series of sequences that offer this initial approach to industrial technology: the camera takes a set of images that observe the movement, thanks to the lights, the constant fluid movements and the

hyper-surveillance technology operating in the greenhouse, which can be explored as much as its structure permits. The filmmaker lets the camera and machines in the greenhouse move together in two tracking shots taken using the technology that drives the automation, which in this case also includes cameras that monitor the production and growth of the plants up close. The space is constructed without spatial logic, through an appropriation permitted by the effect of the last tracking shot: to mark an ellipsis between day and night (image 5). The "Nocturnal Regime" operating in the night-time sequence of *Agrilogistics* is a feminine, carnal, cyclical world close to fantasy (Durand, 1981) with the appearance of the first animals, the pinkish twilight and a symbolic construction of space. What we see is a visual subconscious: a series of shadows, a deconstructed space as if the greenhouse had slipped beyond the limits of order and control. Domesticated animals populate these images, such as a llama, a couple of sheep, animals closely associated with domestication and the production of food and other products for humans.

The night comes to an end and the landscape is restructured. The tulips are ready to be sold, and then comes one of the sequences that makes *Agrilogistics* an ongoing study of the device: the medium and the *gesture* of a totality rewritten in each frame. The flickering towards the end of *Agrilogistics* is experienced and perceived; it takes the time it needs to develop before it disappears. It is nothing more than a kind of phantom projector, reminding us that cinema functions like a greenhouse, that films are made on plastic material and projected onto another surface; that this film was constructed in one greenhouse, but for the purpose of screening it in another one.

The greenhouse in *Agrilogistics* has a meaning related more to the camera and the shutter, in the sense that the image captured is created inside it and the world outside is delimited and dispossessed by the shot (Lynes, 2022: 31). In addition to screening *Agrilogistics* at numerous festivals, including the Berlinale and Cinéma du Reel, Ortín worked in conjunction with the Goig architecture studio to install a polytunnel in the La Capella art centre in Barcelona. The structure occupied the central gallery of the centre and thus altered the route taken by visitors to the centre (image 6). With this installation, the loop projection of Ortín's film was screened in the same way it had been constructed, inside a greenhouse, as if the spectator had been located inside the camera. In this way, the observer is also a creator of images, constructing them through the retina and when light and darkness are featured in the projection. Here and with digital technology, the spectator is transported directly to the landscape shot previously, so that this passage of time is in turn understood as a "passage of light" (Bruno, 2014: 116). The projection returns us to the filmed environment without ever leaving it, being there and going beyond the reconstructions of memory. The spectator engages with *paracinematic* elements like the greenhouse and constructs a fully immersive experience, with the opportunity to touch the referents of the images at the moment of the projection. The passage of light described by Giuliana Bruno is an atmospheric condition and a way of being in the environment, of weathering time (Bruno, 2014) in the same space where it has been filmed.

Image 6. Photograph from the *Agrilogistics* (2021) exhibition presented at La Capella, Barcelona



4. CONCLUSIONS

In the ongoing debate over the alteration of the rural landscape in contemporary Spain, the image is undergoing a process of being totally emptied. The representation of the bodies that populate the rural environment has been fractured by factors associated with the transformation of life in the countryside, by the capitalisation of the land and the New Climatic Regime, resulting in changes both to the paradigm for representing nature and to our relationship with it. In the absence of represented bodies, there is an upheaval, a factual statement that at the same time is also descriptive, as Bruno Latour (2017) suggests. What remains, vestiges and traces of the past that are admitted to the future, are ruins. The ruins exposed by Escartín shock while at the same time informing the spectator of a mutation of the rural landscape. Ortín, on the other hand, responds to the emptiness of the image by constantly filling it with simulacra, which assign a narrative, meta-referential value to that which they substitute.

Both filmmakers construct a dialogue that ultimately converges on the same point: the present and future of the rural landscape, but also the relationship of the human being with agriculture and the environment at a moment of fracture. In Escartín's case, digital filmmaking supports his aim to construct a collective memory, using a high-compression, low-resolution digital Betacam in *Terra incògnita* that offered greater freedom in filming and allowed him to approach Hito Steyerl's (2009) ideas in defence of a *poor image* that can attest to the violent dislocation of audiovisual capitalism. This idea is also present in the representation of the rural environment in the two communities portrayed in *Hasta que las nubes nos unan, Guardiola-Diola*. Conversely Ortín needs a more artificial formal aesthetic, visually closer to the language of fiction, as a series of post-produced images allow him to introduce the simulacrum operating in his films in a purely contemplative act. Both directors engage strategies with their use of the cinematographic device that approach an ecology of images, although they use audio and visual technologies inevitably derived from industrialisation and extractivist politics. However, it is important to take into account that these are filmmaking approaches, as Nadia Bozak argues, framed in the practice of peripheral cinema, which demonstrate "how cinema and the image are and have always been determined (and determining)" and how film, like life, can be more proactively or "intentionally ecological" (Bozak, 2011: 8).

The approach that both filmmakers take to space and time is based on a conception of *medianatures* (Parikka, 2011). As they do not use a physical medium like celluloid, there is no mediality of film; instead, through a range of visual technologies involving the ephemeral and the non-solid, they manage to create a kind of ecological image. The filming device and its positioning in relation to these types of images will determine the filmmaker's *gesture*. While Escartín embraces an economy of resources in the filming, editing, and screening of his film, Ortín needs the aesthetic resources of fiction, as well as narrative and other similar strategies, to reveal the tactile nature of images and to convey the rural problem explored in his films and the factors behind the conflict they expose. However, although the films of these directors employ very different audiovisual languages and aesthetics, they share an approach to the filmed object characterised by respect, minimal intervention, and the use of technologies of memory and *medianatures* to offer a unique snapshot of the rural landscape. Ortín makes frequent use of the mechanisation present in the greenhouse to create tracking shots, and he also exploits these spaces to reuse the images created by the sensors and hyper-surveillance technologies or to record the *simulacra* present in the landscapes featured in his filmography. Through their *gesture*, both filmmakers effectively regenerate imaginaries and

convey a message that is cautionary but also informative about the state of the rural question—in Spain and throughout Europe—in the context of the New Climatic Regime. ■

NOTES

1. A concept developed by Sergio del Molino in his book *España vaciada*, published in 2016.
2. A term developed by the theorist Antonio Weinrichter in his book *Desvíos de lo real. El cine de no ficción* (2004), which defines non-fiction as "the extensive unmapped zone between conventional documentary, fiction and experimental film".
3. Alison Landsberg (2004) associates the concept of *prosthetic memory* with cinema based on its power as a technology of memory that facilitates the reconstruction of stories and memories that were not directly experienced by those who recall them.

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THE EMPTIED IMAGE: NEW APPROACHES TO DEAGRARIANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NON-FICTION CINEMA

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing corpus of non-fiction films that explore rural landscapes and attempt to represent them as they disappear. The changes taking place in contemporary Spain and its reconfiguration by an oligopolistic food industry point to a need to explore the current relationship between the human being and agricultural labour. From the exposure of rural communities to their disappearance, a process of forcible emptying is affecting both the physical space and the territory of the image. In a move from absence to simulation, the empty spaces in the images are being filled with new forms replacing those that have been known up to now. This article offers a reflection on the change to the representation of the rural world in contemporary Spain based on the work of two contemporary documentary filmmakers: Lluís Escartín and Gerard Ortín Castellví. The focus of the analysis is on the representation of the rural world in a series of films by these directors, from *Terra incògnita* (2005) to *Agrilogistics* (2021), to explore the cinematographic device, the fracture, and the silence resulting from the change to the environment that is transferred to the images.

Key words

Deagrarianisation; Rural; Non-Fiction; Exposed Peoples; Simulacrum.

Author

Valentin Via Vazquez is a predoctoral student in the PhD program in Anthropology and Communication at Universitat Rovira i Virgili University. His lines of research focus on non-fiction cinema in relation to ecology and new rural imaginaries in Spain. He is the author of various articles published in scholarly journals, including *Window Diaries* (Tecmerín, 2021), as well as other publications related to contemporary cinema. Contact: valentinviavaz@gmail.com.

Article reference

Via Vázquez, V. (2024). The Emptied Image: New Approaches to Deagrarianisation in Contemporary Spanish Non-Fiction Cinema. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 211-224.

LA IMAGEN VACIADA: NUEVAS APROXIMACIONES A LA DESAGRARIZACIÓN EN LA NO-FICCIÓN ESPAÑOLA CONTEMPORÁNEA

Resumen

Recientemente, ha emergido un conjunto de obras de la no-ficción que exploran los paisajes rurales y tratan de representarlos mientras estos están desapareciendo. Ante los cambios que están sucediendo en la España contemporánea y su reconfiguración ante una industria alimentaria oligopolista, existe una necesidad de explorar la relación actual entre el ser humano y el trabajo en el campo. Desde la exposición de los pueblos hasta su desaparición, un forzoso vaciado que afecta tanto el espacio físico como el territorio de la imagen. De la ausencia a la simulación, se rellenan los vacíos de las imágenes con nuevas formas que suplantan las conocidas hasta el momento. El presente artículo propone reflexionar sobre el cambio en la representación del mundo rural en la España contemporánea siguiendo las obras de dos documentalistas contemporáneos como son Lluís Escartín y Gerard Ortín Castellví. Se pondrá el foco de atención en la representación del mundo rural desde *Terra incògnita* (2005) a *Agrologistics* (2021) para poner en el foco el dispositivo cinematográfico y la fractura, el silencio, que surge del cambio del entorno que se traslada a las imágenes.

Palabras clave

Desagrarización; Rural; No-Ficción; Pueblos Expuestos; Simulacro.

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Referencia de este artículo

Via Vázquez, V. (2024). La imagen vaciada: nuevas aproximaciones a la desagrarización en la no-ficción española contemporánea. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *37*, 211-224.

recibido/received: 31.10.2022 | *aceptado/accepted:* 12.06.2023

Edita / Published by

associació cinefòrum L'ATALANTE — EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

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