

# SPANISH AND HISPANIC AMERICAN EXILE FILMS

#### **MASTHEAD**

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# SPANISH AND HISPANIC AMERICAN EXILE FILMS\*

MATEI CHIHAIA ANDREA LUQUIN CALVO CARMEN GUIRALT

The wars and conflicts of the 20th century in the Spanish-speaking world, such as the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship that followed it, or the civilian and military coups that installed authoritarian governments in various Latin American countries, forced numerous filmmakers, screenwriters and others working in the film industry into exile to escape political repression and persecution. In the film industries of the countries that welcomed them, many of these individuals found both an opportunity to continue their artistic work and a way of discovering and experimenting with forms of expression that could capture and convey the exile experience. Moreover, many were able not only to develop an aesthetic expression of that experience, but also to present a political position that vindicated the place of the exile in collective history, while at the same time elucidating and denouncing the political events that had forced them to leave their home.

This issue of *L'Atalante*, "Hispanic and Spanish American Exile Films", presents research on the

filmic forms adopted by these artists. "Exile films" here refers not only to films with a thematic focus on exile and the events that caused it, but also to films addressing this issue that were made specifically by exiles. In this sense, it is possible to distinguish a kind of "auteur cinema" that offers an articulation of the exile condition, beyond the scope of a globalised film industry that since its inception has been relatively unreceptive to such experiences. This category is evident in the selection of works explored in most of the articles contained in this monograph. At the same time, exile films present the stories, signs and signifiers proposed by Spanish and Hispanic American writers for film creations, either directly addressing exile and/or the political event that caused it, or locating the exile experience in the background of the narrative. The experiences of Spanish Republican exiles, for example, can be found in screenplays by María Teresa León Goyri and Rafael Alberti, Luis Alcoriza, and Jorge Semprún. Also worth highlighting are the reflections of exiled authors

such as Max Aub, Silvia Mistral, José de la Colina and Emilio García Riera, who use theory or criticism in their analysis of different films or cinematic movements as a visible context in which to interpret exile and/or take a political position. The Spanish exiles of 1939 would be followed years later by various exiles from different Hispanic American countries developing parallel film histories, with directors such as Raymundo Gleyzer, Gerardo Vallejo, Patricio Guzmán, Angelina Vázquez, Jeanine Meerapfel and Lita Stantic.

EXILED ARTISTS HAVE USED THE
CINEMATIC LANGUAGE OF BOTH
FICTION AND DOCUMENTARY FORMS TO
CONSTRUCT AESTHETIC FORMS THAT
CAN CONVEY THE EXILE EXPERIENCE OR
INTERPRET THE POLITICAL, HISTORICAL
AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THAT
EXPERIENCE

Exiled artists have used the cinematic language of both fiction and documentary forms to construct aesthetic forms that can convey the exile experience or interpret the political, historical and social circumstances of that experience. Examples include the films On the Empty Balcony (En el balcón vacío, Jomí García Ascot, 1962), Dialogues of Exiles (Diálogos de exiliados, Raúl Ruiz, 1975), It's Raining on Santiago (Il pleut sur Santiago, Helvio Soto, 1975), Esta voz entre muchas [This Voice Among Many] (Humberto Ríos, 1979), Gracias a la vida (o la pequeña historia de una mujer maltratada) [Thanks to Life, or the Little Story of a Mistreated Woman] (Angelina Vásquez, 1980), Presencia lejana [Distant Presence] (Angelina Vásquez, 1982) and The Sidewalks of Saturn (Las veredas de saturno, Hugo Santiago, 1986).

While the situation of exile lends itself to a project of historical memory, it also offers an opportunity to explore the contemporary situation of a condition that places its victims between two communities, on journeys between different languages, spaces or eras. For this reason, this corpus also includes films that aim to establish a dialogue with the society of the country that the exiles had to leave behind or with their host countries, as a way of proposing the conditions for their integration, their possible return or the circumstances that kept them in exile, such as The Young and the Damned (Los olividados, Luis Buñuel, 1950), Eran unos que venían de Chile [They Were the Ones Who Came from Chilel (Claudio Sapiaín, 1986), A Place in the World (Un lugar en el mundo, Adolfo Aristarain, 1992), Roma (Adolfo Aristarain, 2004) and Partidos, voces de exilio [Parties, Voices of Exile] (Silvia Di Florio, 2022).

Moreover, no study of exile films would be complete without a consideration of the extension and/or reappropriation of their filmic forms by the so-called "second- and third-generation exiles", as well as the relationship of these exiles with subsequent generations of filmmakers in the countries from which they came and, amid the complexity of all exile experiences as reflected in this issue, the representation of exiles in the films of the host country. The first of these dimensions is explored in the "Dialogue" section, which contains an interview with Laura Alcoba, author of the novel The Rabbit House (2008), the product of her childhood memories of Argentina's civic-military dictatorship, and Valeria Selinger, who made a film adaptation of the novel under the Spanish title La casa de los conejos (2020).

The approach adopted for this monograph draws from the ideas of the Spanish exiled philosopher María Zambrano, who uses the term *lugares de pensamiento* ("places of thought") (1991; 2007) to describe those symbolic spaces that enable individuals to encounter the world and reflect on their relationship with it. For Zambrano, thought is found not only in philosophy but in the territory covered by all forms of art, as it is through and in the various artistic manifestations that we can

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find personal meaning in the world. This means that in the development of what Zambrano calls "poetic reason" (1993), philosophy itself needs to rediscover poetry-from which it had once been separated—in order to give a full account of reality. The reflection proposed here on Spanish and Hispanic American exile films is founded from the outset on the recognition of cinema as a "place of thought". In this way, following theorists such as Gilles Deleuze (1984; 1987), cinema is understood to be an instrument of thought, capable of constructing and conveying concepts through the construction of the spaces and times of the moving image. María Zambrano herself hints at this when she describes Italian neorealist cinema and Charlie Chaplin's acting as practices that are not only artistic but also philosophical (Luquin Calvo, 2022; Chihaia, 2023).

Moreover, the adjectives "Spanish" and "Hispanic American" are used here based on an understanding of a form of "thought in Spanish" that unites all those who share this language, and with it a way of thinking that has been expressed more powerfully in essays, art or literature than in conventional philosophical discourses or systems. Indeed, the unique nature and possibilities

of philosophy in the Spanish language constituted a reason for Spanish Republican exiles to reflect on its limitations and potentialities, contributing to the formation of an "Ibero-American" community of thinkers (Sánchez Cuervo: 2019).1 The aim of this monograph is therefore to identify a community which, in addition to sharing the same language, adopts a particular way of thinking in cultural terms about exile, particularly in its artistic expression. In his 1978 essay on exile and literature in Latin America. Julio Cortázar describes exile as a "universal theme" that "is a constant today in Latin American reality and literature, starting with the countries of the so-called Southern Cone and continuing with Brazil and more than a few Central American nations" (1994: 163). Exile can thus be defined as a fact or condition present throughout Latin America, while also being a constant in the history of Spain since its very formation as a nation (Abellán, 2001). At the same time, its presence has been reflected in countless literary and artistic meditations on the phenomenon. Over the past century, cinema has added specific forms of its own for depicting a cultural reality that has been contemporaneous with it, while more traditional ways of expressing the exile experience have continued, with Remedios Varo's paintings, the poems of Ida Vitale and the stories of Julio Cortázar standing alongside the cinematic narratives mentioned above.

In this context, as Cortázar himself suggested, it is undeniable that literature in Spanish has demonstrated itself to be a "place of thought" for exiles on both sides of the Atlantic. Numerous literary works can be identified that document the complexity of different cases of exile—both in Spain and Latin America—and there is a profusion of studies exploring the aesthetic approaches adopted by the so-called "exile literature" produced by exiles themselves or by "second- and third-generation exiles", whose work is sometimes analysed based on the notion of "postmemory" (Sarlo, 2005; Hirsch, 2021). This concept

is often found in film theory dealing with exile cinema (Barril 2013; Quílez Esteve, 2015). However, despite its significant role as a form of artistic expression throughout the 20th century and in the specific moments when the aforementioned exile phenomena occurred, cinema has not received the same level of scholarly attention as a "place of thought" that literature has. Thus, for example, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the presence of avant-garde movements can be identified in the work of filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel, developing alongside theories about the role of the documentary film and its usefulness as a propaganda tool. The key role played by cinema in the Spanish Civil War is documented in Catálogo general del cine de la Guerra Civil (Del Amo, 1996) and studies such as those by Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (2006), which not only provide extensive lists of films made during the conflict but also identify the political messaging in the films of those years. But perhaps the significance of this role would be more clearly demonstrated with an illustration. The writer Max Aub was working with André Malraux on the film Days of Hope (Espoir, sierra de Teruel, André Malraux, 1945), based on Maraux's novel L'Espoir (1937), at the time the Spanish Republic finally collapsed. Aub, Malraux and the whole film crew crossed the French border in January 1939, and thus managed to save the film, which was ultimately completed in France. Like many other Spaniards, Aub would go into exile in the Americas, where numerous Spanish filmmakers enriched the film industries of the countries that received them. Another example can be found in the period of the 1960s and 1970s, which was marked by the emergence of film organisations and movements that had a strong presence throughout Latin America, especially among filmmakers in Chile and Argentina during the rise of the dictatorships that forced them into exile. It was at this time that the political potential of cinema as a force for revolution was being recognised all over the world (Amado, 2009). In this context,

filmmaking collectives such as Cine Liberación, formed in Argentina in 1966, understood filmmaking as an "instrument-weapon-work" in aid of the revolutionary struggle (Amado, 2009: 28), leading the country's military commanders to recognise "theatre, film and music" as "a terrible weapon of the subversive aggressor" (Zarco, 2016: 25).

Although the connections between literature and cinema may offer rich and meaningful opportunities for a reflection on exile, the periodisation and historical methods used to analyse exile literature are not entirely analogous to the study of exile films. This is not only because of the need to take into account the differences between literary creation and filmmaking—the latter being a collective process subject to very different patterns of production and methods of distribution to its audiences (Rodríguez, 2012)-but also because of the particular aesthetic techniques adopted in exile films, whose dynamics all bear specific similarities. For Rodríguez (2012),2 for example, the literature on Spanish Republican exiles was characterised from the beginning by a direct reflection on the war, the Republican defeat and the diaspora, until these literary reflections gave way to cinematic depictions in the 1960s. It is important to note that it is precisely in this period that "the notion of 'authorship' in cinema and the independence of filmmakers emerged in Free Cinema and the French New Wave, of which, for

ALTHOUGH THE CONNECTIONS
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example, the members of the Nuevo Cine Mexicano group always considered themselves admirers," which would facilitate "the production of more personal and innovative works" (Rodríguez, 2012: 164). The film *On the Empty Balcony*, with a screenplay by María Luisa Elío Bernal, is a good example of this (Castro de Paz, 2017; Lluch-Prats, 2012), as although it did not reach a mass audience, it paved the way for auteur cinema on exile in the Southern Cone, which has received considerable critical attention.

On the other hand, Julieta Zarco (2016) points out that the absence of filmed images of the repression of Argentina's last dictatorship—a deliberate omission as a political strategy—set the standard for films on exile in Argentina. Considering that the image is the central component of cinematic storytelling, Argentine filmmakers opted for the creation—in Sandra Raggio's words—of "non-existent frames", initially with a particular focus on testimonial accounts in an effort to create "representations of what until that time had been unrepresentable" (2016: 23).

In this sense, the documentary would also play a vital role in Chilean exile cinema. In her study of Chilean documentaries (2005), Jacqueline Mouesca asserts that between 1973 and 1983 alone. Chilean filmmakers made 178 films in exile, at least 99 of which were documentaries (Pivk. 1984a). As Mouesca points out, "the filmmakers who went into exile very quickly showed signs of trying to rebuild their careers" beginning "furtively, and then reaching rates of production so surprising that in the first ten years of exile the figures exceeded any other similar previous period in the history of Chilean cinema" (2005: 100). Zuzana M. Pivk describes how this film production was proposed from the outset as "a Chilean cinema of resistance", which only eventually evolved into a "cinema in exile" while still retaining its dimension of "cultural resistance", a point that must be borne in mind when studying these films (1984: 21). These documentaries were made with two objectives, directed toward the present and the future, drawing on the communicative potential of film but also on its ability to render a suitable, intersubjective image of historical experience. Such films thus constitute a "cinema of denunciation and rescue of a collective memory" (Pivk, 1984: 22).

Another question that needs to be considered is the "return" of Chilean literature and film from exile. For José Miguel Palacios, "exile" and "return" are two words invariably associated with that "outside" or "liminal" status characteristic of the exile condition, based on which the necessary repatriation of exile film archives is proposed (Palacios, 2022: 32). The "return of the archives" involves a range of cultural and political contexts that in the case of exile films are also related to practices of transnational location, cataloguing and exhibition (which today include digitalisation and/or inclusion in festivals and film libraries) inherent in film stock. All of this makes the conditions of this "return" of film archives from exile more multifaceted and complex than those of literary archives.

While bearing in mind the possible intersections and divergences between the theoretical and working conceptions of exile literature and exile cinema, film theory has also reflected on films and exile based on a number of conceptual frameworks that need to be taken into account in this study. One category used in research on films and exile is the concept of "migrant cinema", considering exile as a movement that can be understood essentially as a population displacement, although different from economic emigration due to its political and/or ideological motivations (Piñol Lloret, 2020). The exile can thus be described as a "political emigrant". Two issues related to this conceptualisation must not be overlooked. The first is that the notion of migrant cinema is associated with the film industries of countries with large migrant communities, most of whom are economic migrants (as evidenced by the use of terms such

as "migration film", "immigration cinema", "ban-lieue-films" or "migrant cinema" itself). The focus of this category is therefore on the way the host country names and conceptualises the displaced individual or communities residing in its territory. Thus, although the term may be helpful as a common framework for understanding questions about exiles' "foreigner" status in host societies and the social and legal issues that this status entails for displaced persons, it cannot fully capture the exile experience (Solanes, 2016). The crux of this experience lies in the involuntary nature of exile and the exiled person's inability to return due to the threat of violence that the notion of "migrant cinema" may not account for.

Another concept emerging from the research on cinema and exile is the notion developed by Hamid Naficy in An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking (2001). For this author, "accented cinema" is the product of postcolonial historical displacements and of the cultural hybridisation characteristic of postmodern spaces. The creators of this type of cinema maintain a "double consciousness", as they create their works based on their own experience—as displaced subjects while at the same time taking other cinematic traditions as references, such as the exilic and diasporic traditions<sup>3</sup> that preceded them (Naficy, 2001). In "accented cinema", two types of filmmakers or film styles converge: "diasporic filmmakers/ films" and "exiled filmmakers/films". These categories can tell us about filmmakers who share the commonality of living outside their homelands, leading them to work performatively in the interstices of the social and cinematic practices of these spaces (Naficy, 2001). However, there are also important differences between the two categories. While "exiled filmmakers/films" are marked by the political situation that gave rise to the exile's displacement, "diasporic films" would not necessarily have this characteristic, since the displacement may have arisen for economic, colonial or imperial reasons. In this way, the exile

film implies a relationship of loss, estrangement and nostalgia in relation to the exile filmmakers' homeland, leading to the prioritising of a more personal vision of their experience in their work: "As partial, fragmented and multiple subjects, these filmmakers are capable of producing ambiguity and doubt about the taken-for-granted values of their home and host societies. They can also transcend and transform themselves to produce hybridized, syncretic, performed or virtual identities" (Naficy 2001: 13). On the other hand, the work of diasporic filmmakers tends to have a more "vertical", "horizontal" and "multisited" character, involving not only the country of origin but also other compatriot diasporic communities located elsewhere. In this way, "diasporic cinema" focuses more on expressing the collective experience of displacement; therefore, films in this category are "expressed less in the narratives of retrospection, loss and absence or in strictly partisanal political terms" (Naficy, 2001: 14-15).

Both the concept of "accented cinema" and its subcategories of "exile cinema" and "diasporic cinema" offer useful points for reflection on the relationship between cinema and exile in terms of marginalisation and difference (Naficy, 2001) in the "outside" space that characterises every migration experience. However, it is important to acknowledge that these theoretical conceptions are founded on a postcolonial perspective (Naficy's study focuses on filmmakers from the Middle East and North Africa) and on the notion of the subaltern proposed by Gayatri C. Spivak. Indeed, Naficy is quick to point out how "accented cinema" gives subjects the opportunity to recover their right to speak, opening up the possibility of representing displaced communities (Naficy, 2001).4 This postcolonial framework intersects in some ways (but diverges in others) with the decolonial perspective developed in Latin American countries, which has its echo in Latin American cinema (Satarain and Wehr, 2020). It is a perspective involving a dialogue with colonial thought directly

intertwined with the construction of European modernity, in a historical process that would not culminate with the independence of Latin American nations. There are also important differences in the directions of the exile journey in these countries, which do not necessarily follow the "colony-metropolis" trajectory that is so central to postcolonial film studies. For example, in 1939 most Spanish exiles went to Latin America, while Latin American exiles sought refuge not only in Spain but also in other European countries, in the United States, or in many cases even in other Latin American countries-most notably Mexico, a country that granted asylum to numerous exiles from many different countries over the course of the 20th century.

Another concept of film theory often applied to the study of cinema and exile is the notion of "transnational cinema". This idea, associated with the collective identity of the nation established by its creators (Higbee and Lim, 2010; Shaw and De La Garza, 2010), echoes both the practices of national film industries and the textual aspects of the films they produce. In this respect, in relation to the distribution and production flows that feed the global film industry, it is worth noting the strong tradition of transnational cooperation among the different national film industries dealt with in this issue, which share a common market due to their shared language. Thus, despite the usefulness of the term, it is important to point out that the adjective "transnational" does not necessarily cover the complexity of the fact of exile as "being outside", given the expansion or subversion of the very idea of the nation implicit in this concept. Consequently, the paradox represented by the historiography of "exile films" arising from their development "outside" the spatiotemporal context of the nation-state with which they are identified, together with the significance of their recovery and identification as a source of memory and/or testimony, is one of the focal points of this issue's "(Dis)Agreements" section. The reflections

of Mónica Villaroel, Guillermo Logar, Melissa Mutchinick, Luis Iborra and Olga Sánchez Tapia reveal the complexities of this dimension, as well as the legacy of these films and their influence on contemporary productions dealing with exile.

Thus, although exile films may share various features with "accented", "migrant" or "transnational" cinema, in reality they defy any classification framed according to the hegemonic modes of understanding the relations constructed around the concept of "the national". In this sense, for José Miguel Palacios, the frameworks for understanding the "exile film" expand its boundaries even beyond the transnational, dislocating it from any given territory (2015), as a film made outside the space of the nation-state, that is, as "cinema in exile". In other words, these are films made both in exile and about exile (Palacios, 2022). Thus, for example, films produced secretly inside the country itself or made by the filmmakers upon their return to the nation could be included in the "exile" film" category (2022). By pushing the boundaries of the "national", these films are effectively "out of place, irrespective of the location of the subjects of exile and the cultural artefacts" (Palacios, 2022: 32). In this sense, exile films might be classified as a form of "postnational cinema" that takes into account the most recent discursive and institutional changes in film production (Satarain and Wehr, 2020), although because of their transhistorical

ALTHOUGH EXILE FILMS MAY SHARE VARIOUS FEATURES WITH "ACCENTED", "MIGRANT" OR "TRANSNATIONAL" CINEMA, IN REALITY THEY DEFY ANY CLASSIFICATION FRAMED ACCORDING TO THE HEGEMONIC MODES OF UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONS CONSTRUCTED AROUND THE CONCEPT OF "THE NATIONAL"

dimension and their origins in the 20th century, they also represent an experience that is completely out of place in a postnational era characterised by globalisation.

Without overlooking the fact that every exile is the product of expulsion from the nation-state for political reasons, it can be argued that "exile films", existing in this "outside" space, articulate geographical, generational, cultural and political encounters that transcend national subjectivities and communities, constituting a problem for a nationally constructed film historiography as they go beyond its traditional categories. This exploration of Spanish and Hispanic American exile films thus aims to reflect on the complexity of exile films, focusing on the aesthetic and expressive potential of the cinematic image as a philosophical and aesthetic "place of thought", a site of political, historical and democratic memory that acquires the force of its enunciation precisely through its construction as a space "outside the frame" capable of questioning the hegemonic modes of representation.

THIS EXPLORATION OF SPANISH AND HISPANIC AMERICAN EXILE FILMS AIMS TO REFLECT ON THE COMPLEXITY OF EXILE FILMS, FOCUSING ON THE AESTHETIC AND EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE CINEMATIC IMAGE AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND AESTHETIC "PLACE OF THOUGHT", A SITE OF POLITICAL, HISTORICAL AND DEMOCRATIC MEMORY THAT ACQUIRES THE FORCE OF ITS ENUNCIATION PRECISELY THROUGH ITS CONSTRUCTION AS A SPACE "OUTSIDE THE FRAME" CAPABLE OF QUESTIONING THE HEGEMONIC MODES OF REPRESENTATION

The articles in this Notebook section, focusing on Spanish, Chilean and Argentine exiles, examine this place of thought in specific contexts, exploring many of the aspects outlined very briefly in this introduction.

The first two articles, "The Politics of Mysticism and the Mexican Baroque in the Spanish Republican Exile Film: El cantar de los cantares [Song of Songs] (Manuel Altolaguirre, 1959)" and "Intrahistory and Memory of the Spanish Internal Exile in The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena, Víctor Erice, 1973): A Vision from the Perspective of María Zambrano", revisit the dual dialogue of the Spanish Republican exile experience, first with the cultural tradition of Mexico, the host country, and then with internal exile within Spain. Both the cinematic reading of Manuel Altolaguirre's El cantar de los cantares, analysed by Mari Paz Balibrea, and María Zambrano's analysis of The Spirit of the Beehive presented by Jorge Valle Álvarez, attempt to establish the political dimension of intertextuality and to reconstruct the experience of a divided historical memory.

The decades of the 1970s and 1980s were marked by an intense engagement with auteur cinema, whose dimensions are explored in the following three articles, all of which deal with films by exiles from the Southern Cone. "Humbly, the Group Responded': Organic Intellectualism, Exile and Biopolitical Production in the Cine de la Base Film Collective" by Agustín Rugiero Bader and Lázaro Cruz García takes the case of Raymundo Gleyzer and the Cine de la Base group to track the history of a form of militant cinema that challenged traditional authorial approaches by prioritising horizontal collective processes. On the other hand, Pablo Calvo de Castro and María Marcos Ramos's article "Reflexiones de un salvaje (Gerardo Vallejo, 1978), an Exercise in Memory from an Exile Perspective" examines a self-referential cinematic approach that chooses a lieu de mémoire the director's grandfather's hometown in Spain before he emigrated to Argentina-to talk about

the filmmaker's own exile through the remote experience of another subject, allowing for comparisons and contrasts. The last two decades of the 20th century saw the emergence of new filmic forms not only in terms of their approach to exile but also through their adoption of feminist perspectives. Violeta Sabater's article, "Female Subjectivities from a Distance: A Comparative Study of Three Films of the 1980s and 1990s by Latin American Women Filmmakers", analyses three Latin American films directed by women, exploring exile, migration and the traumas provoked by dictatorships from an autobiographical perspective. Sabater's study highlights the displacement of the identities of the directors and their characters, who articulate what has been silenced. The films of Angelina Vázquez, Jeanine Meerapfel and Lita Stantic reveal feminine subjectivities intertwined with their personal experiences and historical contexts.

In recent decades, these concerns about authorship have been taken up again from a postmemory perspective that considers the interaction of film and archives. In this respect, Ana González Casero's "Archival Migrations and 'Poetic Nomadism' in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)" extrapolates subjective experience and explores the notion of a community of memory through the analysis of a first-person documentary that integrates multiple voices. And finally, Robert Arnau Roselló's study, "Memory(ies) Drawn: The Representation of Exile in the Animated Documentary: Josep (Aurel, 2020)", establishes a dialogue between the authorship of the illustrator (Josep Bartolí) and the filmmaker (Aurélien Froment, alias Aurel) that sheds light on the memory and postmemory of exile. Like the other films analysed, Josep highlights the intertextual construction of the document and the dialectic between author and community. All of the articles featured here offer a reflection on the "how" of filmic storytelling, which acts as a watermark for this place of thought. The two categories of "cinema from exile" and "cinema about exile" become one in this place, which is both the starting point and the final objective of a reflection that is always political and always metafilmic.

By way of conclusion, it is worth highlighting some new questions raised in the articles and materials contained in this Notebook that may be worthy of future research on exile films:

- 1. The archival policies discussed in some of the contributions, which are especially problematic in the case of films created in a few regional contexts, should be recognised as both a theoretical and a practical concern. How should we conceptualise the necessary recovery of memory in these exile films? And how can we bring this memory into the present through public or institutional policies?
- 2. The relationship between cinema and gender, which is discussed in several contributions to this issue, is always an important question in reflections on exiled subjects. A theory of intersectionality can support a consideration of the diversity of exiles, together with the different filmic constructions of subjectivities and communities. How does this intersectional approach broaden the perspective, or provide new perspectives, on the study of exile films and exile itself? How can this intersectional and gender perspective be integrated fully into our research?
- 3. As a necessary form of recognition, research is needed into the legacy or inheritance of exile films beyond exile itself. Can we find qualities of these types of films in the work of contemporary filmmakers? How do they deal with contemporary exile phenomena? One way to approach this question is from the perspective of the memory/postmemory dialectic.
- 4. The transnational/postnational perspective and the comparison of exiles from different countries calls for a film theory that can explain the similarities and divergences in a Hispanic American cultural space in terms of

the concept of "situated cinema" or "accented cinema", as a chronotope that goes beyond the postcolonial or the diasporic, understood from decolonial and critical perspectives.

All these lines of research reflect the complexity entailed in studying exile films. It is hoped that this monographic notebook may offer a contribution to this broad and still largely unexplored field of knowledge.  $\blacksquare$ 

#### **NOTES**

- \* This monograph has been coordinated with the support of Bergische Universität Wuppertal's Open Access Publication Fund, with funds from the German Research Foundation (DFG).
- The framework proposed here is not intended to gloss over the fact that this common linguistic-cultural space is also a site of diverse and conflicting experiences given that it is shared, as Reyes Mate (2021) explains, by both conquerors and conquered. In this regard, it is essential to acknowledge the imposition of the Spanish language both within Spain itself and beyond it, effectively pushing the alternative systems of meaning it has silenced out of the frame. This conception of Spanish thought must also take into account its own limits, as well as the violence, injustices and interpellations it has enacted, as described in the decolonial theory of thinkers such as María Lugones, Ochy Curiel, Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso and Aníbal Quijano.
- 2 Rodríguez posits a number of historiographical problems that arise in discussions of "a culture of exile" (developing the theme of exile both by exiles themselves and by others) and "culture in exile" (produced exclusively in exile) in a collective art like cinema, which moreover is shaped by an industry that generally leaves little room for "authorial and individual" expression. The possibilities for the development of this kind of expression are much greater in literature. For the full recognition of Spanish film industry professionals who were forced into exile in 1939, it is important to note that many were unable to address

the issue of exile in their films for various reasons, many of which were related to the conditions of the national film industries where they were working. Rodríguez points out the need for a historiography of Spanish exile cinema that is more conducive to the construction of a history of the contributions made by exiles to the film industries of their host countries in each of the various fields related to filmmaking. The full historiographical coherence of this study depends not only on considering the intersectional factors that conditioned artistic creation in exile, but also on researching a wide range of areas: the practice of the filmmaking profession by Spanish Republican exiles, the "peninsular condition" conveyed by directors and producers in their collaborative projects, and the exile experience perceived or projected in certain films or their storylines (Rodríguez, 2012). The research here focuses on this last dimension.

- 3 Diaspora here refers to a situation of perpetual displacement.
- 4 The incorporation into "accented cinema" of "ethnic cinema" (Naficy, 2001: 15)—a category not exclusive of exile or diasporic cinema—places emphasis on portraying the lives of the communities or ethnic groups in the country where they reside. This type of cinema would thus not only be a means of representing a community but also an instrument of resistance with the ability to create new narratives.
- 5 In this way, based on the Chilean case, Palacios Argues that "there is an interweaving of the 'exile film' with the historical development of the 'Chilean exile' experience, and it stresses the instability inherent in the exile condition, which is irreducible to a single position" (2022: 32).

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### SPANISH AND HISPANIC AMERICAN EXILE FILMS

#### Abstract

This article establishes the theoretical and conceptual framework that guides the study of the filmic forms of Spanish and Hispanic American exile films, referring to films with a thematic focus on the experience of exile and the events that gave rise to it, made by exiled filmmakers themselves. This complex field of study extends to the work of exiled screenwriters who have also explored this subject and to the reappropriation of their work by "second- and third-generation exiles" and by filmmakers in the host nations or in the countries the exiles were forced to leave behind. Based on the idea of cinema as a "place of thought" and of a shared cultural framework, the article discusses methodological differences between the study of exile in film and in literature, as well as the categories of film theory most commonly used to analyse these types of films, highlighting the limitations of these frameworks in addressing the phenomenon of exile within the Spanish and Hispanic American context. This reflection serves as an introduction to the articles and sections comprising the Notebook, while also positing some future lines of research that emerge from this work.

#### Key words

Exile cinema; Exile; Transnational; Postnational; Archives; Memory.

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## CINEMATOGRAFÍAS DEL EXILIO HISPÁNICO E HISPANOAMERICANO

#### Resumen

Este artículo establece el marco teórico y conceptual que guía el estudio sobre las formas fílmicas de las «cinematografías del exilio hispánico e hispanoamericano», entendidas como el conjunto de películas que, por su temática, se centran en el hecho del destierro y los sucesos que lo provocaron v. a su vez. fueron llevadas a cabo por las propias personas exiliadas. En la complejidad de su comprensión, la materia se extiende al trabajo de guionistas exiliadas y exiliados que también trataron esta temática y a la reapropiación que realizan de estas obras y personas las «segundas y terceras generaciones del exilio» y las y los cineastas de las naciones de acogida o de los países que tuvieron que abandonar. Partiendo de la idea del cine como «lugar de pensamiento» y de un marco cultural común, se discuten las diferencias metodológicas del estudio del cine y la literatura del exilio y las categorías de la teoría cinematográfica con las que se suele abordar el estudio de estas cinematografías. Se muestran, así, las limitaciones de estos marcos respecto al propio fenómeno del exilio y dentro de un ámbito hispánico e hispanoamericano. Esta reflexión sirve como presentación de los artículos y secciones que componen el cuaderno, así como de algunas líneas de investigación que se desprenden de este trabajo.

#### Palabras clave

Cinematografías del exilio; Exilio; Transnacional; Posnacional; Archivo: Memoria.

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#### **NOTEBOOK**

# SPANISH AND HISPANIC AMERICAN EXILE FILMS

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# THE POLITICS OF MYSTICISM AND THE MEXICAN BAROQUE IN THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN EXILE FILM: CANTAR DE LOS CANTARES [SONG OF SONGS] (MANUEL ALTOLAGUIRRE, 1959)

MARI PAZ BALIBREA

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Although practically unknown, Cantar de los cantares<sup>1</sup> [Song of the Songs], the last feature film directed by Manuel Altolaguirre, is the most representative of his aesthetic and religious interests. Cantar takes a key text of Jewish mysticism adapted by Fray Luis de León and recreates and reinterprets it in a Mexican setting. At a time when he had already begun making literary contributions to Spanish cultural initiatives, especially to Camilo José Cela's magazine Papeles de Son Armadans, Altolaguirre thought that Cantar would provide him with the opportunity, if not to return to Spain, at least to engage with Spanish institutions. The film was screened out of competition at the San Sebastián International Film Festival in July 1959, which Altolaguirre attended accompanied by his second wife, María Luisa Gómez Mena. After their stay in San Sebastián, on their way by car to the poet's native Málaga and carrying the

film with them, a road accident in the province of Burgos ended the lives of both. Altolaguirre was fifty-four years old.

When watching Cantar and interpreting its meanings and its director's intentions, it must be taken into account that for Altolaguirre, the film shown in San Sebastián was not a finished project. The first version of it was written and produced in 1958. In 1959, together with Gilberto Martínez Solares, the poet reworked and expanded the script (Valender, 1989a). In 1958, he had told his nephew Julio of his plans to film it in Salamanca, Valladolid and Ávila (Vílchez Ruiz, 2022). It was with the intention of obtaining financing for this new version that he took advantage of a trip to Spain to show Cantar at the San Sebastián Festival (Valender, 1989b). In his letter to Martínez Solares written from San Sebastián, he speaks of "our Cantar" and how "I have been very sorry [...] that we have not been able to finish the film together" (Altolaguirre, 1989b: 294).2 In short, what

Altolaguirre presented in San Sebastián was a work in progress, as his intention was to expand the project by adding Fray Luis's adaptation of *El libro de Job* [The Book of Job] and *De los nombres de Cristo* [The Names of Christ] with the aim of offering a much more structured and theologically erudite reading of the Spanish friar's mysticism.

To complicate matters further, in addition to the fact that there were two scripts, the one Altolaguirre considered the first script, a copy of which has been preserved (Valender 1989a), does not match the content of the film,3 which omits the introductory frame sequence explaining Fray Luis's unjust imprisonment for translating the Song of Songs (his translation was censored by the Inquisition and not published until 1798). Instead of a defensive or despondent Fray Luis, the film presents, in the words of Sánchez Vidal, a Fray Luis "in a kind of trance or serene epiphany, writing calmly in a luminous cell" (2003: 229). Most of the dialogue attributed to the Husband/God is also left out, along with the many amorous flirtations exchanged with the Wife/Church that appear in the script. In the film, the Wife, played by the Black Cuban actress Isolina Herrera, addresses him directly, but in the cinematic structure of shot/reverse shot, the Husband's response is represented primarily through the soundtrack with music rather than a human voice.4 The Husband is visually represented not by an actor but by elements of nature, especially flowers and trees. The dominant male voice belongs to Fray Luis, played by the Mexican mestizo actor Julio Bracho, who guides us as spectators in our interpretation of Cantar. In the scenes where he appears as a character, his voice is heard as a voice-over rather than coming from the actor's mouth.

Sánchez Vidal, who has also drawn attention to these discrepancies between the film and the first script, refers to *Cantar* as "cumulative and dispersed fragments, only structured by the partitioning of the successive *Cantos*" (2003: 229). On the contrary, what I argue in this article is that

Cantar, despite being unfinished, is a very coherent project, both as a formal proposal on the capacities of cinematic language applied to a classic text of mysticism and in terms of its subject matter. It is important to note that while the full title shown in the preserved version of the film is Cantar de los Cantares de Fray de León, the first script includes the subtitle En la poesía mística y en el arte religioso mexicano ["In Mystical Poetry and in Mexican Religious Art"]. It is with this subtitle in mind that the plot of Cantar can be summarised as a mystical representation—visually signified in the aforementioned identification of the Husband/God with elements of nature, and also with recurring vertical movements of the camera-of the Wife's quest for her Husband, which leads her through different Mexican landscapes and iconic elements of pre-Columbian and (especially) New Spanish Baroque architecture and sculpture (which is why, as will be discussed below, it has been compared to ¿Que viva México! [Sergei M. Eisenstein and Grigori Aleksandrov, 1932]). The Wife's quest culminates in her crowning, i.e., her acceptance of perpetual vows as a nun, which, according to Catholic liturgy, turns her into a wife of God. Therefore, despite the contemplative and anti-narrative qualities that make Cantar almost an avant-garde object, there is a discernible attempt at narrative continuity that offers a coherent vision of the role of Catholicism and, by extension, of the Spanish conquest in Mexico. Indeed, through its use of mysticism and the New

THE PLOT IS A MYSTICAL REPRESENTATION
OF THE BRIDE/CHURCH'S QUEST FOR
HER HUSBAND/GOD, WHICH LEADS
HER THROUGH DIFFERENT MEXICAN
LANDSCAPES AND ICONIC ELEMENTS OF
PRE-COLUMBIAN AND (ESPECIALLY) NEW
SPANISH BAROQUE ARCHITECTURE AND
SCULPTURE

Spanish Baroque, *Cantar* articulates a discourse celebrating *Hispanidad* that serves to explain why it was viewed favourably by the Franco regime and accepted for screening out of competition at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 1959.

#### ALTOLAGUIRRE AND THE CINEMATIC ART

Altolaguirre developed his entire career in the film industry while in exile. His work in this field includes "eleven films as a producer, twenty-five scripts—nine of which were made into films while sixteen were not-and five films as director" (Sánchez Vidal, 2003: 221).5 His work in filmmaking reflects the opportunities, challenges and limitations that life in exile meant for Spanish Republican intellectuals. Opportunities, because having to rebuild his life in exile allowed Altolaguirre to delve into a medium that we know he had always admired and been interested in.6 Challenges, because of the technical and aesthetic difficulties of what for Altolaguirre was ultimately a new medium of artistic expression. And limitations, because of the reality of working in an art form that was also an industry (one that in Mexico was constrained by monopolistic commercial interests) requiring teamwork and large budgets. The statements we have of his about cinema convey his fascination with the potential of this new artistic medium. Altolaguirre was sensitive to the view of cinema first recognised by the Surrealists as a new art form capable of drawing spectators into a state of trance whereby their individual rational consciousness would yield to embrace a shared experience of a collective self. As he describes it in his article "Elogio del cine" [In Praise of Cinema] published in 1946:

There is no art form that can so seize us, no poetry like that of film that can so completely transport us. [...] In a cinema, no matter how large the audience is, a single consciousness is formed amongst all attending. In no other spectacle does the crowd unite to form a single body. No other emotion is so

unanimously felt. Even the most rebellious, even those of us who want to take an independent, critical position find ourselves succumbing to its captivating influence. [...]. If you want to stop being who you are, if you want to borrow a soul, take refuge in a cinema. It will give you memory, intelligence and will, if only for a while. (As cited in Valender, 1992: 374-375)

Altolaguirre was aware that this seductive power nullifies the will, and he was critical of the way cinema makes the spectator vulnerable to manipulation. In "Recuerdos de un diálogo" [Memories of a Dialogue] (1946), he expresses his frustration: "You have to go to the cinema to swallow the censorship, to repress the applause. [...] We like cinema very much, but shadows are shadows, and cinema is at most a kind of writing, a primitive writing" (as cited in Valender, 1992: 376). Although when qualifying it as "primitive" Altolaguirre seems here to refer to all cinema, in "Las malas artes del cine" [The Deceptive Arts of Cinema] (1948) his criticism is aimed more precisely at cinema as commercial mass culture, leading him into the contradiction of condemning a form that he himself had contributed to with several of his mainstream films: "The public is dazzled and succumbs completely to a form of propaganda. It is curious to observe the negative impact on audiences of old-fashioned films, regardless of their quality, when they receive them without the aura of advertising" (as cited in Valender, 1992: 381).

While he never gave up his work in the film industry, or for that matter in commercial cinema, Altolaguirre articulated an ambitious cinematic poetics closely related to his own main creative practice, poetry. According to this poetics, cinema is understood as a different way of acquiring knowledge, capable of expanding and multiplying the word's capacity to reveal the world. Cinema is the "representation of the inexpressible [...] and the ineffable, which the poet, sculptor, illustrator or musician could not express in words, notes or lines" (as cited in Valender, 1992: 374). It was with

Cantar that Altolaguirre sought to express this capacity, which is why he called it a *cinepoema*, or cinematic poem. As he eloquently expresses in a letter to his sister María Emilia:

[I made *Cantar*] because of the importance that words have for a poet. Words open up a whole world of representations. [...] I, humbly, have tried to give each word of Fray Luis an external projection and an independent plastic and spiritual beauty. I have not tried to help the word with the image. What I have tried is to make the image prolong the word and, if possible, replace it. In essence, I believe, what I have tried is to illuminate the words. (As cited in Valender, 1989a: 344)

Also key to understanding his cinematic poetics is his assertion that the true medium of cinema is time:

The deeper you delve into that temporal space, into that tempestuous human inner world, the better, the more felicitous your results will be. [...] To create memories, to build stories, is the mission of cinema. [...] Memories are maintained with that pulsating substance of time [and] cinema is mixed with it. Cinema is either inner life or it is nothing. (As cited in Valender, 1992: 374)

Altolaguirre alludes here to a concept that Gilles Deleuze, in the second of his volumes on the theory and philosophy of the cinematographic image, would later call l'image-temps. The time-image defines European neorealism's new way of making films that prioritises the visual elements and soundtrack as the medium of communication, freed of the demands of advancing a narrative plot (Deleuze, 1985). This means that Cantar is very much in tune with the sensibility of this new European cinema that had been emerging in the 1950s. Indeed, it is a film in which hardly anything happens, encouraging contemplation and spiritual introspection rather than the entertainment derived from following a story. At the beginning of the film the Wife's voice-over tells us: "This film, Song of Songs, has no other plot than the pilgrimage of a Christian soul in search of God" (00:02:43-00:02:51). This explains José Francisco Aranda's review of the film for Ínsula, in which he insisted on its avant-garde character. calling Cantar "one of the most personal, daring and exquisite works that Hispanic cinema has ever produced" (1959: 11), and describing its images as "intoxicating" (1959: 11). Although he criticises the editing (which Altolaguirre himself wanted to rework), Aranda compares the film favourably to ¡Que viva México! As a critic already very familiar with European neorealist cinema and the incipient French New Wave, Aranda was well placed to appreciate Cantar's insights into the power of the time-image through the recreation of cinema as a visual explosion. This understanding of a new way of making films is also evident in De la Vega Alfaro's recognition of Cantar as "a precursor in Mexico to the neo-avant-garde tendencies that would emerge in the following decade" (2005: 71).

#### CANTAR IS VERY MUCH IN TUNE WITH THE SENSIBILITY OF THIS NEW EUROPEAN CINEMA THAT HAD BEEN EMERGING IN THE 1950S

However, Altolaguirre had taken his own path to reach this conceptualisation of cinema: the path of poetry, and particularly the use of allegory as a vehicle for mysticism. These three pillars of cinema, poetry and mysticism underpin the construction of Cantar. It is not surprising that Altolaguirre chose the theme of mysticism for his most ambitious film. As noted above, he understood cinema at its best to be the "representation of the inexpressible [...] and the ineffable", and therefore representing the mystical experience was within the scope of its capabilities. Altolaguirre's interest in this philosophical, religious and aesthetic perspective is central to his poetry, as expressed in its exploration of the correspondences between the material and spiritual worlds and in its use of

symbols (Vílchez Ruiz, 2022). Since 1930, he had been publishing anthologies of classical Spanish poetry that included Spanish mystics, and in 1927 and 1928 he had actively participated in homages to Fray Luis, alongside other leading poets such as Federico García Lorca, Vicente Aleixandre, Rafael Alberti, Jorge Guillén, Luis Cernuda, Juan Larrea and Gerardo Diego. Once in exile, in 1942, he took part in a similar homage, this time honouring another great Spanish mystic poet, Saint John of the Cross (Vílchez Ruiz, 2022).

## POLITICS OF MYSTICISM AND THE BAROQUE

Vílchez Ruiz (2022) puts forward an argument of relevance for considering the ideological nuances of Altolaguirre's engagement with the mystical tradition. She suggests that for the generation of poets who would go into exile after the Spanish Civil War, mysticism constituted a way of preserving their Catholic faith, but freed from its reactionary Spanish counter-reformist shackles: a faith without restrictive disciplines, critical of the dogmas of Catholic doctrine, capable of combining the secular with the divine, the popular with the cultured, and Hebrew, Sufi or Neoplatonic elements with Christian ideas. For a generation educated in the Republican values of tolerance and freedom, mysticism represented "a symbol of ethical, aesthetic, and also poetic regeneration" (2022: 433, 435) that made it possible to integrate God with the human, bringing matter and spirit together, "translating the spiritual essence into the material" (2022: 463). Vílchez Ruiz refers in particular to the ethics of Altolaguirre, who never gave up his Catholicism, as "anti-dogmatic and anti-partisan" (2022: 439), firm in its affirmation of sensory experience, in its desire to contemplate the material world as part of a pathway to purification. Exile was a traumatic process for Altolaguirre, leading to his admission to a French mental institution before his exile to Cuba, and to a pathological condition associated with a profound sense of guilt. To overcome it he was compelled to let go of the more negative aspects of his Catholic faith, which, according to Vílchez Ruiz (2022), was expressed in both his poetry and his work in the film industry. Religion thus became less prominent in Altolaguirre's poetry in the first years of his exile, only to return with greater force in his final years. For Vílchez Ruiz, it was the mystical tradition that "allowed Manuel Altolaguirre to bring out a Catholic meaning and feeling once he had eliminated that which had weighed on his heart. His position was always strictly Catholic, but critical as well of certain Catholic values" (2022: 492). In fact, for Vílchez Ruiz, Cantar represents the culmination of Altolaguirre's efforts to "understand religiosity while evading the negative restrictions of Catholicism" (2022: 448), as his perception of reality was "much more in tune with the senses and with his sensibility [...]" based on an understanding of "God that was much freer, without theology's negative side" (2022: 449-450).8

The clearest example in Cantar of this use of mysticism to rewrite Catholicism as a religion without guilt can be found in the scene recreating the Garden of Eden and the moment when Eve, tempted by the serpent, eats the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge (00:46:05-00:47:28). Unlike the biblical reading, in mysticism the garden is an allegory for the place where the soul enjoys the mystical union, finding its fullness. In the mystical tradition, as Vílchez Ruiz points out, "[t]he tree of life is the most obvious symbol of the union of spirit and matter [...] born out of the darkness, out of the depth of those roots until it grows. It is a symbol of conscious spiritual evolution" (2022: 475). The scene in Cantar evokes both traditions: the biblical one, represented by two panels replicating Albrecht Dürer's two paintings of Adam and Eve (1507), followed by the reenactment of the moment when Eve, also played by Isolina Herrera, takes a bite of the apple from the tree and immediately throws it away in regret for

having succumbed to temptation; and the mystical one, with the same actress, now dressed as a nun, stretched out in a relaxed attitude under the same tree, its branches completely surrounding her (as noted above, Mexican flora is used consistently throughout the film as an allegory for God), picking its fruits freely and happily. This second reading, where the garden is a realm of joy with/of the beloved, rewrites a version of the biblical episode free of prohibitions and feelings of guilt for the Catholic tradition (as its protagonist is the character of the Beloved dressed as a nun).

A similar interpretation can be applied to one of the most sophisticated and complex scenes in the film (00:03:52-00:05:21). The scene in question is preceded by several shots at the beginning of the film, in which the camera lingers precisely on frames (of windows, doors and paintings) in a subtle allusion to the cinematographic apparatus itself, and more generally to how our perception is influenced by the medium chosen (cinema, literature, painting), but also by the cultural perspective (European, Latin American). All of this is relevant to the scene that follows, and to the entire film.

The scene begins (Image 1) in a room where two frames can be seen. The one on the right, only partially visible, is the threshold of a door through which Fray Luis enters from a barren garden. Leaning on a lectern and surrounded by books (frames for the word) and a vase, he begins to write. The camera moves left towards the second frame, a painting showing a fragment from the central panel of Hieronymus Bosch's Triptych of The Adoration of the Magi (c. 1494). As in the scene of the Garden of Eden, Altolaguirre cinematically re-signifies a paradigmatic painting of the European tradition depicting a key moment of the biblical liturgy, in this case from the New Testament.9 While Fray Luis writes, the characters in the central panel come to life. Cinematographic techniques place the focus on certain figures in the painting while others are blurred. The shepherds on the roof of the manger where Jesus has

been born are shown rejoicing over the epiphany, not distracted by their worldly problems as portrayed in Bosch's painting. The side panels of the triptych, which symbolise the threat of sin to the world, are not depicted at all. The menacing, diabolical figure on the threshold of the manger appears only in wide shots and is relegated to the background. On the other hand, the leading role in the adoration is played by racialised characters, King Balthazar and his page-boy, whose faces are shown in close-up shots.

The scene ends with a close-up of the Virgin Mother, which then cuts directly to the Beloved/ Wife/Church. While the mother of God is white, like her baby, his wife is Indigenous. In this way, the film marks the transition between a European Catholic tradition of representing the birth of Christ and its integration into a different tra-



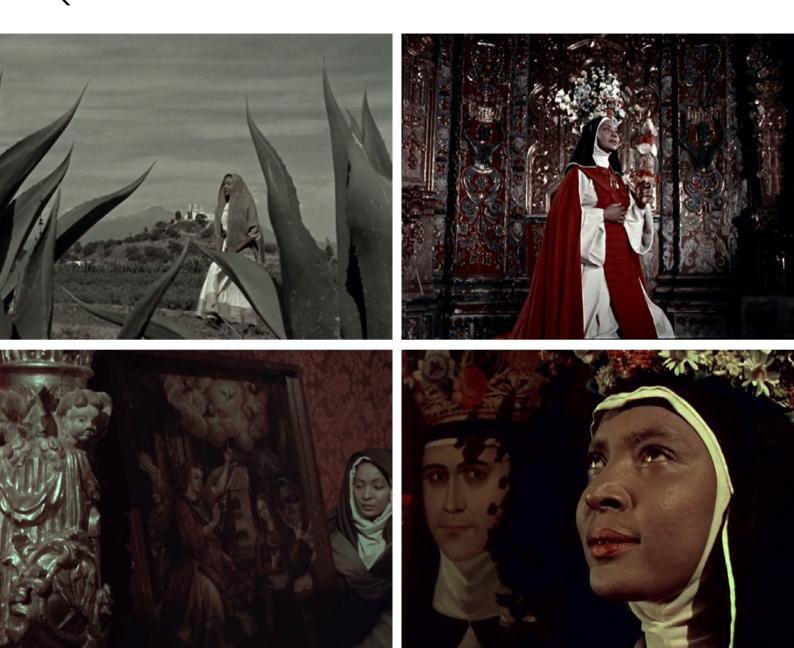
Image I

dition located entirely in Mexico, where the rest of the film takes place. The incarnation of God in the child Jesus, a defining element of European epiphanies, is thus given less prominence, as for the purposes of the allegory God here will dissolve into nature. In this new allegorical-mystical dimension, the actress/woman/Wife not only represents the Church, as interpreted by the Christianising tradition of *Song of Songs*, but

also stands for the land itself, i.e., Mexico. In other words, Altolaguirre's film not only transposes mysticism to a different artistic medium-from literature to cinema, from painting to cinema—but also transfers the parameters of Christianity/Catholicism themselves to a geographical space once colonised in their name, where their redefinition will be represented through the architecture of the New Spanish Baroque. It is this additional element of the allegorical-mystical dimension that underpins the argument outlined below that Cantar offers a defence of Hispanidad. The centrality of the Baroque in the film reproduces a discourse that finds in this prestigious and refined artistic style the distillation of a Catholic Spanish essence that would spread throughout the Spanish Empire and place its stamp upon it. In Marzo's words:

For Spain, the Baroque has been the most concrete metaphor of what it means to be Spanish, and thanks to its empire, which coincided in time with the Baroque period, the best exponent of the nation's capacity to be universal, to convey notions of humanity valid not only within the strict context of the country itself but even in lands where the human presence was still left outside of history, such as the Americas. (2010: 34)

Indeed, throughout Cantar, Baroque architecture and painting function as evidence of a perfect integration of Indigenous into Catholic elements, a joyful acceptance of Catholicism through the formal integration of local features. In this syncretism, which places the emphasis on embracing Catholicism through aesthetic difference, mystical ecstasy smooths out all the rough edges of colonialism, as the racialised local individual, represented in the film by the Beloved/Wife, surrenders to the absent monotheistic God. The disembodiment of the divine, which is of course in keeping with the logic of mystical allegory, at the same time reproduces certain gender relations that are also colonial relations. The evasion of the incarnation of the Almighty also erases the conditions of extermination and exploitation through which His law was imposed, resulting in a celebratory spectacle of a land conquered by Catholicism, a characteristic feature of discourses of Hispanidad. As a specific example, the Wife's quest for her Beloved, which structures the film, is undertaken mostly on foot through unmistakably rural (never urban) Mexican landscapes (Image 2), including flora and geographical features (nopal, maguey, the Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl volcanoes) and pre-Columbian architectural and monumental ruins (the pyramids of Teotihuacán and the Olmec altar and colossal head of Tabasco), which the Wife passes by without paying them any attention, thus denying them any religious or ritual function. The various colonial Baroque architectural constructions shown in the film receive very different audiovisual treatment: churches and convents (Church of San Francisco Javier in Tepotzotlán, State of Mexico; Basilica of Ocotlán in Tlaxcala; Church of Santa María Tonantzintla in Puebla: Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, built on a monument dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, in Mexico City; and Temple of San Francisco Acatepec in Cholula, Puebla); monuments (atrial cross at the convent of San Agustín in Acolman, one of the first made for the conversion of indigenous people in the 16th century, which fuses pre-Hispanic and Catholic elements); and paintings (The Annunciation [1559] by Juan de Correa de Vivar, an Afro-Hispanic painter who included indigenous and Black figures in his paintings). Each of these represents a step in the Wife's ascent towards the culminating moment when she will become a crowned nun. As in an art history documentary, the camera revels in detailed observations of facades, apses and altarpieces that make the syncretism and indigenous contributions to the New Spanish Baroque evident, providing a background into which the racialised Wife devoutly merges. A culminating example is the Church of San Francisco Javier Tepotzotlán, where pride of place is given to an altarpiece devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe, where the Wife will be crowned sur-



Images 2, 3, 4 and 5

rounded by bas-reliefs of Black cherubs (00:41:27) (Image 3). This central idea, the frictionless fusion of the indigenous reality with Catholic iconography, is particularly well achieved visually in the scene where the Wife, by means of an optical effect, is literally integrated into a painting of the Annunciation<sup>10</sup> (01:05:00) (Image 4). And a similar visual strategy is used to reinforce this idea when the face of the Wife, now a crowned nun, is superimposed onto the painting of a white crowned

nun to highlight their similarities (01:07:13) (Image 5). At the end of the film, the culmination of the Wife's journey represents not only the mystical union with God but also the perfect incorporation of Mexican qualities into Catholicism through her.

All these considerations suggest a need to qualify the interpretation of Altolaguirre's aforementioned interest in mysticism as a tolerant and open-minded project. While such an interpre-

tation was partly based on the incorporation of non-Catholic religions and traditions, in Cantar this kind of tolerance and open-mindedness results in the representation of the colonial relationship as a mutually beneficial coexistence of equals or the voluntary acceptance of what one of the parties offers. This is a discourse with a reactionary, anti-modern foundation aimed at concealing the subjugation of the natives that defined the Spanish Catholic empire's civilising project in the Americas. To the extent that Cantar facilitates this whitewashed reading of the Spanish conquest, it "camouflages [...] responsibilities and memories, with the aim of extending an aesthetic cloak capable of [...] controlling memory and diverting attention away from the reality of exploitation [...], making [...] the inconvenient others disappear in a mythologised story of integration, communion and mestizaje" (Marzo and Badia, 2010: 13).11

On the other hand, it is equally possible to argue that by viewing colonised subjects and their artistic representations as active agents in their own transformation and definition of the Catholic worship, the syncretism celebrated in *Cantar* supports a different reading of the New Spanish Baroque, offering a vision of solidarity that Latin American critics call the Baroque ethos (Echeverría, 1988; Velasco, 2022). This entails a subversive appropriation of the discourse of Hispanidad, transforming the Baroque from a weapon of repression wielded by the coloniser (Marzo, 2010; Locker, 2014) into a tool taken up by the colonised. This ethos defines an attitude towards reality among the colonised subjects that effectively combines the two contradictory approaches of submission to and rebellion against the empire by non-confrontational means. The Baroque ethos recognises the reality of defeat and the impossibility of reversing or resisting the Spanish conquest. Faced with this fact, colonised subjects choose to seek an "excluded third way" constructed out of the ruins, a path at once equal to that imported from the Spanish metropole and different from it in its concealed and apparently

docile incorporation of pre-Columbian culture (Echeverría 1988: 181). As Velasco argues, "[f]aced with the imposition of a monolithic, intolerant, and colonial European universalism, American Indigenous and mestizo peoples appropriated it selectively and universalised their own cultures by mixing them syncretically and in an original and purposeful way" (2022: 95-96). From this perspective, the Wife in Cantar, repeatedly framed by the most spectacular architectural achievements of the colonial Baroque, embodies the audacity of placing a racialised woman at the pinnacle of feminine Catholic power. Her position is thus analogous to that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, capable of articulating a Mexican identity that would end up becoming independent of the Spanish metropole (Velasco, 2022).

THE WIFE IN CANTAR, REPEATEDLY FRAMED BY THE MOST SPECTACULAR ARCHITECTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COLONIAL BAROQUE, EMBODIES THE AUDACITY OF PLACING A RACIALISED WOMAN AT THE PINNACLE OF FEMININE CATHOLIC POWER.

Although both these interpretations of the ideology of New Spanish Baroque architecture in the film are plausible, it would be impossible to understand the reception that *Cantar* received in Francoist Spain without a reading of the film as a celebration of *Hispanidad*, of the conquest of the New World as an evangelising, Christianising mission that would come to define Mexican identity. The opportunity to screen *Cantar* at the San Sebastián Festival, as well as its success with the clergy and cultural institutions that at that time were controlled by the most ultra-Catholic factions of the regime, suggest that the film was interpreted as a vision of *Hispanidad* the regime's most reactionary forces could approve of.

## CANTAR'S RECEPTION IN THE FRANCO REGIME

There is evidence from August 1958, in a letter to his nephew Julio Mathias, that Altolaguirre wanted to convince Spanish authorities to designate Cantar as a film of Interés Nacional [National Interest] (Vílchez Ruiz, 2022). Altolaguirre no doubt had some notion of the enormous advantages that such a designation could offer a film in Spain at that time in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. In a letter written on 20 May 1959, he asked Camilo José Cela to use his influence to get Cantar a screening at the San Sebastián Festival, given that "as a cinematic poem with a religious form and meaning, it will not be selected here [in Mexicol by the Directorate of Film" (1989a: 290).12 As the film was indeed screened at the festival, albeit out of competition, it is plausible to assume that Cela did make appropriate inquiries. But other reasons besides this possible recommendation help explain the invitation.

In 1959, the Franco regime was immersed in a fierce internal struggle for hegemony between liberals and ultranationalists. The battle was also being waged in the cultural sector, where Latin America occupied a very important place in discourses of Hispanidad. José María García Escudero had been dismissed from his post as Director General of Film and Theatre after the government crisis of February 1952 for being too tolerant, and he was replaced by José María Muñoz Fontán, who favoured strict censorship. Moreover, as Gubern explains (Labanyi and Pavlović, 2013), responsibility for censorship had been transferred to the Ministry of Information and Tourism, which was run by the prominent conservative Catholic Gabriel Arias Salgado from 1951 to 1962. This of course meant years of ironclad control by National Catholics over what national audiences were able to see at the cinema. On the other hand, Luis Carrero Blanco had brought technocrats with neoliberal economic and open-minded political ideas into Franco's government. Notable among these was Fernando María Castiella, the Minister of Foreign Affairs who began the process of Spain's diplomatic reintegration onto the world stage. Once the country's geopolitical position in the context of the Cold War had been consolidated and the hostility of liberal democracies towards the dictatorship had abated, Castiella saw that the time was ripe for Spain to align itself fully with the West. For this rapprochement to succeed, the Spanish dictatorship urgently needed to transform its image, presenting itself as a tolerant and open nation. This explains why the regime was willing to lower the bar of censorship of literary and audiovisual culture in contexts of controlled and limited reception in Spain and for the purpose of exports. One example of this was encouraging renowned artists and intellectuals to return from exile in order to improve the country's international image (Larraz, 2009). Another example was the San Sebastián International Film Festival. established in 1953, which, according to Gubern (Labanyi and Pavlović, 2013), was permitted to screen uncensored Hollywood films-in 1959 it presented North by Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)—and to welcome productions from the Communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe, especially those with a Catholic tradition. In the case of Latin American politics, Castiella acknowledged the historical ties while toning down the ideologically codified languages of early Francoism and focused instead on diversifying economic and cultural connections with the region (Pardo Sanz, 2000). Castiella's ministry was responsible for the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica (ICH), created in 1946 to promote Hispanic culture, which acted as a very well-funded form of soft power (Großmann, 2014) that was extremely important to the regime. A key space for the dissemination of the discourse on Hispanidad around the world and especially in Latin America, in the 1940s it had cultivated an idea of pan-Hispanism in opposition to the values of liberal democracies. During the Cold War, this

discourse would evolve into an understanding of Hispanic identity compatible with liberal democracies as a bulwark against the communist threat (Großmann, 2014). However, in 1959, in a reflection of the aforementioned internal struggles, the director of the ICH was the ultranationalist, anti-Western politician Blas Piñar, an ally of Arias Salgado and an enemy of Castiella (Pardo Sanz, 2000).

The tensions between the different factions of the regime became apparent in 1959 at the San Sebastián Festival's seventh edition. Still in its early days, the festival's profile was yet to be fully defined, and the two factions sought to exploit its soft power in divergent directions. Piñar and Arias Salgado wanted it to specialise in Ibero-American cinema, invoking an ultranationalist version of Hispanidad. Conversely, Castiella saw the festival as a showcase where the idea of a liberal Spain could be sold to a broader international public. Although Castiella's vision would ultimately prevail (Tuduri, 1989), it is not surprising that in 1959, a film based on a central pillar of Franco's Spain-Catholicism in a colonial context-should have aroused the interest of its organisers and convinced them, in addition to Cela's recommendation, to include Cantar in the festival.

According to a letter that Altolaguirre wrote to his daughter Paloma from San Sebastián in July 1959, the prospects for the film could not have been better. Not only was it being acclaimed at the festival, but there was also hope that the positive response might lead to an invitation to compete the following month at the Venice International Film Festival:

[The film] has had a splendid reception, with long articles in the newspapers, and it is being screened at the festival out of competition [...]. It will be shown tomorrow, Tuesday, at a special session for the bishop and clergy. On Friday, at the best time, and in the best cinema, it will be screened at the festival. It will be screened twice that day and it is causing a huge stir. Then it will be presented to the

distributors and people are saying that we'll have very good offers. [...] In Venice, in August, it will enter the competition for the prize, with the publicity from San Sebastián, which will be very beneficial. (Altolaguirre, 1989c: 291-292)<sup>13</sup>

Altolaguirre told Father Ángel Martínez about the media coverage of the film in El Diario Vasco ("Great satisfactions and joys!") (Altolaguirre, 1989d: 293)14 and informed his co-writer Martínez Solares about the interviews in the top French newspapers (Le Monde, Le Figaro, Les Lettres Françaises) and that "Spanish critics [are] unanimous in their praise" (Altolaguirre, 1989b: 294). It is also clear from this correspondence that the film sought and obtained a "specialised" audience in the clergy, who responded to it enthusiastically, according both to Altolaguirre's own account and to reports in the press at the time in San Sebastián ("El Cantar de los cantares", 1959) and Málaga (Caballero, 1959). While he predicts it in his letter to his daughter Paloma (cited above), to Father Ángel Martínez he presents it as a fait accompli: "His Excellency the bishop saw it, and a large number of clergymen" (Altolaguirre, 1989d: 293). And he gives more details to Martínez Solares: "The Bishop of San Sebastián summoned all the clergy of his diocese and they filled the cinema" (Altolaguirre, 1989b: 294). By extension, the official response seems to have been equally positive, as he goes on to explain to Martínez Solares: "The President of the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica [Blas Piñar MPB] invited us for lunch. The Director of Film [Muñoz Fontán MPB] has requested the film for Madrid" (Altolaguirre, 1989b: 294). This characterisation of the film's success might require some qualification, however, given that Aranda-who was present at the screening for the general public-wrote in his posthumous review that Cantar was attended by barely a dozen spectators (1959).

The foregoing suggests that where *Cantar* really had an impact and prospects of success, and by extension, where funding could have been found for Altolaguirre's planned reworked

version, other types of collaborations, etc., was within the hierarchies of Catholic power, i.e., the Church and government institutions. To a regime that was already keen on the idea of persuading illustrious Republican exiles to return to Spain in order to demonstrate its openness and tolerance, to a cultural sector that in the 1950s was controlled by the National Catholic factions of the Franco regime that sought to promote a discourse of *Hispanidad* internationally, *Cantar* must have seemed an attractive and easily exploitable proposition. Unlike the fiasco it would have on its hands just three years later with Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana*, the regime had nothing to fear from the film by the exiled Altolaguirre.

#### CONCLUSION

Cantar arrived in Spain at a key moment for Francoist Spain marked by fierce internal struggles, as the country was changing and adapting to a new geopolitical situation. Altolaguirre's prestige as a poet, his status as a Republican exile but also a devout Catholic, and the centrality of the discourse of Hispanidad in his film all made Cantar attractive to the regime. How would the director and the film have navigated this context? What conflicting interests of the regime might have challenged them? Could a subversive reading of Hispanidad have been drawn out of Cantar by anti-Francoists, or in Latin America, or in the suspicions of some censor? The fateful accident in the town of Cubo de Bureba cut short the prospects raised by those happy days for the poet in San Sebastián. However, the film still offers an opportunity for analysis as part of a project aimed at mobilising and rendering visible the cultural products of Spanish Republican exiles as important artifacts of their time that offer complex understandings that continue to enrich us. In this sense, this article has sought to highlight the significance of this little-known audiovisual text by Manuel Altolaguirre for the key importance of its Mexican setting, for its exposure of the continuity and transformation of the mystical-allegorical structure in the filmmaker's work, for the ways it participates in ideological discourses of *Hispanidad* through the Baroque and for how these discourses helped the film to capture the attention of Francoist institutions.

#### **NOTES**

- 1 Hereinafter abbreviated as Cantar.
- 2 The Manuel Altolaguirre-Concha Méndez archive contains a large amount of material related to the film that has yet to be studied in depth. The archive is held by the Centro Documental de la Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid, which is part of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- 3 However, it does match Altolaguirre's own description in a letter to his nephew Julio Mathias y Lacarra in August 1958 (as cited in Vílchez Ruiz, 2022).
- 4 The voice of the Husband/God is rarely heard. According to Sánchez Vidal (2003), this voice was provided by the Mexican actor Arturo de Córdova. As the film's credits are incomplete, it is not possible to verify this.
- 5 A more detailed account of Altolaguirre's work in the film industry can be found in Sánchez Vidal (2003), Sánchez Oliveira (2014) and Valender (1992).
- 6 According to accounts from friends such as Darío Carmona, and Altolaguirre's correspondence prior to his exile (Valender, 1989a).
- 7 The influence of María Zambrano also helped Altolaguirre overcome these contradictions, feelings of guilt and distress. In *La confesión: género literario* [Confession: a Literary Genre], a work known to Altolaguirre, Zambrano speaks of confession as "a method to find that person, the subject to whom things happen, and as a subject, someone who remains detached, free from what happens to him. Nothing that occurs to him can nullify him or annihilate him, because this kind of reality, once achieved, seems invulnerable" (1988). Furthermore, Zambrano considered Fray Luis's *The Book of Job*, which Altolaguirre intended to incorporate in an expanded version of *Cantar*, as

one of the first forms of confession, corresponding to the first phase of descent into hell on the mystical path. (Valender, 1998). In other words, mysticism and confession, according to Zambrano, come together to purge the elements of guilt inherent in Catholicism. Similarly, when stressing the liberating function of confession in his "Prólogo a mis recuerdos" [Prologue to My Memories, originally written in 1943, Altolaguirre speaks of the trauma of going into exile as a form of spiritual death, and how his rebirth had been possible after that death (Vílchez Ruiz, 2022). In this sense, as Valender argues, Altolaguirre was able to make Cantar after having written his own confessions—later published in El caballo griego [The Greek Horse]—and having overcome the personal and collective trauma of war and exile.

- 8 Vílchez Ruiz even sees a critical intention in *Cantar*, due to its references to Fray Luis being imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition, calling it "a completely revolutionary act that questions power, public opinion and social, political and ideological norms" (2022: 482). As noted above, however, although present in the script, these allusions were eliminated in the version of the film that has been preserved.
- 9 As Altolaguirre knew perfectly well, both Bosch's painting and the works of Dürer were in the Prado Museum, and therefore out of his reach while in exile.
- 10 It has not been possible to identify the authorship, title or location of the painting.
- 11 Altolaguirre is no exception. Spain's relationship with the Americas concerned many Republican exile intellectuals, particularly in Mexico, such as Juan Larrea, Luis Cernuda, Max Aub and Eduardo Nicol. For an introduction to discourses of *Hispanidad* in Republican exile, see Faber (2017).
- 12 The letter was first published in the journal *Papeles de* Son Armadans in 1960.
- 13 With his allusions to Venice, the time of year and competing for an award, Altolaguirre must be referring to the International Catholic Office Film Prize, awarded at the Venice Film Festival, which was held at that time in August.

14 The letter was first published in the journal *Caracola* in 1960.

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# THE POLITICS OF MYSTICISM AND THE MEXICAN BAROQUE IN THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN EXILE FILM: CANTAR DE LOS CANTARES [SONG OF SONGS] (MANUEL ALTOLAGUIRRE, 1959)

### Abstract

Although practically unknown, Cantar de los cantares, the last film directed by Manuel Altolaguirre, is the most representative of his aesthetic and religious interests. Cantar takes the masterpiece of mysticism adapted by Fray Luis de León and recreates and reinterprets it in a Mexican setting. Its plot is essentially a mystical representation of the Bride/Church's quest for her Bridegroom/God, which leads her through different Mexican natural landscapes and iconic elements of pre-Columbian and (especially) New Spanish Baroque architecture and sculpture. This article begins by analysing the film as a formal exploration of the capacities of cinematic language applied to a classic text of mysticism that reflect developments in film history later defined by Deleuze with the concept of the time-image. It then considers the extent to which Cantar articulates a coherent, celebratory vision of the role of Catholicism and, by extension, the Spanish conquest of Mexico. It concludes by arguing that an interpretation along these lines explains why the film was viewed favourably by the Franco regime and accepted for screening out of competition at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 1959.

## Key words

Manuel Altolaguirre; *Cantar de los cantares*; Colonial Baroque; Mysticism; San Sebastián International Film Festival; *Hispanidad*; Spanish Republican exile films; Time-image.

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# POLÍTICAS DE LA MÍSTICA Y EL BARROCO MEXICANO EN EL CINE DEL EXILIO REPUBLICANO: CANTAR DE LOS CANTARES (MANUEL ALTOLAGUIRRE, 1959)

# Resumen

Cantar de los cantares, último y malogrado proyecto cinematográfico dirigido por Manuel Altolaguirre es, aunque prácticamente desconocido, el más próximo a sus intereses estéticos y religiosos. Cantar recrea y reinterpreta, en un entorno mexicano, un texto cumbre de la mística adaptado por Fray Luis de León. Su trama representa, en clave mística, el recorrido de la Esposa/Iglesia en busca de su Esposo/ Dios, lo que la lleva a atravesar diferentes paisajes naturales mexicanos, icónicos elementos de la arquitectura y escultura precolombinas y, especialmente, del barroco novohispano. El artículo analiza la película, primero, como propuesta formal sobre las capacidades del lenguaje cinematográfico aplicadas a un texto clásico de la mística que coinciden con desarrollos de la historia del cine definidos más tarde por Deleuze con el concepto de imagen-tiempo; segundo, en qué medida en Cantar se articula, a través de la mística y del barroco colonial, un discurso de apoyo a la hispanidad, es decir, una visión coherente y celebratoria sobre el papel del catolicismo y, por extensión, la conquista española en México. Se termina argumentando que una interpretación en este sentido explica que la película fuera vista con buenos ojos por el franquismo e invitada a presentarse fuera de concurso en el Festival de Cine de San Sebastián de 1959.

# Palabras clave

Manuel Altolaguirre; *Cantar de los cantares*; Barroco colonial; Mística; Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián; Hispanidad; Cine del exilio republicano español; Imagen-tiempo.

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# INTRAHISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN IN THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973): A VIEW FROM MARÍA ZAMBRANO'S PERSPECTIVE

JORGE VALLE ÁLVAREZ

# I. MARÍA ZAMBRANO WATCHES THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973) IN GENEVA

Although she dedicated only a few pages of her vast oeuvre to it, films had a constant presence in the life of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano. Wherever she lived, she regularly attended the local cinemas, at least until her ailing health no longer permitted it; she talked about the films she saw with the boyfriend of her youth, Gregorio del Campo, and with her Cuban friend Josefina Tarafa, as evidenced by her correspondence with them;1 she made use of educational films when she took part in Second Spanish Republic's Pedagogical Missions and propaganda films during the Spanish Civil War, reinforcing her firm commitment to the republic's modernising and democratising project; she maintained friendships with Italian directors such as Adriano Zancanella, who

explained the technical details of film production to her; and she attended film cycles organised by the Department of Cinematography in Havana during her Cuban years, which greatly enriched her understanding of film culture. In short, Zambrano was a member of the generation that embraced Rafael Alberti's declaration: "I was born with the cinema, respect me!" (2002: 229). Indeed, in her most autobiographical work, *Delirium and Destiny* (1952), she herself acknowledges that she "loved [cinema] passionately" (1999: 95).

The three articles that Zambrano wrote about cinema in the early 1950s² formed part of her quest for a new form of reasoning—which she would later refer to as "poetic reason"—that could meet the need we all have to see ourselves in mirrors that reflect a more complete image of ourselves than rationalism can offer. In this sense, Zambrano's entire philosophy is articulated as a radical criticism of Western rationalist thought, which she often describes as too "self-absorbed"

IN SHORT, ZAMBRANO WAS A MEMBER OF THE GENERATION THAT EMBRACED RAFAEL ALBERTI'S DECLARATION:
"I WAS BORN WITH THE CINEMA,
RESPECT ME!". INDEED, IN HER MOST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORK, DELIRIUM AND DESTINY (1952), SHE HERSELF ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SHE "LOVED [CINEMA] PASSIONATELY".

and "abstracted" because it is only capable of contemplating itself, forgetting that its primary function is actually to provide human beings with vital truths that can help guide our existence. The inability of philosophical and scientific reason to grasp the full heterogeneity and complexity of the different areas of human life—especially those that Zambrano argues are most essential to it, such as hopes, dreams and feelings—compelled her to look for other means of shedding light on the human experience, such as poetry, painting or cinema.

One of the films that Zambrano found most captivating, and that best exemplify cinema's capacity to reveal what rationalism neglects (as will be demonstrated in this article). is Víctor Erice's The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena, 1973), the Basque director's first feature film. At the time it was released, Zambrano was living with her cousin Rafael Tomero in the small French town of La Pièce in the Jura region, in the final years of her long and difficult exile. Her beloved sister, Araceli, from whom she had hardly ever been apart since they were reunited in 1946 in Paris after the city's liberation, had died a year earlier due to acute thrombophlebitis. Her years on this farm in the middle of the French forest thus constituted a period of "accompanied solitude", as Zambrano described it, because despite her isolation she was visited regularly by members of her inner circle of friends, including rec-



Image I. María Zambrano while in exile in La Pièce, France

ognised cinephiles such as Alfredo Castellón and Joaquín Verdú de Gregorio. Living far away from any large urban centre and with her health deteriorating (especially her eyesight), Zambrano was generally unable to attend the cinema.

This did not mean, however, that she lost her lifelong interest in film. Joaquina Aguilar, a young translator with a degree in philosophy who was helping Zambrano at that time to edit the writings that would ultimately be included in her 1977 book Claros del bosque (2019a), convinced her to travel to Geneva to watch a film set on the Castilian plateau in the years after the Spanish Civil War (Image 1). This was how Zambrano came to see The Spirit of the Beehive, which fascinated her for three main reasons:3 first, its use of a cinematic poetry very similar to her own poetic approach to her writing; secondly, the resemblances between the life of the film's young protagonist, Ana (Ana Torrent), and her own; and third, its insight into an experience she had never been able to witness personally: interior exile in Spain. As the first two aspects have already been explored

in depth by José Manuel Mouriño in his documentary *El método de los claros*, this article will consider how *The Spirit of the Beehive* met Zambrano's need for intrahistorical knowledge about Spain's recent history, and how it also contributed to the consolidation of a collective memory of the Republican experience, of which exiles constitute the most palpable sign, at a time, moreover, when the process of Spain's transition to democracy ran the risk of consigning that memory to oblivion.

# 2. THE VISION OF THE INTRAHISTORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN

History was one of María Zambrano's key concerns throughout her career, from her very first book, Horizonte del liberalismo (1930), which reflects the interests of a philosopher strongly committed to the politics of her time, to the last article she published before her death, "Los peligros de la paz" (1990), written in response to the Gulf War. Zambrano's conception of history is inextricably tied to her criticism of rationalism, whose obsession with facts tends to neglect what lies beneath them. She therefore rejects both the modern vision of history as a succession of significant, decisive events advancing inexorably forward, and the scientific approach to history, which completely overlooks "everyday life, which transpires quietly and shapes the narrative [...] on which the unfolding of the extraordinary life or the significant event must necessarily be constructed" (2012b: 64). Thus, For Zambrano, all history has two levels, based on the categories proposed by Francisco Giner de los Ríos: the superficial level of facts, which history qua science is concerned with; and the deep level, or intrahistory, constituted by the experiences of the people who do not appear in the history books but are just as much a part of it. Zambrano thus adopts Miguel de Unamuno's notion of intrahistory as her own, referencing it in many of her writings, both implicitly and explicitly (Bonilla, 2024: 17-18).

Given that this knowledge of deep history cannot be acquired using the parameters of rationalism—causality, objectivity, clarity—because it is shaped by the hopes, sorrows, longings and fears of anonymous individuals, Zambrano suggests that it must be acquired by means of "an attitude somewhat like that of the spectator of a tragedy," as if one were "living the life of another" (2022a: 254-255). In this sense, any motion picture constitutes a historical document that alludes to the major events occurring at the time it was made. Zambrano therefore sees cinema as a medium that gives privileged visibility to human experience (both individual and collective), as it depicts human life and human emotions without analysing or objectifying them. No other art form is capable of capturing reality and life with the realism offered by photographic objectivity and the incorporation of time into the image, qualities that clearly characterise cinema, as the French theorist André Bazin points out (2021). Nor is any other medium able to immerse the spectator in a state analogous to dreaming, where our consciousness is numbed and we surrender entirely to the sight of a procession of images of the past. Cinema is thus able to satisfy every society's need for intrahistorical knowledge, and to do so, moreover, in a manner that Zambrano describes as "between truth and dreaming" (2022: 720).

Zambrano's extensive reflections on history in her work include numerous musings on the history of Spain. She was educated in an intellectual and philosophical context shaped by Spain's Gen-

CINEMA IS THUS ABLE TO SATISFY EVERY SOCIETY'S NEED FOR INTRAHISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND TO DO SO, MOREOVER, IN A MANNER THAT ZAMBRANO DESCRIBES AS "BETWEEN TRUTH AND DREAMING"

eration of '98, which had turned the problem of Spain's decline into one of the most discussed issues among intellectuals in the first decades of the 20th century. She maintained a close relationship with the nation both in her youth, as an intellectual committed to the Second Spanish Republic, and during her exile, when she would continue to write about the philosophy of Seneca, the couplets of Jorge Manrique, the idealism of Don Quixote, the use of white in Francisco Zurbarán's paintings, the romances of Federico García Lorca and the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós, because it was in these that she found the deep history of the Spanish people. Indeed, she argued that nobody was able to express the intrahistory of 19th-century Spain like Galdós:

What Galdós offers us in his vast oeuvre is more than just history, because it is history interwoven with the most ordinary events in his *Episodios Nacionales* [...]. He gives us the life of the anonymous Spaniard, the domestic world in its quality as the foundation of the historical, as the real subject of history. The historian has tended to give us the "historical event", which must meet certain conditions to be considered as such: it has to be deemed decisive and significant in the view of those studying it. Conversely, Galdós's novels show where such events come from, what is hidden beneath their significance and what can be taken as the simple vestige of time. (Zambrano, 2022c: 569-570)

Galdós thus offers a comprehensive view of the levels of history described by Zambrano, because he "interweaves" the great events that concern the historian together with the consequences they have on the lives of the anonymous masses, whose lives are neither "decisive" nor "significant", but without whom history is incomplete. By the 1970s, when the prospect of returning to Spain became increasingly unlikely and she had fully accepted her situation as an exile in La Pièce, Zambrano's interest in her country's history shifted from the 19th century to more recent history, to what had happened in Spain since she

had been forced to leave it. Although she had read the news and heard reports from friends who had been to Spain regarding the situation in the country and the events that had marked its political evolution since the end of the war, Zambrano had not personally witnessed the poverty, hunger, distrust, fear, self-imposed silence, grief, penury and exhaustion of those who had been forced into exile within Spain's borders. In short, she was unaware of the intrahistory of the "interior exile", a term coined by the journalist and writer Miguel de Salabert, which he defines as follows:

Because interior exile is neither a literary trope nor a worn-out cliché for use by politicians or journalists. I said then, and I say now, that interior exile is, or was, a historical reality. In a broad sense and as an antithesis of the rootless pilgrim Spain of the [external] exile, it was a reality that included and expressed a Spain that was captive, oppressed and marginalised within its own physical heart; in other words, it included all those Spaniards who passively resisted the Franco regime or whose only form of collaboration with it consisted of not actively fighting against it. [...] Interior exile meant turning into scattered little islands; grabbing your luggage and setting up camp outside the polis [...], buying a screen and cutting yourself off from the world; escaping inwards to respond to the aggression inflicted by walls and newspapers. In short, interior exile was social autism. (1988: 11)

It is thus unsurprising that *The Spirit of the Beehive* so captivated Zambrano, because it offers a vision, between truth and dreaming, of the intrahistory of her country's very recent past, the "captive", "oppressed" and "marginalised" lives of the interior exile described by de Salabert embodied in the adult characters in the film. Aguilar must surely have imagined the impact that the images of the Spanish post-war period would have on Zambrano. On this point, Mouriño argues that the film astonished Zambrano not only because she saw her own life reflected in the character of Ana, but also because it revealed to her, "with tre-

mendous clarity, with the most appropriate tempo and type of gaze, the other side of the fracture that she herself had experienced, the state of affairs in the place from which she had been forcibly expelled" (2021: 85). Years before viewing *The Spirit of the Beehive*, in "Carta sobre el exilio" (1961) Zambrano describes the reality of those who had remained in Spain, "detached from the course of history", like she herself had been:

The exile was left with nothing, on the edge of history, alone in life and with no place; no place of his own. And so were those with a place, but in a history without precedent. Therefore, with no place either; with no historical place. [...]. They were left with no horizon. And though they might be on their land, where their language is spoken, where they can say "I am a citizen", by being left without a horizon, man, the historical animal, also loses his place in history. He does not know what is happening to him, he does not know what he is living. He lives in a dream. (1961: 69-70)

The images in *The Spirit of the Beehive* confirmed this idea of Zambrano's and broadened her limited understanding of the interior exile. Although it is set in a specific place and time—"Somewhere on the Castilian plateau, around 1940", as the film's opening caption tells us (Image 2)—the film's characters have no future, no horizon, as Zambrano suggests in the quote above. The first time Ana's mother, Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), appears on screen, we see her writing a letter to a man—probably her lover before the war separated them—which perfectly expresses this idea of inhabiting the edges of history that is a characteristic feature of interior exile:

Though nothing can bring back the happy moments we spent together, I pray that God grant me the joy of seeing you again. That has been my constant prayer, ever since we parted during the war, and it's my prayer still here in this remote spot where Fernando and the girls and I try to survive. Little but the walls are left of the house you once knew. I often wonder what became of everything



Image 2. In the film's opening shot, a caption locates the action in space and time: "Somewhere on the Castilian plateau, around 1940..."



Image 3. Teresa writes her letter tinged with nostalgia and despair while bathed in the stifling light that enters through the beehive-shaped stained windows of the house

we had there. I don't say that out of nostalgia. It's difficult to feel nostalgic after what we've been through these past few years. But sometimes, when I look around me, and see so much loss, so much destruction and so much sadness, something tells me that perhaps our ability to really feel life has vanished along with all the rest. I don't even know if this letter will reach you. The news we get from outside is so scant and confusing... Please write soon, to let me know you're still alive. With all my love, Teresa. (Image 3)

In the next scene, we see Ana's mother riding her bike to the railway station to post her letter. She exchanges a glance with a young soldier on the train, who perhaps reminds her of her lost lover. The train pulls away, taking with it all the hopes Teresa has placed in that letter, which will never reach its addressee (Image 4). Teresa has lost everything in the war and has now become, like Zambrano herself, a "survivor" who "has not had the discretion to die" (2014a: 1052). The character of Ana's father, Fernando, played by Fernando Fernán Gómez, is detached from history too: he barely exchanges a word with Teresa, spends his time taking care of his bees and sleeps at night at his desk, immersed in a state of apathy that only his daughters are able to shake him out of. Víctor Erice is a director who. like Zambrano, considers cinema to be a poetic tool for exposing the reality of human experience (Arocena, 1996: 11-17), depicting with his camera a reality that he himself has lived:

Sometimes I think that for people who in their childhood have fully experienced that void that, on so many basic levels, those of us born immediately after a civil war like ours were heirs to, our elders were often just that: a void, an absence. They were there, yet they weren't there. And why weren't they there? Because they'd died, they'd left, or they'd become daydreamers radically stripped of their most basic modes of expression. (Cited in Fernández-Santos and Erice, 1976: 68-69)

This feeling of emptiness and absence that characterised the adult world and which Erice himself perceived in his childhood is what Zambrano describes as the lack of a horizon. The filmmaker expresses this feeling with the windows of the house where the characters live, which mimic the hexagonal shape of a beehive and enclose the family behind the stained glass in a warm but stifling light (Image 5). The beehive thus functions as a metaphor for Spanish society under Franco in the years after the Civil War, a completely alienated community governed by an authority that



Image 4. Teresa's hopes vanish, like the train, on the horizon of her vision



Image 5. Fernando opens the window to take a little air, but Erice places him back behind the beehive

oversees the correct behaviour of its members and prevents them from exercising their freedom (Cerrato, 2006: 68-69). At the same time, the exterior landscape also reflects Teresa's and Fernando's mood. The sky is always grey and cloudy, the streets are empty, and the prevailing silence is broken only by the voices of the children playing, who are unaware of the consequences that the tragedy of the war has had on the remote village of Hoyuelos (Image 6).

On the other hand, *The Spirit of the Beehive* also gave Zambrano an insight into the reality of the Spanish Maquis, the Republican soldiers who



Image 6. The landscape of Hoyuelos is grey, overcast and empty, with the shadow of the Franco regime looming over everything

were forced into hiding when the war ended, waiting for the moment when they would finally be caught and shot by Franco's forces. Although Franco declared the war over on 1 April 1939, an armed resistance emerged in the years that followed in response not only to the defeat of the Republican army but also to the widespread repression imposed by the new regime in the former Republican strongholds, forcing many men to escape to the woods or to the bleak plains of the Castilian plateau on an aimless quest to save their own lives, knowing that there was no place or time left for them in Franco's Spain. They were "outlaws and strangers in our own country" for whom "any vestige of political life" had vanished, as they now had to live "disconnected, isolated, alone", like "spectres" whose time on Earth had run out (Vidal Sales, 2002: 30-31).

When Ana encounters a Maqui (played by Juan Margallo), she naively believes him to be a spirit, because she is unable to understand who he is or why is hiding from everyone else. Erice presents him to the viewer with an aura of mystery; Ana never finds out who he is, what his name is, where he comes from, or what brought him there—because she believes, in keeping with Vidal Sales's description of the Maquis and Zam-



Image 7. Ana helps the Maqui, whom she confuses with a spirit

brano's understanding of the exile condition, that the Republican guerilla is a "spectre",4 a ghost in his own land, inhabiting a time that is no longer moving forward, that has stopped for him (Image 7). This suspension of time affects Teresa and Fernando too, as the time imposed by the dictatorship contrasts sharply with the acceleration of time that characterised the democratisation and modernisation project of the Second Spanish Republic. The pacing of the film is in keeping with this atemporal atmosphere that pervades the story, as the scenes are connected by slow lap dissolves. However, the storyline does not advance in a clear, linear way from the past into the future, but progresses instead in accordance with a series of poetic revelations.

The only horizon of hope conveyed in the film lies in the innocence of the two girls who have not lost what Teresa refers to as the "ability to really feel life", because they are unaware of the harsh reality of their country's recent history; in fact, they are quite unaware of anything at all. They have their whole lives ahead of them, and they still have the ability to be amazed or excited. They are driven by a thirst for knowledge that is fully quenched, in the early years of Francoist Spain, by watching *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931),

because it is on a film screen, rather than in the brutality of war, that Ana and her sister Isabel come into contact for the first time with fear and death. Erice thus constructs his film on the basis of the contrast between two different time periods, which are further accentuated by the use of the music of Luis de Pablo. One is the time period of the children, who play, go to the cinema and dance to a cheerful melody inspired by children's songs, in a time that looks ahead to the future. The other is the time period of the adults, who barely interact with each other and who remain silent, mired in a longing for what was and plagued by a fear of what is to come, in a time anchored in the past. For the adults, the only option is to carry on in silence and to accept their condition as exiles, like Zambrano herself did.

The Spirit of the Beehive, which has been described as "the quietest film in the history of Spanish cinema" (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 271), thus offers a picture of a specific time and place that María Zambrano never saw or knew: the interior exile of the post-war period, the anonymous, ordinary lives that comprise the intrahistory of a country that the philosopher had once been so much a part of but which she was forced to leave behind. And we see it all through the eyes of a girl who does not really understand what she sees, who cannot make sense of what is happening and who relates to it with astonishment, approaching reality ambiguously but without unravelling the mystery, illuminated with a light that is not the sunlight of rationalism but a shadowy light more suited to conveying the sense of hopelessness that afflicts interior exiles like Teresa and Fernando. with whom Zambrano no doubt identified.

# 3. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE MEMORY OF THE REPUBLICAN INTERIOR EXILE

The Spirit of the Beehive is an example of how cinema, in contrast to historicist science, can document intrahistory while also serving to recover

the past through the creation of a collective memory in the present. Memory plays a central role in María Zambrano's philosophy because she understands it as "the function of seeing and being seen that the human being undergoes rather than performs", as that which "intimately drives the keenness for knowledge", the "first form of sight" that acts "as a support and guide" for the individual and for society (2019b: 83-85). Far from being clear, the past is opaque and inscrutable, whereas memory clarifies what happened and sheds light on an understanding of experience that is indispensable for both individuals and society to know themselves. History is not just the narration of past events but a quest to make sense of what happened so that we can discover the raison d'être, both of what is happening now and of what is yet to come. In this sense. Zambrano's view of history is not solely the intrahistorical view offered by Galdós's novels or The Spirit of the Beehive, but a knowledge that serves to unveil the enigma of every past event and that prevents the individual and society from grinding to a halt: "We must look back, if we want to move forward. [...] Knowledge of the past is no longer a luxurious curiosity or a hobby that the clever can allow themselves while on holiday, but an absolute necessity" (2015: 571).

Recollection of lived experience, which Zambrano argues is the first form of knowledge, constitutes one of the most frequently used tools in her work, in which she gives considerable attention to both her personal past and the recent past of Spanish history. Delirium and Destiny, the book in which she puts this use of memory into practice most effectively, was written in 1952, more than ten years after the events she recounts in it, when enough time has passed for her to look clearly and coherently at what happened: "historical knowledge can only be acquired when events appear in depth and in unity at the same time, like the bottom of a transparent lake," (2014b: 395-396). In the introduction she wrote in 1977 to the new edition of her book Los intelectuales en el drama de España

(2015), Zambrano urges Spain to remember its tragic past at a time when it was deliberately—and mistakenly, she argues—forgetting it in the belief that only by doing so would the transition to democracy be possible. At this point in Spanish history, forty years after the end of the Civil War and with the Franco dictatorship now gone, Zambrano believed that enough time had passed for the image of Spain's past to appear more transparently and coherently: "we Spaniards need [...] the clear image of our yesterday, even of the most immediate past" (2014: 777-778).

AT THIS POINT IN SPANISH HISTORY, FORTY YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR AND WITH THE FRANCO DICTATORSHIP NOW GONE, ZAMBRANO BELIEVED THAT ENOUGH TIME HAD PASSED FOR THE IMAGE OF SPAIN'S PAST TO APPEAR MORE TRANSPARENTLY AND COHERENTLY

The memory of the Republic, which the philosopher experienced as the outlet for a collective aspiration, could thus feed a new hope for peaceful coexistence that—despite the huge ideological differences and the bitter grudges that separated different factions of Spanish politicians and citizens in the 1970s-could bring them together again as had happened with the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic, which Zambrano saw as a new dawn in the history of a Spain that was finally beginning to stir after long years of lethargy. Like other intellectuals of the time, Zambrano embraced what the historian and cultural critic José Carlos Mainer has called a "thaumaturgical idea of the Republic" shared even by those who would rise up against the new regime only a few years later (1983: 277-278). For Zambrano, the hope placed in the Second Spanish Republic by very different ideological sectors was due to the fact that "in the hours of the expansion of history,"

hope cuts down the distance between neighbours, "because of the bigger dimensions of our person, our soul appearing to our neighbour; we emerge together with him" (2014a: 1020).

Although the dream of the Republic had ultimately turned into a tragic nightmare, Spain needed to understand the failure of the hopeful collective project of the Second Republic if it wanted to "expand" its history once more at a decisive moment like the transition to democracy. But given that for Zambrano true history is found in the hopes and feelings of ordinary people, the vision that 1970s Spain needed could not be offered by historicist science alone: the art. literature and cinema of the time also had a role to play. This imposes upon us "the task of analysing, scrutinising and dissecting the narratives established by the Franco regime in an intellectual, essayistic operation" that Vicente Sánchez-Biosca calls "deconstruction" (2006: 35). Erice, who began his film career in the 1970s, argues that every film is "a social fact" that "reflects the historical situation in which it is produced" because "for better or for worse, it is born in it and finds its raison d'être in it" (1961: 56). In this sense, films made during the transition to democracy were not immune to the turbulent social, economic and political dynamics of the period, even if each one expresses those dynamics in very different ways.

Film historian Magí Crusells, who argues that cinema has the capacity to show "the protagonists of history on tape", concurs with Zambrano that "knowledge of the past gives us an understanding of the present, which helps us to build a better future," because "when we lose our memory, we cease to be ourselves" and "a people with no memory loses its identity" (Crusells, 2006: 11). Sánchez-Biosca expresses the same view, arguing that cinematic images "possess the plasticity necessary to become symbols, to set down the memory of societies, political groups or sectors of the population, and in collaboration with the narratives, to serve as representations of memory"

(2006: 25). However, he is critical of the idea that films that give the victims a voice and body can substitute for history qua science to examine the past. The collective memory that films consolidate for spectators, although necessary, poses certain risks, such as "the emotional consumption of the document [...] and the identification of testimony with historical truth, two corruptions that threaten to mystify and dislocate our relationship with the past" and the abandonment of the critical spirit that should drive historiography (2006: 37).

In any case, Zambrano is not so interested in reconstructing history with scientific precision and accuracy as uncovering its underlying meaning, which, being tied to the life experience of those who lived it, can never be objective. The memory that individuals and societies need of their own past is a constructed, changeable, subjective memory, which does not mean that it cannot be shared by the majority. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that at the time of the democratic transition Zambrano was speaking from the perspective of her condition as a victim, still in exile and without prospects of an immediate return, seeking recognition and reparation. She thus needed not only to see the Spanish intrahistory of interior exile, but also to know that Spain saw her and other exiles of her generation. The Spirit of the Beehive showed her what she had never been able to see, but it also showed Spanish audiences something they did not know and had not wanted to see: the brutal reality of the exile, whether interior or exterior, of those who had fought for democracy, at a moment in history when Spain was moving towards it once again.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

Any past that never fully passes becomes a ghost, and the same could be said of those like Zambrano who had survived the Spanish Civil War only to be doomed to wander in an interminable exile, never able to settle down anywhere and never receiver.

ving recognition from their own country. Mouriño suggests that the exile is a "ghost in a perpetual state of unfulfilled return" who, "in the absence of the place it understands as its own," is doomed to "a habitation without rest": this means that "to look at the exile, at that object of the gaze, is to look upon a past too difficult to assimilate. Every ghost is a matter of the past that comes back because its conflict was never resolved" (2021: 84). Similarly. Zambrano describes exiles as "souls in purgatory, for we have descended alone into the infernos of our history, some of them unexplored, to salvage from them what can be salvaged, what cannot be given up. [...] We are memory. Memory that salvages. [...] Memory of what has passed in Spain" (1961: 69-70).

For Zambrano, the exile embodies the best of an unjustly crushed Spain: the generation of the "bull", as she liked to refer to it: a generation sacrificed by history that had its voice taken from it, whose history needed to be told in order to break "the silence that surrounds the murdered inspiration" (2014a: 1028). The Spirit of the Beehive fulfils that duty of reparation and recognition that Zambrano called for in Spain's transition towards democracy, because it brings the exile experience to the big screen and gives a voice to those who had lost it. The view of intrahistory offered by cinema, between truth and dreaming, is also capable of undoing the spectral condition of the exile. Teresa, Fernando and the Maquis, those interior exiles, are ghosts condemned to inhabit an uninhabitable place and time outside history, beyond the frame of what we see and know. But just as Frankenstein's monster crosses the film screen to become a powerfully real presence before Ana's eyes, the exile takes shape and form before the eyes not only of Zambrano, but of all Spanish spectators (Images 8 and 9). In this way, The Spirit of the Beehive satisfies both Zambrano's need to see and to be seen by a Spain that should remember the Republican experience and construct a shared collective memory if it wants to



Image 8. This still-frame from Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931) anticipates one of the final scenes in Erice's film

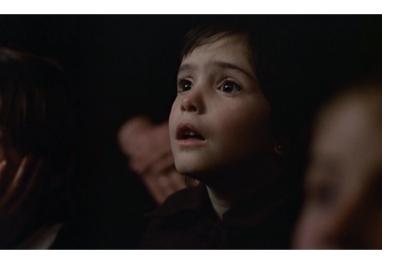


Imagen 9. Ana is fascinated by the vision of the extraordinary that cinema offers her

build the new democratic project emerging in the Transition of the 1970s. In short, Erice's film captures that experience of "seeing and being seen" that Zambrano refers to repeatedly throughout her work as an inherent need of every human being, of which the exile had been deprived.

# **NOTES**

- 1 Zambrano's letters to Gregorio del Campo can be found in Zambrano (2012a). Her correspondence with Josefina Tarafa, which has not yet been published, was consulted in the archives of the María Zambrano Foundation.
- 2 The original publications of these three articles can be found in the references section of this article (Zambrano, 1952a; 1952b; 1953).
- Following the impact the film had on Zambrano, Joaquina Aguilar mediated between the philosopher and Víctor Erice so that they could exchange views not only on the film but also on other issues such as the desacralisation of life, which concerned them both. Thanks to Aguilar's mediation, Zambrano and Erice began a written correspondence. The letters exchanged between the two, which unfortunately have not been preserved, included mutual praise for each other's work, as Erice himself recalls in an interview for José Manuel Mouriño's documentary El método de los claros (2019).
- 4 According to Jo Labanyi (2001), in her in-depth study of the ghosts of the past that populate Spanish literature and cinema, there are various ways to confront these spectres (ranging from refusing to look at them, which implies denying one's own history, to offering them a home in the present, which implies recognising the mark they leave). In *The Spirit of the Beehive*, this second approach is adopted, as the Maqui appears as a manifestation of an unknown past in a rundown, abandoned barn, perceived by the young girl Ana as an extension of what she has seen recently in *Frankenstein* and by the spectator as a presence of the past that becomes powerfully real on the film screen.

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# INTRAHISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN IN THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973): A VIEW FROM MARÍA ZAMBRANO'S PERSPECTIVE

# Abstract

In 1973, María Zambrano travelled to Geneva to see Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The philosopher was captivated by the view the film offered of Spain's recent intrahistory, marked by the hopelessness and despair that afflicted those Spanish Republicans who had been forced to remain in the country as interior exiles. Zambrano saw the film just a few years before Spain's transition to democracy, at a time when she believed it was essential to recover the buried memory of the Republican project, whose imprint was still present in the lives of Spanish exiles, in order to build the new democratic project that would emerge in Spain in the late 1970s. The aim of this article is to analyse the images of *The Spirit of the Beehive* based on the notions of intrahistory and memory explored by Zambrano in her work in order to consider how cinema may be able to undo the "spectral" condition that Zambrano believed was the lot of every exile.

# Key words

María Zambrano; Víctor Erice; *The Spirit of the Beehive*; Intrahistory; Memory; Spanish Republican Interior Exile; Cinematic Reason.

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# INTRAHISTORIA Y MEMORIA DEL EXILIO INTERIOR ESPAÑOL EN EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA (VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973). UNA VISIÓN DESDE MARÍA ZAMBRANO

### Resumen

En 1973, María Zambrano se desplaza a Ginebra para visionar *El espíritu de la colmena* de Víctor Erice. La filósofa queda cautivada por la visión que ofrece la película de la intrahistoria reciente del exilio interior de España, conformada por la falta de horizonte vital y las desesperanzas que caracterizan a los republicanos que se vieron obligados a quedarse en el país. Por otro lado, Zambrano ve esta película en un momento, los años inmediatamente anteriores a la Transición española, en que rescatar la memoria olvidada del proyecto republicano, cuya huella sigue viva en las vidas de los exiliados, le parece imprescindible para fecundar la nueva experiencia democrática que está naciendo en España. Así, este artículo se propone analizar las imágenes de *El espíritu de la colmena* desde las nociones de intrahistoria y memoria que despliega Zambrano en su obra para determinar de qué manera el cine puede deshacer la condición de «espectro» que, para la pensadora, posee todo exiliado.

### Palabras clave

María Zambrano; Víctor Erice; *El espíritu de la colmena*; Intrahistoria; Memoria; Exilio interior republicano; Razón cinematográfica.

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# "HUMBLY, THE GROUP RESPONDED": ORGANIC INTELLECTUALISM, EXILE AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION IN THE CINE DE LA BASE FILM COLLECTIVE

AGUSTÍN RUGIERO BADER LÁZARO CRUZ GARCÍA

Much film historiography tends to privilege authorial figures, particularly directors, to structure any discussion of artistic and political trends and movements. The exponents of militant cinema do not always accept this approach and often consider filmmaking activity in terms of other processes, such as the multi-directional and horizontal interactions between organic, technical and militant intellectuals. Out of such experiences has come a particular kind of biopolitical production that is reflected both in the resulting films and in the work methods that members of the movement often exported to other collectives to which they contributed. Certain repressive strategies, including exile, facilitated the dissemination of these approaches—which from the outset were internationalist by nature—and have opened up the possibility of new constructions of militant cinema history. This article takes the example of Raymundo Gleyzer's time as a member of the Cine de la Base collective to illustrate these

dynamics and reflect on the future of radical film movements.

# 1. FROM RAYMUNDO GLEYZER TO CINE DE LA BASE

I am an Argentine filmmaker and I've been making films since 1963. All of them deal with the social and political situation in Latin America. I try to show that there is only one way to bring about structural changes in our continent: socialist revolution.

Raymundo Gleyzer (cited in Ardito and Molina, 2002)

This is how Raymundo Gleyzer described his work and his purpose as a filmmaker. Peña and Vallina (2000) identify three periods into which Gleyzer's career can be divided: the first period from 1963 to 1966, when he worked on ethnographic documentary films; the second, from 1965 to 1971, when he engaged in film journalism, combining documentation and investigation; and finally, a third phase

from 1971 and 1976, when he devoted himself entirely to making militant underground films. The points of transition between each stage are uncertain, because the shift was progressive and each phase emerged as a result of the previous one.

After completing his studies and working on projects such as the fiction film El Ciclo (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1964), Gleyzer began making documentaries. As a student at the Escuela de Cine de La Plata film school, he connected with film industry professionals such as Humberto Ríos, with whom he ended up forming a network of colleagues who would contribute to several of his films (Peña and Vallina, 2000). In 1963, Gleyzer directed La tierra quema [The Land Burns], which explored the social issues faced by rural workers in Brazil. This film was funded by an Experimental Film Association grant awarded to him and Jorge Giannoni (Recchia Paez, 2017), although Giannoni ultimately abandoned the project because of the harsh conditions of the filming location (Peña and Vallina, 2000). The cinematographer on the project was the Brazilian Rucker Vieira, who would subsequently work in Brazil's Cinema Novo movement (Link, 2011). Two years later, Gleyzer directed Ceramiqueros de Traslasierra [Potters of Traslasierra] (1965), working with colleagues who would subsequently contribute to many of his other films: Ana Montes de González, Humberto Ríos, Catulo Albiac and Juana Sapire. This film presents the lifestyles and working conditions of a community of potters in Córdoba, Argentina.

His ethnographic leanings led him to work with Jorge Prelorán, with whom he co-directed Occurado en Hualfín [It Happened in Haulfin] (Jorge Prelorán and Raymundo Gleyzer, 1965) and Quilino (Raymundo Gelyzer and Jorge Prelorán, 1966). Prelorán enjoyed a long career as a documentary filmmaker, working on most of his films on his own, which was his preference (Pérez Llahí, 2011), with Gleyzer being an exception. In an interview he gave in 2000, Prelorán acknowledged

that his work with Gleyzer helped him develop new ways of interviewing and presenting certain issues, a methodology he labelled "ethnobiographical". He also stressed that his films should be classified as "works of art, not of documentation", as he considered himself more a dramatist than an anthropologist (Masotta and Campano, 2000). Gleyzer's markedly structural approach gave rise to an ideological conflict between the two filmmakers (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

It was at this point that Gleyzer began his journalistic period, with Nuestras islas Malvinas [Our Malvinas Islands] (1966), a production made for Argentina's night-time news program Telenoche, which had hired Gleyzer. According to Julio Gómez, the cameramen for Telenoche were divided into two groups: technicians without much political awareness, and people such as Gleyzer or Pino Solanas of the Grupo Cine Liberación, intellectuals trained in film schools who were nearly always leftists (Peña and Vallina, 2000). The news show format made it possible to reach more people, but it also highlighted the tensions between the mainstream message and the new perspectives of these directors. In Nuestras islas Malvinas, Gleyzer paints a portrait of life of the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas). At this time, the dispute over the sovereignty of the islands was the living expression of the colonial conflict between Argentina and Britain, a confrontation between "a peripheral country and a major power" (Laufer, 2022: 49). The conflict would later be seized on by the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) in an effort to galvanize public support for a regime that had become notorious for its constant human rights abuses, repression and economic mismanagement. The Malvinas question, and Argentine politics in general, was defined by two key factors: class and country. This stage of Gleyzer's career ended with Matague (Raymundo, Gleyzer, 1967), a film about the living conditions of Argentina's Wichí people, an Indigenous community affected by social exclusion.

Throughout 1968 and 1969, Gleyzer and sound engineer Juana Sapire, whom he had married two years earlier, travelled around Europe making news reports for Telenoche and screening the films La tierra quema and Hualfín. From there, while still working for Telenoche, they flew to Cuba and filmed Nota especial sobre Cuba [Special Note on Cuba] (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1969), an experience that reinforced their Guevarism. They then returned to Europe and met a couple of Americans in London who would later introduce them to producer Bill Susman in the United States (Peña and Vallina, 2000). Susman financed their trip to Mexico to film México, la revolución congelada [Mexico, the Frozen Revolution] (Raymundo Gleyzer, 1971). In addition to Gleyzer and Sapire, the production team included Humberto Ríos on the camera. María Elena Vera as historical researcher, and the Mexican producer Paul Leduc, who acted as a guide for the team but asked not to be credited for fear of reprisals by his government (Pineda Franco, 2016). The fact they were not Mexicans placed them in a favourable position to make the film (Peña and Vallina, 2000). After being condemned by the Mexican authorities for exposing their strategies of repression and co-option, it received very limited screenings in a few universities and union halls in the country. In Argentina, the film suffered the same fate, but it was shown in the United States, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, Chile and Venezuela, among other countries (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

On their return to Argentina, Gleyzer and Sapire joined the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Workers' Front (FATRAC), the cultural branch of the PRT-ERP.¹ There they met scriptwriter Álvaro Melián and sound engineer Nerio Barberis, and they made productions such as *Swift* (FATRAC, 1971),² consisting of ERP press releases (numbers 5 and 7) on the abduction and revolutionary trial of the British consul Stanley Sylvester, manager of the Swift meat processing plant in Rosario. These militant films with marked TV production

formats countered the hegemonic discourse describing the kidnapping merely as an "incident", characterising it instead as a political strategy to secure worker rights. As will be explored below, such films contributed to the creation of new "common places" (Virno, 2004) in relation to the party's revolutionary politics. Much to the disappointment of its members, the PRT-ERP dissolved FATRAC in 1971, but by this time the connections among the filmmakers had already been established (Peña and Vallina, 2000).

At the end of 1972, the group began filming Los traidores (Cine de la Base, 1973), marking the commencement of the third phase in Gleyzer's filmmaking career (Peña and Vallina, 2000). For the screenplay Gleyzer had the support of Melián and Víctor Proncet, the writer of the short story on which the film was based. This moment was decisive for the establishment of the collective. Los traidores is a fiction film that tells the story of a union boss named Roberto Barrera (based on José Ignacio Rucci) who fakes his own kidnapping in order to win re-election in the National Workers' Confederation. While the film was being made. the Lanusse dictatorship killed 16 political prisoners and injured three others when they attempted to break out of the Rawson prison (Peña and Vallina, 2000). In response, the group produced Ni olvido ni perdón: 1972, la masacre de Trelew [Neither Forget nor Forgive: 1972, The Trelew Massacre] (1972). Due to "the urgent need to counter the official versions, the film is armed with material from the [press] conference, the photos that appeared in the press, the records of the court statements, news footage; in other words, there is practically no original footage" (Escobar, 2007: 7). This would become a regular approach for Cine de la Base. Los traidores was completed in 1973, effectively marking the formation of the group. Initially, its main objective was simply to distribute the new film (García and Bouchet, 2003; De la Puente, 2016). The core of the group was made up of former FATRAC members (Gleyzer, Sapire,

Melián and Barberis), but soon they were joined by friends and supporters, such as Jorge Denti, whom Gleyzer had met in Rome through Giannoni (Ferman, 2010: 5). According to Gleyzer:

Cine de la Base grew a lot after July because the practical experience of the screening of the film began bringing together around the group a lot of people who had the same ideas and the same concerns. So it was the film *Los traidores* that consolidated and strengthened the group a bit. (Cited in Schumann, 1974)

The evolution and growth of Cine de la Base resulted in the expansion of its initial objectives from the distribution of *Los traidores* to the formation of a network of groups in different regions that were engaging not only in the distribution but also in the creation of militant cinema. "The basic premise was that cinema had to go to the people [*la base*] because the people weren't going to the cinema" (Escobar, 2007: 6-7).

# 2. CINE DE LA BASE: INTELLECTUALISM, SPONTANEITY AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION

Despite the repressive context of 1970s Argentina, branches of Cine de la Base were established in different regions. In 1974, Gleyzer spoke of "four groups in Buenos Aires, one in La Plata, and one each in Bahía Blanca, Trelew, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Rosario, Paraná, Corrientes, Chaco" (cited in Schumann, 1974). The groups operated autonomously, with their own projectors and prints of the films produced up to that time, as well as others that had not been made by the collective but that had some degree of political affinity with it.3 Screenings were held every week in community centres and factories, wherever they were accepted. These screenings were initially held openly but subsequently went underground (García and Bouchet, 2003). Alongside the films, Cine de la Base took an interest in other means of disseminating ideas, such as the photonovel, highlighting its constant efforts to

challenge cinematic orthodoxy. The group sought "neither individualism nor art; these are utilitarian films" (cited in Schumann, 1974).

Gleyzer is perhaps the clearest example of an organic intellectual in Cine de la Base because his craft allows him to communicate Marxist ideas and practices absorbed from his family and background (Mor, 2012). He thus constitutes a synthesis of two concepts that Gramsci generally identifies as irreconcilable: the traditional intellectual (a professional man of letters) and the organic intellectual, "the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental-social class" (cited in Hoare and Smith, 1971: 3-4). From Gramsci's perspective, his personal concern with the absence of artistic pretension suggests an awareness that:

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser [...] and not just a simple orator [...] from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains "specialised" and does not become "directive" [dirigente]. (Gramsci, 1971: 10)<sup>4</sup>

When Gleyzer refers to the utilitarian nature of Cine de la Base, he also discusses a range of practices that go hand-in-hand with the production process: discussions of problems, strategies and solutions. The modus operandi of the different cells of the group reflects a horizontal approach, although this does not mean that each member did not contribute according to their particular abilities. As Barberis explains:

I argued a lot with him. We fought a lot about form and content. Whether the telenovela-like structure was right or not. He said very clearly: "I don't give a shit. I want to make a film that is a political tool for raising awareness. If the telenovela format serves better to communicate with people, I'll use it. I want people to realise that there is a bureaucrat and you have to fight against him." [...]. The interesting thing

about an individual like Raymundo is that even if he denied what was sometimes considered a bourgeois deviation—the status of an artist—he was an artist. That's why *Los traidores* is a film that endures. (Cited in García and Bouchet, 2003: 28)

As Mor points out, Gleyzer's forced disappearance in 1976 turned him into the "martyr par excellence" (2012: 72) of the reconstruction of Argentina's film industry after the last military dictatorship. In the act of looking back, there is a temptation to reconstruct the Cine de la Base model according to conventional principles, such as the industrial mode of production, with its assignment of credits and distribution of tasks, its authorial tendencies, etc. Based on the idea of the organic intellectual, what this study seeks to define is Cine de la Base's conscious effort to circumvent the whole range of determining factors associated with the notion of the director and the fact that the result of that effort is precisely what made the group so significant. Cine de la Base never actually had normal production or distribution processes. Many of the films were reworked based on the discussions they generated: scenes were cut, new endings designed,5 and everything came out of the constant debates among members and viewers and the political changes in the unstable context of Argentina in the 1970s. For Barberis, "the leader of the group was Raymundo, but he was not alone; there were other comrades as solid as him politically and ideologically" (cited in García and Bouchet, 2003: 30). Gleyzer expressed the same idea in a letter to Chile Films:

For us, who have never believed in "auteur cinema", it is perfectly clear that all members of a team have the same rights to influence the film. [...] We firmly believe in a creation and production collective, but we have strong doubts about the effectiveness of overlapping tasks. Things are discussed thoroughly until there is agreement, then the work is divided according to what each one knows how to do: this is the healthiest and the most logical approach. (Cited in Peña and Vallina. 2000: 80-81)







Images 1, 2 and 3. Title credits for Swift (Image 1), Los traidores (Images 2 and 3)





Images 4 and 5. Title credits for Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan (Image 4), and Las AAA son las tres armas (Image 5)

Gleyzer was troubled by the notion of authorship because Cine de la Base, despite being made up largely of professional filmmakers, worked differently from the film industry of the time. The group was concerned with production and distribution and with establishing certain work patterns that facilitated the consolidation of the principles of aligned political groups, especially the PRT-ERP. Many of their films at this time do not even have credits, or if they do, they only cite Cine de la Base as the organisation responsible and individuals like Susman, who lived far away from the repressive regime (Images 1-5).

The absence of credits is significant for various reasons. The first is that it was a way to protect the members of the group, as the political environment in Argentina after 1966 was hostile to radical movements. There was a grace period with the return of Peronism to power in 1973, but there was still state terrorism, which intensified during the presidency of Isabel Perón, following the creation of the AAA (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance) (Mor, 2012). A second reason lies in the mode of distribution of the films, with people close to Cine de la Base almost always present at the screenings. Any audience member who really wanted to know who had made the film and what their intentions had been needed only to ask (García and Bouchet, 2003; Schumann, 1974; Ardito and Molina. 2002). A third reason is related to the origins of the credit system in the film industry. The members of Cine de la Base were not paid for their contributions and seemed to have no interest in gaining prestige as artists, nor did they have any intention of using these films to help them find work in the Argentine film industry. Members often repeated the same roles—Sapire and Barberis were generally responsible for sound design, Gleyzer and Denti alternated responsibilities for the directorial and cinematographic work, and Melián wrote the screenplays—but the assignment of pre-production and post-production tasks, for example, was less clearly defined. The absence of credits makes it necessary to search through testimonies, some about the number of groups, others about the number of members at specific moments—Barberis, for example, speaks of up to twenty "people involved in filmmaking" at certain times (García and Bouchet, 2003: 29) in order to identify the contributors.

The core of the group remained unchanged, but the associations between the different members evolved according to the idiosyncrasies of each member and the informal relationships between them (writers like Conti and Galeano and prominent figures in Argentine cinema, such as

Jorge Cedrón, Hugo Álvarez and Octavio Getino, were close to the group). On the other hand, the production seemed to be executed in an extremely organised and dynamic way, "Vietnamese style" (García and Bouchet, 2003: 32). For Los traidores (1973), for example, Gleyzer and Susman orchestrated a smuggling system whereby the film rolls were given to sympathetic Aerolíneas Argentinas pilots to take to the United States, where Susman would develop them and send the release prints back. In this way, the films evaded Argentina's censors (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Documenting these processes is crucial because, as Gramsci points out:

[...] "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history [...]. In the "most spontaneous" movement it is simply the case that the elements of "conscious leadership" cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the "history of the subaltern classes" [...] and consequently it never occurs to them that their history may have any possible importance, that perhaps there would be some value in leaving documentary evidence. (Gramsci,1971: 196)

Cine de la Base sought to generate new spaces of public knowledge, new forms of "common sense". In their films, there is always a certain didactic element, often coming from the participants rather than from the group itself: worker principles, mobilisation through symbols, slogans and ideas intended as "common places" (luoghi comuni) for the multitude, as Paolo Virno calls it, as a unifying feature (Virno, 2004). For Cine de la Base, such common places are still found in class consciousness. Examples can be found in Swift, which establishes this implicit connection between direct action and material outcomes, and in Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan [They'll Kill Me if I Don't Work and if I Work They'll Kill Me] (Cine de la Base, 1974), which assigns considerable importance to the tradition of ollas populares (community kitchens), as a clear example of solidarity and mutual support. Presented in this way, such events are imbued with realism, shown not only as effective strategies but also as points of convergence of the Argentine working class. For the organic intellectual (and here it is worth asking whether this refers only to Gleyzer or to all members of Cinema de la Base), leadership can never be abstract. On this point, Gramsci observes:

This leadership [...] neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, real action, with theoretical disquisition. It applied itself to real men [sic], formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world, etc., which were the result of "spontaneous" combinations of a given situation of material production with the "fortuitous" [...]. This element of "spontaneity" was not neglected and even less despised. It was educated, directed, purged of extraneous contaminations; the aim was to bring it into line with modern theory. (Gramsci, 1971: 198)

In the creation of these new common places through the cinematic medium, what is left obscured is the documentary evidence of the conscious leadership of the group: the sensation of spontaneity was maintained through a mirror game that allows the coexistence of the act of filming with what happens in front of the camera, in the form of an encounter. Some members of Cine de la Base had already learned to do this in *Ceramiqueros de Traslasierra*, which includes a scene where they ask one of the documentary's subjects whether she thinks the film will change her life and she replies "no".

As a constantly changing group of individuals, Cine de la Base adopted a work method that incorporated debate and disagreement, which were never subordinated to the completion of the film. The group understood that internal contradiction was necessary, that it was not a weakness but an asset that was crucial for the development of their task—a guerrilla cinema, "Vietnamese style", in an ongoing dialectical process. Moreover, this methodological structure made it possible to operate in

a swifter and at the same time more resilient way, given that if any of the members left the project, died or disappeared—as would later occur—the spirit of the group would survive in the set of relationships and learning experiences that shaped it.

In Hardt and Negri's concept of "multitude", people resolve internal differences through "the common that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced" (2005: xv). Most members of Cine de la Base were connected by class ties, political alignment and country of origin (the notion of a people), but this model explains the set of informal relations in which the members of the group participated. The common emerged both within the group itself and in the places where its work was distributed, in future militant production and distribution cells, and in participatory film movements—aimed at the multitude. A second key concept proposed by Hardt and Negri is "biopolitical production". Intellectual labour, they observe,

tends through the transformations of the economy to create and be embedded in cooperative and communicative networks. Anyone who works with information and knowledge [...] relies on the common knowledge passed down from others and in turn creates new common knowledge. This is especially true for all labor that creates immaterial projects, including ideas, images, affects, and relationships. We will call this newly dominant model "biopolitical production" [...]. This biopolitical production and its expansion of the common is one strong pillar on which stands the possibility of global democracy today. (Hardt and Negri, 2005: xvi)

The biopolitical production of Cine de la Base was counterhegemonic and on a smaller scale than the multitude. It operated on two levels: the textual level, expanding the vocabulary of the Latin American working class by generating a set of common places and collective reference points (direct action, *ollas populares*, support for revolutionary cells, etc.); and the methodological level,

referring to the set of informal practices that underpinned the project and served as inspiration for many other activist film initiatives long after the group itself had disintegrated. Exile, as will be shown in the following section, played a crucial role in the expansion of this biopolitical production, as did the battle for memory, which counteracted the terrible repression suffered by the members of the group.<sup>6</sup>

By 1975, the situation had become very difficult for members of Cine de la Base. Glevzer took his last holiday, together with Jorge Denti and Eduardo Galeano, and the children of all three. The AAA shut down the Escuela de Cine del Litoral, a film school that had played a key role in Argentine revolutionary cinema. Around this same time, Gleyzer met up with Humberto Ríos, who warned him to leave the country (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Although there were still many who thought the military takeover of 1976 was "just another coup d'etat" in the long series of coups in recent Argentine history (Sabat, 2012), Gleyzer took Ríos's advice and went to the United States to stay with Susan Susman (Bill's daughter), where he secured a contract with UNESCO to make a film in Africa. He then returned to Argentina to be reunited with Sapire and their son, Diego. When his friend the writer Haroldo Conti disappeared, Gleyzer decided to hide out in Denti's house, without telling his family of his whereabouts. On 27 May 1976, Gleyzer was kidnapped outside the Argentine Film Industry Union offices (Ardito and Molina, 2002). The last time he was seen was in the secret detention centre known as El Vesubio, along with Conti (Soberón, 2012). His status as a filmmaker made him a target of reprisals. However, when the kidnappers broke into his home, they left various films behind, suggesting that they were unaware of the nature of his subversive activities. Those films were later recovered (Mor, 2012). Most of Cine de la Base managed to escape to Peru, albeit not with difficulties. From there, they launched a campaign with the support

of the Susmans to petition the US government to pressure the dictatorship to release its political prisoners, but to no apparent effect. Nevertheless, these events would lead to the construction of Gleyzer's image as a martyr. The filmmakers Pablo Szir and Enrique Juárez also disappeared around the same time.

# 3. CINE DE LA BASE IN EXILE: TOWARDS (NOT SO) COMMON PLACES

Less has been written about Cine de la Base after Gleyzer's disappearance. The group's first production during this period was Las AAA son las tres armas [The AAA are the Three Weapons] (Cine de la Base, 1977).7 In 1978, the FIFA World Cup was held in Argentina, an opportunity that the dictatorship exploited in an effort to whitewash its image both domestically and internationally (Wilson, 2016). Using an open letter to the junta written by the then-recently deceased Rodolfo Walsh for the voice-over, Las AAA son las tres armas was yet another exercise in counterhegemonic discourse. As Barberis remarks: "It was shown on Mexican television. it was shown on Italian television... While the World Cup was showing Videla celebrating Argentina's goals, humbly, the group responded" (Ardito and Molina, 2002). Despite being its first film without Gleyzer, the group's style is immediately recognisable in the combination of Walsh's words with various images that reinforce the ironic tone, focusing on humorous moments involving the leaders of the military junta and encouraging the spectator to participate actively in its last scene, showing a group of people sitting in a circle listening to and discussing Walsh's letter openly (although we cannot hear what they are saying). This reflects the common language that continued to exist after Gleyzer's disappearance, as a result of the collective nature of biopolitical production.

Certain visual and methodological motifs make it possible to outline a Cine de la Base style, a difficult task given the disinterest in author-

ship in such movements, the ideological objective of its aesthetic approaches and the tendency to copy successful strategies. A common element in the group's work is the use of parody and acerbic humour. Even Los traidores includes a widely discussed scene that uses both strategies: Barrera's dream about his own funeral, in which the curious personalities who attend it, the elegies they offer, and the exposure of his corpse in a ludicrous spectacle confront him with the absurdity of his legacy. There was considerable debate among Cine de la Base and similar groups about whether this strategy was too risky, whether spectators would understand it and whether it served a useful function in the film or was simply artistic self-indulgence (García and Bouchet, 2003). For Gleyzer, the answer was clear:

The bourgeois always think for the working class [...] [the spectators] laugh a lot at [the dream scene] because it ridicules the enemy. We think that throughout the film there is a very heavy burden of oppression through everything that the union bureaucracy does to the working class [...] it can be counterproductive [...] in mockery lies the basis for understanding that this force, as big as it is [...] can be defeated. (Cited in Schumann, 1974)

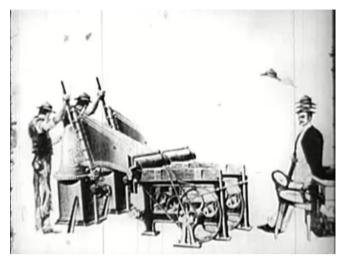
The strategy worked (Mestman, 2008), and its success led Cine de la Base to experiment with comedy in its subsequent films, often combined with the absurd and the use of unrealistic sequences. In Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan, there is a rather didactic explanation of the transition from primitive accumulation to capital accumulation. To make it more appealing while still exposing the internal contradictions of the system, the collective resorts to an animated sequence in which a business owner piles up a ridiculous number of hats on his head, while giving each employee only one as payment for his work. Despite the extreme seriousness of its content, and the example of solemn dignity set by Rodolfo Walsh's letter, in Las AAA son las tres armas the group keeps up the mockery by using editing

strategies with static images; for example, depicting the deposed president, Isabel Perón, giving a fascist salute, and showing the junta generals Videla, Massera and Agosti sniggering while the narrator reads:

[Even without the pretence] that this Junta seeks peace, that General Videla defends human rights, or that Admiral Massera loves life, it would still be worth asking the Commanders-in-Chief of the Three Weapons [i.e., the branches of the military] to meditate on the abyss into which they are leading the country.

By this point, the strategy had transcended Gleyzer's life to become a collective strategy.

A final example worth highlighting comes from a much later film, in partnership with the Cine Sur group, El compa Clodomiro y la economía [Comrade Clodomiro and the Economy] (Cine de la Base and Cine Sur, 1980), an animated short that contextualises the economic reforms implemented by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The short film contains numerous sequences dealing ironically with "what the economy was like in the time of Somoza," but two are particularly striking for the similarity of their humour to Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan and Las AAA son las tres armas, respectively. In the first, a rural worker is calculating the cost of his produce and says to the wholesaler "four times eight, thirty-two", but the wholesaler replies "for me, four times eight isn't thirty-two... One." He deposits a single coin into the worker's hand and leaves in his van to go meet an exporter. When he gets there, he announces: "four times eight, thirty-two." The exporter gives him a bag of money and takes the produce. The sequence continues with an assembly line very similar to the one for the hats in Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan, where workers insert chickens and extract eggs and, finally, jars of mayonnaise. Once again, the business owner takes the products and deposits a single coin into the hands of each operator (Images 6 and 7). The second example is much more fleeting: when both





Images 6 and 7. Still-frames from Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan (Image 6) and El compa Clodomiro y la economía (Image 7), showing analogous jokes

business owners bring the goods to the port, they meet Somoza, who oversees the exports to the United States. In a lap dissolve between two images, Somoza reveals vampire fangs.

Of course, Cine de la Base did not invent political caricature. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of these films reveals a degree of exchange between groups, accelerated by the rejection of "bourgeois art", i.e., of a claim to originality or authorship of certain cinematic techniques. Such practices are not limited to militant cinema (much has been written about the use of intertextual allusions by Martin Scorsese or Quentin Tarantino), but the renunciation of aesthetic-economic

control over certain motifs and ideas facilitates their adoption by others, as well as the generation of certain common places that are extraordinarily useful for militancy, particularly in exile. The image of the business owner obtaining large quantities of products in exchange for a meagre compensation for the workers effectively condenses whole pages of Marxist literature



Image 8. Dedication to Raymundo Gleyzer in Malvinas: historia de traiciones (1984)

into a clear and accessible message. It is not just a way of saying "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer", as the motif also alludes to notions of class (who owns the machines and who operates them?), the logic of capitalism (why does the business owner want so many hats?) and justice (how can four times eight equal one?).

While the group reproduces its biopolitical production, it also protects its members from reprisals. Forced disappearance and exile were not enough to silence them. Undeniably, the loss of affective bonds left an irreparable vacuum, evident in elegies (Birri, 2003) and dedications post-1976 (Image 8). In a way, grief itself was a common place, first for those who knew Gleyzer (Birri and Bouchet, 2003; Ferman, 2010; García and Bouchet, 2003; Ardito and Molina, 2002; Sabat, 2012), and then for the various identities he influenced—Argentina, militant cinema, Latin America, and many others (Foster, 2011; López Marsano, 2018; West, 2019).

The canonization of Raymundo Gleyzer would draw the attention of later collectives, perpetuating the group's legacy. Examples can be found in the community filmmaking movements established since the 1970s that have taken militant cinema as a direct inspiration, coming to

understand it as a link in their genealogical history. Community films can be defined as productions made by "an organised community with sufficient capacity to make decisions about the modes of production and distribution, which takes part in every stage" (Gumucio Dagron, 2014: 11). This logic of collaborative horizontal production inherited many of its character-

istics from collectives such as Cine de la Base. which community filmmakers often identify as a direct inspiration due to its approach to communities and its depictions of them, which always eschewed biased images and sought to offer views of social groups traditionally excluded from film production (Fernández de Llanos, 2016; Gumucio Dagron, 2014; Wolanski, Grünbaum et al., 2023). In fact, Gleyzer had considered the possibility of carrying out a joint project with Jorge Sanjinés, one of the most prominent exponents of community cinema, as he considered that the filmmaker shared his "Guevarist objective of expanding the revolution as a process of national liberation to the entire subcontinent [of Latin America] and preventing the revolutionary processes from being interrupted or halted" (Pineda Franco, 2016: 104). In the 1970s, Sanjinés began working on films with local communities, who starred in the films and held decision-making power over their own representation, a modus operandi far removed from the norms of auteur cinema (Sanjinés, 1979). The community film tradition continues today, having become a popular tool of creativity and self-representation for communities of all kinds.

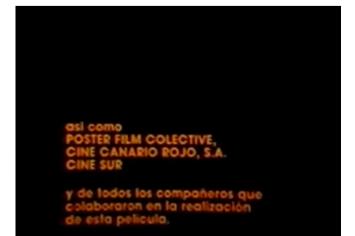
As its collaboration with Cine Sur reflects, the disintegration of Cine de la Base facilitated



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SE OGROGECE la colaboración de:
ORTOLF KARLA, EDMUNDO PALACIOS,
ANA DEL RIO, LEOPOLDO NACHT, NORL
CHANAN, MARTA SILSER ANA SKALON,
DUNCAN SMITH, GREGORIO SELSER
JUANA SAPIRE, CARLOS G MORANTES



Images 9 to 12. Selected title credits from Malvinas: historia de traiciones, naming core members of Cine de la Base, as well as the collaboration of associated groups

the distribution of its biopolitical production to different parts of Latin America. Although they were not always credited as such, members like Denti and Barberis continued to make films that drew on their experience with Cine de la Base in terms of politics and methodology (Peña and Vallina, 2000). They moved mainly between Mexico and Nicaragua, supporting the Sandinista revolution and making short films such as *País Verde y Herido* [Green and Wounded Land] (Cine de la Base, 1979), a film featuring the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti that deals with the issue of exile using a series of familiar techniques, such as animation, caricature and excerpts from archival footage.

In 1984, the group produced its last film, Malvinas: historia de traiciones [Malvinas: A History of Betrayals], taking up Gleyzer's ideas and the footage he had taken in 1966 and contrasting them with the Falklands War of 1982 and the collapse of Argentina's last military junta. Once again, the group went beyond the immediately apparent to offer an analysis that takes into account the movement of capital, primitive accumulation, the parcelling of land, geopolitical dynamics, and the collusion of both sides (Margaret Thatcher's Britain and the junta) with US expansionism. It also places a notable emphasis on international class solidarity, without forgetting the power imbalance between the two nations. Most importantly, the film uses the Falklands/Malvinas as a starting point for an interrogation of the decade of military dictatorship, a call for accountability for the disappeared, a tribute to Gleyzer (to whom the film is dedicated), and a discussion of the underground trade union organisation, among other things.8 Finally, it constituted an effort to address the legacy left by the members of Cine de la Base, this time named in the credits, in a significant departure from the norm described above (Images 9 to 12). As of the moment of the film's release, the group was disbanded. Barberis offers the following reasoning: "At that point, we said: 'Cine de la Base, as an element of cultural resistance from the outside no longer made sense.' We were living abroad [in exile], and we said: 'From outside [Argentina], there is nothing more to say. We speak from the inside and if we're not inside we don't speak" (quoted in García and Bouchet, 2003: 33).

# 4. CONCLUSION: CINE DE LA BASE'S OTHER LIVES

The group's disbandment coincided with the aftermath of the last military dictatorship, the establishment of new avenues for documenting what had happened, such as the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), and the progressive restoration of the Argentine film industry. This raises the question of whether the end of the dictatorship somehow halted the productive process necessary to support the revolutionary initiative of Cine de la Base. The answer is complicated. On the one hand, by the time the group ceased to exist, many of Argentina's revolutionary networks had been torn apart by repression. On the other hand, Cine de la Base persisted in a sense, with celebrations of Gleyzer's life and work within the collective (retrospectives, restorations and his canonisation in Argentine film history). However, perhaps the group's real productive legacy has been its status as a precursor, influence and model, with its biopolitical production of methodologies for countless militant and collaborative filmmaking initiatives. While the significance of the group can be identified primarily in the footage that has been researched, acclaimed and rescued, equally important is the shared intellectual legacy that enables us to understand militant cinema as an urgent, horizontally organised commitment to the pursuit of vital projects in contexts of extreme repression. ■

# **NOTES**

- 1 The Workers' Revolutionary Party's and the People's Revolutionary Army, respectively. Both were non-Peronist Marxist revolutionary groups. In an amicable breakup, Ríos and Vera joined a different but analogous group that adhered to the tenets of revolutionary Peronism (Peña and Vallina, 2000).
- 2 As will be discussed later in the article, based on their experience in FATRAC, and especially in Cine de la Base, Gleyzer and other members reconsidered the authorship of these films as collective works. It therefore seems more consistent with the argument put forward here to use the names of the groups rather than the names of the individual members responsible for their direction (which in any case was often shared or undefined).
- 3 For example, *Operación Masacre* (1973) by the Peronist filmmaker Jorge Cedrón.
- 4 Gramsci's ideas circulated openly in Argentina thanks to publications of his work such as those that appeared in *Pasado y Presente*, which was widely read and discussed by revolutionaries of the time (Mor, 2012). Gleyzer knew Gramsci (Peña and Vallina, 2000), and his ideas are clearly evident in Cine de la Base's commitment to countering the hegemonic discourse and its concern with the relationship between the intellectual and the working class.
- 5 An example of a deleted scene can be heard in an interview when Gleyzer himself asks Schumann to take a re-edited negative to Berlin (Schumann, 1974). The ending to *Los traidores* was particularly problematic (Mestman, 2008). Barberis refers to an unrealised intention to shoot an epilogue to explain the structural nature of the issue presented (García and Bouchet, 2003).
- 6 A methodological note: this perspective allows for a somewhat less orthodox approach to understanding Cinema de la Base in exile. Throughout various configurations of its production and distribution teams and partnerships with other groups, the one constant was precisely this whole series of learning experiences—biopolitical production—that emerged from the

- set of practices of the group itself. Although this in no way means that no effort should be made to map out where each of the members was or what role each one played in the making of each film, Cine de la Base's methodology is the central focus here, which allows a certain distance to be be taken to understand its production in terms of the function that the group gave it, instead of trying to interpret it according to the principles of authorship which the collective rejected.
- 7 Some sources suggest that it was first screened in 1979, but this seems unlikely. Walsh's letter is from early 1977 (just before disappearing) and Denti (1988) dates the film as 1977. "The Three Weapons" in the title refers to the army, the navy and the air force.
- 8 It should be noted that at that time the report by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, titled *Nunca más* (CONADEP, 2011) had not yet been published. CONADEP presented part of the results of the report on television in July 1984 (Crenzel, 2008). The full report would be published on September 20, 1984 (CONADEP, 2011), while *Malvinas: historia de traiciones* had its first screening on 3 April 1984 in Mexico.
- 9 This is the process that Jessica Stites Mor describes as "transitional" (Mor, 2012: 11).

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# "HUMBLY, THE GROUP RESPONDED": ORGANIC INTELLECTUALISM, EXILE AND BIOPOLITICAL PRODUCTION IN THE CINE DE LA BASE FILM COLLECTIVE

# **Abstract**

Classifying the production of militant film collectives and making sense of their work methods poses a number of challenges. Certain historiographical approaches tend to privilege authorial figures directors, screenwriters-over the multidirectional and horizontal connections established between organic, technical and militant intellectuals. This article uses a case study of Raymundo Gleyzer and his time with the Cine de la Base collective to highlight the productive dynamics, ways of understanding filmmaking, and strategies of resilience of such groups. Drawing on autonomist theory, the study suggests that these collectives generate a twofold biopolitical production expressed both in the creation of common places in the communities where their productions are shown and in the dissemination of a set of methods that could serve as a structure for future militant and/or collaborative film experiments. The analysis is divided into three parts, exploring the initially authorial role of Gleyzer, the establishment of new creative dynamics in Cine de la Base, and the way the group reacted after the forced disappearance or exile of its members. It is argued here that such strategies afford a surprising malleability, even in conditions of extreme repression.

# Key words

Cine de la Base; Raymundo Gleyzer; Biopolitical Production; Organic Intellectual; Exile; Common places; Militant Cinema.

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# «HUMILDEMENTE, EL GRUPO RESPONDÍA»: INTELECTUAL ORGÁNICO, EXILIO Y PRODUCCIÓN BIOPOLÍTICA EN EL CINE DE LA BASE

### Resumen

Los colectivos de cine militante presentan desafíos a la hora de catalogar su producción y entender sus metodologías de trabajo. Ciertas aproximaciones historiográficas tienden a privilegiar figuras autorales -directores, guionistas- por encima de las conexiones multidireccionales y horizontales que se establecen entre intelectuales orgánicos, técnicos y militantes. En este artículo, utilizamos el estudio de caso de Raymundo Gleyzer y su paso por Cine de la Base para poner en relieve dinámicas productivas, maneras de entender la labor cinematográfica y estrategias de resiliencia de estos colectivos. Apoyándonos en la teoría autonomista, sugerimos que estos grupos generan una producción biopolítica doble, que se manifiesta tanto en la generación de lugares comunes en las comunidades en las que circula su producción como en la propagación de una serie de metodologías que sirven de estructura para futuros experimentos de cine militantes y/o colaborativos. Dividimos el discurso en tres partes, que trazan la figura inicialmente autoral de Glevzer, el establecimiento de nuevas dinámicas creativas en el grupo Cine de la Base y la manera en que el grupo reacciona tras la desaparición forzosa y el exilio de sus integrantes. Proponemos que dichas estrategias permiten una maleabilidad sorprendente, incluso en condiciones de represión extrema.

# Palabras clave

Cine de la Base; Raymundo Gleyzer; producción biopolítica; intelectual orgánico; exilio; lugares comunes; cine militante.

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# REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), AN EXERCISE IN MEMORY FROM AN EXILE PERSPECTIVE

PABLO CALVO DE CASTRO MARÍA MARCOS RAMOS

The New Latin American Cinema developed in a context of social upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s, when the "rise of military dictatorships in almost every country in the region resulted in persecution and censorship and forced many filmmakers to go into hiding or exile, if they were able to avoid being abducted or killed" (Gumucio Dagron, 2014: 26). Working in a context of repression, but also with very limited resources, these filmmakers were notable for "the formal and expressive audacity of their very different films" (Ortega Gálvez and García Díaz ,2008: 79), with the documentary form being given a hegemonic role. Filmmakers thus went out "with their cameras to capture everyday social reality, using an artisanal, flexible, low-budget form of filmmaking" (King, 2000: 69), a description of relevance to the film analysed in this study. Much of the New Latin American Cinema was produced, as Schroeder Rodríguez points out, "in two successive but not mutually exclusive phases" (2011: 11). The first phase was characterised by a militant approach that predominated in the 1960s. During this period, many filmmakers understood their work as an essential part of a broader project of political, social and cultural emancipation. The second phase, identified as a Neo-Baroque phase, encompassed the 1970s and 1980s. In this period, many of the filmmakers of the first stage, as well as a number of new emergent directors, sought to transform the militancy into a pluralist discourse, identifying with civil society in opposition to the authoritarian regimes that controlled so much of the region.

In this second stage the New Latin American Cinema was characterised by the use of a Neo-Baroque style to represent a discourse of the una-

ligned—and therefore invisible—masses. Just as a set of theoretical principles developed by the main exponents of this movement were important to the first stage, in this second period works such as Fernando Birri's Por un cine cósmico, delirante y lumpen [For a Cosmic, Raving and Lumpen Cinema] (1978), Glauber Rocha's Eztetyka do sonho [The Dream Aesthetic] (1971), Jorge Sanjinés's El plano secuencia integral [The Integral Sequence Shot] (1989), and Raúl Ruíz's Poética del cine [Poetics of Cinema] (1995) were offered as manifestos reflecting the movement's transition from militancy to the neo-Baroque not just in practice but in theory as well.

In Argentina, this phenomenon developed along two lines defined by the political affiliations and theoretical premises of their respective ideologies. One was represented by the Cine de la Base collective, which focused on the workers' struggle, while the other was led by the Cine Liberación group, with Octavio Getino, Fernando Solanas and subsequently Gerardo Vallejo, whose documentaries offered reflections associated with a broader conception of society.

It was *The Hour of the Furnaces* (La hora de los hornos, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968) that gave rise to "a new conception of cinema, which, after the film's screening and the political events that marked the end of the decade, would be expanded and consolidated in the early 1970s" (Halperin, 2004: 13). It was a foundational film in the history of Argentine documentary cinema, but it was also a work that systematised a particular form of storytelling, turning it into "a cultural artifact with the purpose of raising awareness about the political situation in Argentina and Latin America" (Halperin, 2004: 17).

The Cine Liberación group coined the term *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema) to describe its films, recognising that "it was the content of the Argentine reality of the late 1960s that defined the content and the specific form of a film production and its corresponding theoretical expression" (Ge-

tino, 1979: 3). It was established as an inherently political collective, with an orientation informed by the convergence of socialism and early Peronism, evolving towards what came to be known as revolutionary Peronism, associated with urban working-class militancy. Juan Perón would be an increasingly recurring figure in the group's work, making an explicit appearance in Actualización política y doctrinaria [Political and Doctrinal Renewal] (Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1971), a film clearly addressing the Peronist movement that radicalises many of the ideas previously addressed in The Hour of the Furnaces. The contradictions in Cine Liberación's political principles are evident, and this would lead to their becoming somewhat ambiguous in the mid-1970s, although the myth of Peronism would continue to be extolled for decades, as exemplified in Leonardo Flavio's Perón, sinfonía del sentimiento [Perón, A Symphony of Feeling] (1999), although it might equally be criticised, as Raymundo Gleyzer did in Los Traidores (1973).

# **GERARDO VALLEJO**

Gerardo Vallejo (b. Tucumán, Argentina, 1942-2007) was a prominent figure in the movement known as the New Latin American Cinema, on a level with filmmakers as celebrated as the Brazilian Nelson Pereira dos Santos, the Argentine Fernando Birri, the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés, and the Cubans Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa. Although their films deal with a wide range of themes, they were all influenced by "the French New Wave. Italian neorealism, the British Free Cinema movement, Germany's Neuer Deutscher Film, and the New Spanish Cinema that emerged after the Salamanca Conversations in 1955" (Pérez Murillo, 2023). In addition to drawing inspiration from the same film movements, the films of this movement are all realist works made for the purpose of protest, especially against social injustices.

Vallejo's career in cinema encompassed many roles, as he worked as a director, screenwriter, actor and producer in both documentaries and fiction films in Argentina. Beginning with his directorial début in 1968 with El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales [Viejo Reales' Long Way Journey to Death], he developed a filmography characterised by political militancy and an identification with social causes. His work can be divided into three distinct periods. The first, from 1965 to 1968. is notable for his affiliation with the Santa Fe documentary school founded by Fernando Birri in 1956, reflected in works such as Las cosas ciertas [True Things] (1965) and Olla popular [Community Kitchen] (1968), which exhibit his own unique approach to auteur cinema and a markedly political dimension typical of the first period of the New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s. The second. covering the ten years that followed, began with El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales (1968-1971) and ended with Reflexiones de un salvaje [Reflections of a Savagel (1978) (Image 1). His films during this period maintain a connection with auteur and protest cinema but also reflect a stronger leaning towards less purely militant styles. The third phase, from the 1980s onwards, includes films such as The Sternness of Fate (El rigor del destino, 1985) and Con el alma [With the Soul] (1993-1994), which incorporate certain distinctive elements of post-dictatorial Argentine cinema such as "nostalgia, dread, supposedly naturalist dialogue and a more classical editing structure with flashbacks and retrospective narration" (Rodríguez Marino, 2013: 64) (Image 1).

The life and political activity of Gerardo Vallejo left a profound mark on his filmography. When he became a target of the paramilitary organisation AAA (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance), also known as the "Triple A", Vallejo was forced into exile in Panama in 1974. Years later, the persistent threat posed by the Argentine military dictatorship compelled him to leave his country again, this time seeking refuge in Spain, the



Image I. A moment from the film Reflexiones de un salvaje

homeland of his grandparents. Once settled in Spain, in 1979 he founded a recognised film school in Madrid, which attracted more than 150 students during the three years it was operational. After the return of democracy in Argentina, he chose to return home, where he remained until his death in February 2007.

#### REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (1978)

Once settled in Spain, Vallejo took a trip to Cespedosa de Tormes, a hamlet in the province of Salamanca that had been the home village of his grandfather, who emigrated to South America in the early 20th century. Upon arriving there in 1978, Vallejo decided to make the documentary film *Reflexiones de un salvaje* as a way of coming to terms with his past. In his own words, he sought to "understand that my exile had not begun with myself; it had started much earlier, with my grandfather, a shepherd [...] who decided to escape poverty and move to the Americas" (Vallejo, 1984: 220). The film begins with a voice-over provided by the director himself, explaining his reasons for making it:

A dream, when I was a child, gave me the image of the grandfather I had never met and, for the first time, the caress of his peasant hand. In my childhood fantasy, that dream reconstructed a portrait

that I could never forget. With my eyes and my Latin American soul, I discovered that far-off Spain that my grandfather had one day been forced to leave behind. Perhaps that is why I have always wanted to learn about that past and to search in the Spain of today for the factors that led him to emigrate. Now dream and reality blend together. What I had never imagined was that one day, like him. I would have to leave the land where I was born, and experience life as an emigrant like he did, right here, in the same country he left so long ago. Everything blends together, stories, anecdotes, landscapes, war, in a chain of sorrows and long-forgotten tears that are my roots, in this Spanish town, Cespedosa de Tormes, where my grandfather was born.

The main reason for Gerardo Vallejo's decision to return to his grandfather's village and

make a documentary there was to comprehend the motivations and social, political and economic conditions that made him leave Cespedosa de Tormes and emigrate to Argentina. The documentary identifies the main reason for his emigration as the difficult economic conditions in Spain in 1910, which had made living off the land (the main source of income in the region) an unfeasible option. This precarious situation not only prompted his grandfather to seek a better life in another country but also led thousands of other Spaniards to make the same decision. Along with the issue of economic migration, the documentary also considers the exodus that occurred for political reasons a few decades later in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, another subject explored in the film. Vallejo also "attempts to discern, amidst the apparent squalor of the houses and dirt roads, the true identity of a village steeped in a past that seems to belong to no one, which he, in a way, has inherited" (Parés, 2010) (Images 2 and 3).

By talking about his grandfather's absence in his hometown, and about the need that compelled him to leave it behind and move to another country on a different continent, Vallejo is able to allude, if only metaphorically, to his own situation as an exile. This theme is evident in the sequences where a child is depicted walking through the fields in the Argentine province of Tucumán, which in reality represent the fields of Cespedosa. This boy, who listened to his grandfather's stories about his village and his country, visualises the stories he was told. Vallejo reconstructs the memories by creating a narrative in a land that is at once alien and familiar to him, a place to which he himself has now been forced to come. much like his grandfather had been forced to go to Tucumán.

Images 2 and 3. A moment from the film Reflexiones de un salvaje





The documentary reflects the filmmaker's desire to explore the exile experience without making explicit reference to it. This absence of references to his own situation—and by extension, to the situation in Argentina—effectively turns all exile into a universal experience. In this sense, "Vallejo's interest lies not in reflecting on Perón, Videla, political violence or resistance in exile, but in considering the exile's condition in general and almost metaphysical terms by delving into his own family's history of displacements" (Campo, 2012: 8).

Vallejo's trip to Spain arose from an urgent need to leave his country due to the political situation there. His inability to return to Argentina was effectively a banishment, as going back would have meant endangering his freedom and even his life. For Vallejo, exile is "a time lapse between Argentina and Spain, between the Republican struggle of '36 and the revolutionary struggle in Latin America. It is also an experience that constitutes the temporalisation of space and the difference of narrating a simple journey, which spatialises time" (Rodríguez Marino, 2013: 70).

In the film, emigration and exile are intertwined to tell the same story: expulsion from a territory, a life, a time and a space. For Vallejo's grandfather, this expulsion, although voluntary, was at the same time forced by economic need, which meets the definition of emigration. For Vallejo, it is both involuntary and forced, the product of political factors that define it as exile. However, in Reflexiones de un salvaje, these two experiences are depicted similarly through the representation of absence. An emblematic example of this is the sequence where one person dictates a letter to another in Tucumán, which is later read by a third person in Cespedosa. This segment, highly original in its conception, reveals a discourse on different levels and uses parallel editing between Spain and Tucumán. One person expresses ideas, and another transforms them into eloquent sentences, so that finally a third party can read them to the person concerned. Beyond accurately reflecting the reality of emigration to the Americas at the beginning of the last century, this unit of action stands out for the originality of its mise-enscène and editing.

The director makes several comparisons between Europe and Latin America at significant moments in the documentary, such as the scene showing Cespedosa's few children marching through the village in a protest demanding improvements to their school. Although the location is clearly identified in the film, it does not have a regionalist focus. Vallejo uses the story of Cespedosa to reflect on the history of Spain, in the same way that he uses Tucumán to expand his reflections on it to the whole of Argentina.

Vallejo uses the testimonies of Cespedosa's residents to tell his own story through the voices of others. The film's title also reveals a comparative objective, as the word *salvaje* ("savage") refers both to the Argentine exile forced to live in Spain and to a Spaniard hunted by Franco's troops who is forced to live in the wild like a hermit, or almost like a savage, a concept also mentioned in the film.

### SELF-REFERENTIALITY OR FILMIC REFLEXIVITY

Vallejo takes an active leading role in *Reflexiones* de un salvaje, giving the film a subjective, self-referential quality. The lack of an autobiographical dimension was identified as a shortcoming of militant political cinema by Birri, who praised Vallejo for his use of it in a letter he sent to the filmmaker (Vallejo, 1984).

The inclusion of an autobiographical element has only recently begun to be consolidated in documentary film due to the objective character originally associated with the genre, which has grown in maturity thanks to this addition. In Latin American documentary cinema, it took time for the value of self-reflexive and self-referential documentaries to be fully recognised. According





Images 4 and 5. A moment from the film Reflexiones de un salvaje

to Ruffinelli (2010), one of the reasons for this may have been that the interests of the collective were always prioritised over the individual in the past when filmmakers sought to explore certain themes and present those explorations in a film. This perspective was associated with the notion that history is shaped by the masses rather than by individuals, in a context marked by the intense social changes and active militancy that characterised Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although she is not referring specifically to documentary cinema, Leonor Arfuch (2002) discusses multiplicity in stories, which may be told in different ways, in different registers and with different co-authors, such as in conversations, life stories, interviews or psychoanalytic relationships. This multiplicity, also identifiable in *Reflexiones de un salvaje* in the different roles adopted by Vallejo, helps construct a recognisable framework of its own, albeit one that can only be defined in relational terms: I am in a sense here in relation to certain others who are different and external to me (Images 4 and 5).

From the 1980s onwards, self-referentiality, especially in documentary films related to memory, began being consolidated with the presence of the director, although using different narrative strategies that lean toward narration and the need to negotiate identities between the subject of what

is being enunciated (the other) and the enunciating subject (the narrator). New relationships were established between what was traditionally understood as the subject and the object (the other), and also between these two and the receiver, i.e., the new audience (Ruffinelli, 2010: 77).

Ruffinelli establishes four categories of the use of referentiality in Latin American documentary cinema. The first is "diary" cinema or the personal diary. The second is characterised by a personal gaze on the family. The third involves a retrospective exploration with the aim of emotional reconciliation, working in the present but investigating the past. And the fourth category is comprised of investigative documentaries that constitute investigations in themselves, raising questions about social issues based on an exploration of personal or family matters. Vallejo's film could be placed in the third of these categories, as it is essentially a retrospective inquiry that investigates the past now in the present in an effort to come to emotional terms with that past (Ruffinelli, 2010: 69). Indeed, Reflexiones de un salvaje is a prime example of this category, because the director declares his intention right from the outset in the opening voice-over: to reconstruct and investigate the past in order to understand the present.

Vallejo makes use of one of the most common narrative strategies to highlight the self-referen-

tial nature of this film: the voice-over. In this case, the voice is his own, a choice that accentuates the documentary's self-referential character and distances it from any notion of supposed objectivity, as what is narrated is simply Vallejo's personal experience. Everything we learn is presented to us from his perspective—represented by the camera—and with his voice, which acts as a vehicle both for the story and for the images. Vallejo's voice plays a leading role in the scenes depicting his childhood in Tucumán, where we see a child walking over the hills of the region holding his grandfather's hand, thus evoking the past.

There is a high level of symbolism in the documentary in the self-referential strategies, which are conveyed on two levels: a micro-level and a macro-level. On the micro-level, Vallejo describes his own experience of exile, the search for his grandfather and the stories of his relatives and other villagers of Cespedosa de Tormes. On the macro-level, running through the subtext but also dealt with explicitly at certain moments, Vallejo touches on issues of repression and exile in relation to both the Spanish Civil War and the Argentine dictatorship. He also discusses poverty and uses the image of Cespedosa as an analogy for Spain. The Spanish village is presented as a bleak place, almost like a graveyard, with narrow winding streets, dilapidated houses and hungry inhabitants, as reflected in a sequence showing food rations being distributed to the villagers. This Spain is populated with mournful, disheartened characters, such as the woman who appears throughout the film praying, weeping and enduring hardships in a country that has just emerged from a dictatorship that is still keenly remembered. This is also made clear in the figure of the old Spanish Republican who crosses a battlefield strewn with the bodies of victims of the Franco regime's repression; this sequence is particularly striking and remarkable given that it was filmed in 1978, just three years after Franco's death, when the dictatorship's violent past was still a very sensitive topic.

The main element used by Vallejo to address the issue of political exile is the voice-over, which turns the director into the narrative guide. Through interviews with Cespedosa's residents and personal testimonies, the story acquires a uniquely personal quality, establishing "early on an autobiographical pact of veracity with the spectator, personalising a retrospective story and establishing a unity between narrator, character and author" (Piedras, 2012: 41).

Reflexiones de un salvaje not only tells the story of Vallejo's exile and his grandfather's emigration but also uses these stories as a starting point for a broader narrative. In this way, the documentary delves into other cases of exile and emigration, extending its scope to explore similar experiences of other Spanish immigrants who were forced to leave their homeland in search of a better life, fleeing the hardship they had faced in Spain. The documentary thus offers a broader reflection on the causes and consequences of exile and emigration, revealing the universal nature of these experiences and their impacts on people's lives.

On the other hand, Vallejo does not date his story, avoiding the use of visual or audio deictic cues while also maintaining a kind of spatial indeterminacy. The absence of time references is combined with a homogeneous mise-en-scène to reinforce a sense of continuity, with the lighting and scenery barely changing throughout the documentary. Even Vallejo's clothing—brown coat, black trousers and a beige hat—remains the same in every sequence, contributing to the idea of time suspended, as if nothing ever changed and the story was unfolding in a continuous present. The rhythmic and visual elements contribute to the narrative seamlessness using continuity editing.

Using various narrative techniques to make his presence felt in the film, such as his on-screen presence as an interviewer and his participation as narrator through his voice-over, Vallejo acknowledges his subjectivity as a filmmaker and participant in the process of creating the documentary,

facilitating a more complex and nuanced exploration of the issues. Furthermore, his inclusion as a character reinforces the subjectivity of the work. as in addition to being audible in the voice-over he is also the subject making the film, as well as the object presented in it. This new style of documentary, which was consolidated in the mid-1980s, reformulates the conceptions of subject and language that predominated in classical cinema. Like other directors in the new wave of "post-documentaries", Vallejo reinvents the author's role "as a subject who expresses a worldview and a personal poetry through the cinematic discourse" (Piedras, 2012). In this way, "by calling attention to filmic mediation, reflexive films subvert the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication, a window on the world, a mirror promenading down a highway" (Stam, 2000: 151). These films question not only the role of the author but also the functionality of referential language itself, freeing it "from its false identification with the phenomenal world and from its assumed authority as a means of cognition about the world" (Minh-ha, 1991: 31).

Vallejo tells his story not only through his voice-over but also through the testimonies of the villagers, who are given a voice in the interviews included in the film. Although he is present in these conversations, Vallejo listens to the stories the locals tell him with minimal interruptions. This gives them the opportunity to express themselves, but the story is still Vallejo's, as he uses their experiences and concerns to tell his own. He thus interweaves his own narrative with the voices of the community, creating a story that reflects both his personal experience and the experiences of those he encounters there. Through the interviews, the villagers reconstruct stories of the past that have been told so many times that it is difficult to distinguish the reality in them from the invention. These reconstructions constitute one of the greatest achievements of the film, as reflected in the long sequence that ends the documentary, where the villagers recreate an event that occurred in 1917: a public uprising after the murder of Manuel Vallejo, the filmmaker's grandfather, at the hands of a landowner for gathering firewood on his land. In a spontaneous reaction, the people rose up and stormed the landowner's property, forcing him to leave the village and sell his land to the municipality at a reduced price. This story, repeated so often by the people of Cespedosa, was filmed by Vallejo without apparent scripting. The villagers move in and out of the shot, reenacting a story they have heard many times. In the performance, "there is no control over their actions, because their actions are true. And they are true because they really happened, and in each one's mind, that story has been imagined hundreds of times" (Parés, 2010). The villagers reenact other stories in addition to this one, such as the death of a teacher who lived for seventeen years in the wild hiding from the Francoist authorities. Through these reenactments and the villagers' testimonies, Vallejo catches glimpses of the hidden truth of Cespedosa, passed down from generation to generation.

The director sets the pace of the film based on his own exploration of the village and the surrounding countryside. The interruption of the narration with scenes seemingly disconnected from the main story is a notable feature of the film: examples include images of a smelter ablaze and a blacksmith working and footage of the lynching of a peasant. These interruptions may seem strange at first, but they actually add layers of meaning to the main narrative.

The alternation of two sequences showing pigs in a slaughterhouse and the killing of peasants is reminiscent of the segment in Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (Stachka, 1925) where images of the massacre of workers by Tsarist forces are cross-cut with footage of cattle being slaughtered. Eisenstein's film, famous for its use of intellectual montage, served as inspiration for Vallejo, who also uses visual metaphors for narrative purposes.

In Reflexiones de un salvaje, this montage creates a regular thematic rhythm that alternates between the memory of life in the countryside—referring to a historical time—and the present context of interviews in his grandfather's village in Spain. The alternation of temporal rhythms serves not only to contrast the two contexts but also to highlight the connection between violence in history and exploitation in contemporary times. The brutality of the slaughterhouse is interwoven with the oppression of the working classes, thereby highlighting the persistence of injustice over time. This editing technique vests the film with an aesthetic complexity that in turn serves to enrich its social and political commentary on the cyclical nature of human oppression and suffering. Like Eisenstein, Vallejo makes the montage clear in certain scenes by using shots of short duration, framing, rhythmic montage, parallel sequences, etc.

For Vallejo, past and present are inseparably intertwined. His grandfather's experience of being forced to leave his homeland resonates in his own life. The director presents a stagnant time in which life is viewed as an interminable burden, and the passage of time is experienced as an endless waiting. This feeling is reinforced by the depiction of Cespedosa, a village frozen in time, whose residents are all old, with the exception of the schoolchildren shown briefly in one sequence. Only for one short moment does Vallejo leave this static setting to show the hustle and bustle of life in Madrid. This contrast between the rural village and the cosmopolitan capital suggests that the only way for young people to find a future is to leave the country behind and move to the city. The filmmaker seems to be hinting that all the opportunities for a good life are found in urban centres, while little villages like Cespedosa offer no more than a stagnant past and a limited future. The contrast between the rural and the urban underscores the idea that progress and development are only possible outside the confines of one's hometown.

Pierre Nora (1989) uses the term lieux de mémoire ("realms of memory") to refer to sites or territories where memory crystallises through remnants of human experience that belong to an inaccessible past. Cespedosa is for Vallejo a lieu de mémoire because it was his contact with this place in the province of Salamanca that inspired his documentary about exile from Argentina. According to Nora (1989), memory functions as a repository of experiences about the past whose common nexus is not so much the existence of sites to which we attribute a symbolic value as the presence of social or cultural links or rituals that connect people. Nora's concept is essentially cinematic in the sense that cinema provides access to these remembered experiences and gives them an audiovisual form outside the sealed container of individual memory. Reflexiones de un salvaje is thus a documentary that reclaims the memory and makes it universal, as it has the character of a dialectical and metafictional reflection in which the image represents the filmmaker's gaze and memory underpins everything that is filmed and subsequently resignified through the editing process.

Moreover, Vallejo vindicates the role of cinema as a medium capable of embalming memory (Mitry, 1997), as he captures the present moment, reflecting on the role of the image as a mirror of the fleeting nature of our memory, as the embalmer of reality described by Bazin (1990). Providing audiovisual narrative forms with new functions beyond mere capture and representation is an avant-garde practice that serves to question the dominant modes of representation (Drummond, 1979: 13). Thus, for Vallejo, memory is a nostalgic way of reconstructing his personal history by revisiting sites of the past and reinterpreting them. Vallejo reconstructs his memories through the spatial dimension, in an exercise that encompasses two meaningful locations: Cespedosa and Tucumán. These sites have a duality that reflects both their individual and their collective nature. as Nora points out, as they are part of Vallejo's

#### VALLEJO RECONSTRUCTS HIS MEMORIES THROUGH THE SPATIAL DIMENSION, IN AN EXERCISE THAT ENCOMPASSES TWO MEANINGFUL LOCATIONS: CESPEDOSA AND TUCUMÁN

personal memory but also part of the shared memory of many others. The filmmaker explores this memory by transforming these places into film settings, immortalising them not only on celluloid, but also in the memory of all the film's spectators.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Films have a life of their own that goes beyond the time they were made, and watching them in the present facilitates new readings that are sometimes similar to the ones proposed when they were first made. Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of this film when viewed in the present day is the fact that one of Spain's biggest contemporary issues is already evident here, in a documentary made fifty years ago: the "Empty Spain" phenomenon, referring to the rural exodus that occurred in certain regions of the country, such as Castilla y León, when large numbers of people began to emigrate in search of a better future. Today, far from having improved, the situation is considerably worse, and villages like Cespedosa have all but disappeared. Vallejo's documentary points out some of these issues, which are expressed by the villagers themselves.

In Reflexiones de un salvaje, the director addresses topics that would be recurring themes in his filmography, such as rural life and our relationship with land and territory. However, the main focus of this film is the feeling of rootlessness. Vega Solís points out that "diaspora, exile, nomadism, tourism, migration and vagrancy are all forms of travel, although each one is under-

stood differently depending on the subjects, places and times that determine them" (2000). For Vallejo, this travel represents an opportunity to make sense of his condition as an exile, to find out what his grandfather lost by leaving his homeland, his people and his world, and it functions as an analogy for what Vallejo himself has lost by having to leave his homeland, his people and his world.

The film's mournful tone is pervasive not only in the narrative. It is especially evident in the scenes of the grandfather and grandson walking over the hills of Tucumán, although it can be sensed as well in the general atmosphere. Brown and greenish tones predominate, in harmony with the landscape, while the naturalistic light helps to underscore this feeling of absence. Vallejo shows the impact that migration and being unable to continue their lives in their homeland had on both the people of Cespedosa and his grandfather, which serves as an analogy that helps him understand what he himself experienced in having to flee Argentina due to the threat posed by the dictatorship.

Vallejo explores the absence, the emptiness, the desolation resulting from being banished from one's own life. This absence is expressed in images, in silences, in words, in what is said and left unsaid. From the very beginning of the documentary, the spectator is made aware that it is about a personal experience—the filmmaker's and his grandfather's—but as the narration progress-

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THE DICTATORSHIP.

es, this experience becomes universal. Vallejo extends the discourse to involve the audience in this absence, as spectators may have experienced it directly themselves or know someone close to them who has. Herein lies the beauty and the success of *Reflexiones de un salvaje*, as Vallejo effectively turns a personal experience into a universal concern: what happens to our lives when we are gone, when we are missing, when we disappear?

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# REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), AN EXERCISE IN MEMORY FROM AN EXILE PERSPECTIVE

#### Abstract

Reflexiones de un salvaje is a documentary directed by Gerardo Vallejo that explores the director's family history and his own experience of political exile. On a journey to Cespedosa de Tormes, his grandfather's home village, Vallejo seeks to understand the motivations behind his family's emigration to Argentina. The film explores issues such as rootlessness, absence and loss. Vallejo uses a self-referential voice-over to tell the story, combining his own experiences with the testimonies of villagers. The documentary investigates the duality between the country and the city, as well as the ongoing oppression of communities over time. Vallejo also considers memory as a central theme, exploring the connection between past and present based on places of significance for him (Cespedosa, Spain, and Tucumán, Argentina). Reflexiones de un salvaje ultimately offers a universal reflection on the human experience of absence and emptiness, inviting the spectator to ponder what happens to our life when we are absent.

#### Key words

Memory; Documentary cinema; Gerardo Vallejo; Exile; Migration.

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# REFLEXIONES DE UN SALVAJE (GERARDO VALLEJO, 1978), UN EJERCICIO DE MEMORIA DESDE EL EXILIO

#### Resumer

Reflexiones de un salvaje es un documental dirigido por Gerardo Vallejo que explora las raíces familiares del director y su propia experiencia de exilio político. A través del viaje a Cespedosa de Tormes, el pueblo natal de su abuelo, Vallejo busca comprender las motivaciones detrás de la emigración de su familia a Argentina. La película aborda temas como el desarraigo, la ausencia y la pérdida. Vallejo utiliza una voz en off autorreferencial para narrar la historia, mezclando sus propias experiencias con los testimonios de los habitantes del pueblo. El documental indaga sobre la dualidad entre lo rural y lo urbano, así como sobre la continua y recurrente opresión de los pueblos a lo largo del tiempo. Además, Vallejo utiliza la memoria como un tema central, explorando la conexión entre el pasado y el presente a partir de lugares significativos, como Cespedosa y Tucumán. En última instancia, Reflexiones de un salvaje ofrece una reflexión universal sobre la experiencia humana de la ausencia y el vacío, invitando al espectador a contemplar qué sucede en la vida cuando estamos ausentes.

#### Palabras clave

Memoria; Cine Documental; Gerardo Vallejo; Exilio; Migración.

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# FEMALE SUBJECTIVITIES FROM A DISTANCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THREE FILMS OF THE 1980S AND 1990S BY LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN FILMMAKERS

**VIOLETA SABATER** 

#### INTRODUCTION

The issues of exile, migration and their connections with culture and modes of representation have been explored in various academic studies, as has the relationship of these experiences with autobiographical narratives and with debates on identity and gender. Authors examining discourses on exile from the perspective of cultural studies have pointed out the gap that exists between exiles and their world, the construction of a fractured. complex subjectivity (Fernández Bravo, Garramuño et al., 2003), and the difficulty of reconciling individual and national identity after their displacement. In the case of cinema, particularly in the documentary genre, filmmakers in recent decades have begun constructing autobiographical narratives that explore their own condition as exiles or emigrants (Renov, 2004). Some of these films, referred to as "returnee" documentaries or narratives, anticipated various strategies and techniques that would later be associated with the first-person documentary in countries such as Argentina and Chile (Piedras, 2016; Ramírez Soto, 2014). Moreover, feminist documentaries since the 1970s have tackled these themes to explore connections between the self and the community, the scope, political effects and criticism of realism, and experimentation with modes of storytelling (Mayer, 2011). This article analyses three films by Latin American women directors that represent different forms of exile and subjectivity: the Chilean film Fragmentos de un diario inacabado [Fragments from an Unfinished Diary] (Angelina Vázquez, 1983) and the Argentine films Desembarcos: When Memory Speaks (Desembarcos, un

taller de cine en Buenos Aires, Jeanine Meerapfel, 1989) and A *Wall of Silence* (Un muro de silencio, Lita Stantic, 1993).

The issues mentioned above are present in these three films in different ways. This article presents a comparative study of these films, as all three, whether in a documentary or fiction register, construct a distanced enunciative position that operates not only in geographical terms but also in terms of the identity of the subject and the processes of reflexivity this entails. All three are characterised by a transnational dimension, and by the presence of subjects and characters constructed on the basis of different forms of distancing and the articulation of an "outside" gaze, which is in turn implicated and multiplied in the narration. Moreover, all three films are closely connected to their political and social contexts, highlighting the circumstances of the dictatorships, exile, and the tensions between memory and erasure in processes of democratic transition.

Vázguez's documentary deals with a different context from the two Argentine films, as the director made it while in exile from Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. The director decided to return to her homeland in order to document the situation in the country by collecting a series of testimonies, at a time when the protests against the dictatorship were beginning to gain momentum and the country's social fabric was gradually being rearticulated. During this period, several exiled Chilean filmmakers made films dealing with the social reality following the coup d'état,1 establishing a cycle of Chilean films made in exile (Pick, 1987; Mouesca, 1988). Vázquez's film shares several affinities with Meerapfel's and somewhat fewer with Stantic's, but it is interesting to compare the three productions from a regional perspective, considering a critical movement that emerged in the context of the political cinema of the era in question.

## DESEMBARCOS. DEPICTIONS AND DISPLACEMENTS

Jeanine Meerapfel is a director who has yet to receive much scholarly attention and her filmography remains somewhat unknown in Argentina. In 1964, for personal reasons, she emigrated to Berlin, where she studied film and launched her career as a filmmaker. The daughter of German immigrants, she was born in Buenos Aires in 1943, and although based in Germany she has returned several times to her homeland to reflect on its recent history. Her work includes both documentaries and fiction films, many of which deal with stories about women who are forced to travel, and who in that process have to redefine their personal identities, family ties and sense of belonging.

Meerapfel began filming the documentary analysed here in 1986, in the context of a filmmaking workshop she held that year at the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires. She would not complete it until 1989, due to certain obstacles to its production imposed by Argentina's Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía.<sup>2</sup> The Goethe was an institution that contributed to the production and screening of non-fiction films in Argentina at that time (Margulis, 2017), in a context where it was very difficult to obtain funding for documentary production. The film is made up mainly of alternating sequences of the workshop and the production of the three short films that came out of it, as well as interviews conducted by the director with the workshop participants about their films and footage of protest marches by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in 1986 and 1987, at the time the Argentine government was passing laws to protect the military from being brought to justice for their crimes during the dictatorship. The director's voice-over threads these elements together with tracking shots of the streets of Buenos Aires and sequences of ships in the port.

The film begins with a voice-over that immediately places the spectator in the context, as

Meerapfel tells the story of a day in September 1976, when she was filming the sunset on a bridge with a colleague; they were approached by two men with machine guns because, it turned out, their camera was pointing in the direction of a police station. They were arrested and interrogated, and finally released; in those days, she explains, "it was quite possible to disappear for filming a sunset." After this brief scene come the film's opening credits, followed by a daytime sequence with shots of terraces, buildings and ships in Buenos Aires, to the sound of the director's voice-over: "Buenos Aires, 1986. A film workshop with students who are going to make three short films about the fear that persisted after the military dictatorship." The students descend from a ship and introduce themselves, giving their places of birth, their ages and why they decided to study cinema. The themes of the dictatorship and memory constitute the core of all three shorts made in the workshop and of the director's interviews with the students. At the same time, the concept of travel, of displacement, is connected to this thematic core through metaphors for various concepts that will be described below.

First of all, however, it is important to highlight the different degrees of Meerapfel's presence in her film. On the one hand, through her voiceover, but also through her presence on screen, she plays a recurring role in the footage of the rehearsals of the scenes of the short films, as well as in several of the interviews conducted with the workshop participants. In some of the interviews, we cut back and forth between close-ups of Meerapfel asking questions and the students answering them. In other scenes, she talks to the sound manager and director Alcides Chiesa, who himself had gone into exile in Germany in 1982, and who answers her questions about his experiences during the dictatorship. In these scenes, Meerapfel always shares the frame with Chiesa; in some of them, we are shown her expressions and reactions to Chiesa's statements, while in

others she appears with her back to the camera while he is shown in profile. This reflects the director's intention to position herself on the same level as Chiesa, both in generational (in opposition to the generation of young filmmakers) and discursive terms. Chiesa plays a key role in the narrative development, as during filming he reveals that he was arrested and tortured in the clandestine detention centre known as Pozo de Ouilmes. Thus, in various scenes his presence becomes central, especially with respect to the film's evocative and communicative intention. An example of this is a sequence where he discusses with students how to represent certain scenes in the short films dealing with situations in detention centres. Throughout this whole sequence, when the camera is on Chiesa, the director appears beside him, watching and listening. This sequence-and indeed, the film as a whole-could be classified as markedly reflexive according to the categories of documentary modes of representation proposed by Nichols (1997), as the representation of the historical world gives way to the theme of cinematic mediation. However, there is also a certain degree of performativity, insofar as it is possible to appreciate the impact that Chiesa's statements have on Meerapfel, if only indirectly, in the way she is presented on screen (Image 1).

Image I. Jeanine Meerapfel (left) and Alcides Chiesa (right) in Desembarcos - When Memory Speaks (Jeanine Meerapfel, 1986-1989)



THE FILM CONTAINS A SUCCESSION OF METAPHORS WITH IMAGES OF SHIPS AND MOVEMENT, IMPLYING AN INDIRECT EXPLORATION OF THE DIRECTOR'S IDENTITY GIVEN THE POWERFUL IMPACT THAT GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY HAS HAD ON HER (AND HER FAMILY'S) LIFE.

In this regard, it is worth considering some conceptualisations proposed by Pablo Piedras (2014) about the first-person documentary in Argentina. Piedras suggests that this categorisation "makes it possible to identify a broad group of works that incorporate some modulation of the filmmaker's 'self' into their framework of meaning, as the manager and author of the audiovisual discourse" (2014: 22). In this way, the exposure and insertion of subjectivity as the main element of the narrative substantially changed the "epistemic position" of documentary discourses on reality, reformulating the communicative pacts between film and spectators. Piedras identifies three modes of representing the filmmaker's intervention in the documentary, of which the "experience and alterity" mode is of particular interest to this study. This mode "produces a feedback loop between the filmmaker's personal experience and the object of the discourse, with signs of contamination between the two levels" (2014: 78). This operation involves "connecting something associated with the filmmaker's personal experience to the development of the other, of an instance initially alien to the subject but which, for various reasons, constructs and determines it, although it also goes beyond it" (2014: 79). Although Piedras argues that these modes have been systematic and recurrent in contemporary documentary since the turn of the millennium, he suggests that it is possible to find the first signs of their forms of expression and modes of representation in the documentaries of the 1980s, made by Argentines living abroad or recently returned to the country whose motivation was "exile, emigration or a reencounter with their cultural, social, national and family origins" (2014: 46). From the perspective of this study, Meerapfel's documentary thus constitutes a precursor to the "experience and alterity" mode of the first-person documentary. Meerapfel's personal connection and involvement with the film's theme, as well as with the various testimonies offered, is undeniable given the director's family history and her own migration to Germany in her youth. At the same time, this experience extends beyond her and Meerapfel cedes the enunciative space to the workshop students through their testimonies, as well as to Chiesa, and also to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, in a series of speeches filmed by the director that are interspersed with the rest of the footage.

The film contains a succession of metaphors with images of ships and movement, implying an indirect exploration of the director's identity given the powerful impact that geographical mobility has had on her (and her family's) life. Various scenes feature footage of ships while Meerapfel's voice-over recites something that makes a metaphor of what we have seen before and generates a new meaning based on the combination of the two moments. The director's voice, together with the use of music, acquires a markedly poetic character. In general, the metaphors are allusions to travel in relation to the ship: at the beginning of the film, the director quotes a poem by Brazilian poet Thiago de Mello about ships; later in the film, immediately after a speech by Hebe de Bonafini (the leader of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo), the footage of the port shown at the beginning appears again, and the director says: "Boats are dawns; they sail from a spring of dark waters, but they always arrive from tomorrow. Some arrived earlier [...] there are some that did not arrive and sank in the infancy of the river." This association between the two scenes thus implies a connection between the ship and the victims of forced disappearances mentioned by Hebe in her speech. Significantly, the director asks the students about the meaning they attribute to the action of disembarking. Their answers vary, with associations such as "being able to make contact with concrete reality [...] immigration, arriving at... descending... touching ground... being able to talk again about things that we'd closed or locked up... finding a new story, emigrating to our own homeland."

Disembarking or travelling thus takes the place of an agency that would involve coming into contact with a previously shuttered reality associated with the fight of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo to find their disappeared children, but also with the filmmaker's exploration of her own changing identity. On the question of the nomadic subject and identity, Rossi Braidotti conceives the power of movement in relation to "a critical awareness that resists conforming to codified models of thought and behaviour" (Braidotti, 2004: 31). From this perspective, nomadism moves in the spaces between, on the frontiers of the structuring of space, and its power lies in its mobility. For Braidotti (2011: 273) "the nomadic or intensive horizon is a subjectivity [that is] multiple, not dualistic, interconnected [...] in a constant flux, not fixed." Displacement therefore contains a power, as a kind of critical awareness capable of distancing from and returning to itself. This movement is also evident throughout the film, in its reflexive and self-conscious character, and in the presentation of the film itself as a process. The expression of an awareness of one's own identity and its consequent mutations or shifts, along with situations of mobility such as exile, is also a key concept for the analysis of Vázguez's film, which is discussed in the next section.

#### **DISTANT GAZES(S): A CRITICAL STANCE**

Angelina Vázquez made her first short film, Crónica del salitre [Chronicle of Saltpetre], in 1971, in the context of political documentary production in Chile during the presidency of Salvador Allende. In 1975, through contacts with a Finnish film studio she had done work for, she went into exile in Finland, where she spent most of her film career. Fragmentos de un diario inacabado was one of her last feature-length films. As the protests against the dictatorship began gaining strength in Chile in the early 1980s, Vázguez decided to return secretly to the country to film the situation of people in various sectors of society who represented the resistance against the Pinochet regime. Her aim was to establish "a kind of personal reflection on my experience of re-encountering the country [...] the everyday aspect of that explosion/ violation represented by 11 September 1973 [...], the mood, the soul of Chile" (Pinto, 2012: 220). She managed to remain undercover in the country for two weeks before the intelligence services detected her presence and deported her again, and the filmmaker Pablo Perelman finished the film on the instructions she had left behind. In addition to documenting the Chilean reality ten years after the military coup, the director's intention was to bear witness to the situation of the ones who had remained behind, working in opposition to the regime and at the same time living lives that had parallels with her exile. The director knew herself to be in an alternative position to those she sought to document, while her own situation as an exile allowed her to convey the experiences of her interviewees in a specific way.

In contrast to *Desembarcos* and other documentaries of the period, such as Marilú Mallet's *Diario inacabado* (1982) (whose title and basic conception are similar to those of Vázquez's project), at no point in *Fragmentos de un diario inacabado* does the director appear physically on screen. Her deportation is of course one reason for this,

but not the only one. Other documentaries she made in exile, such as *Dos años en Finlandia* (1975), never show her on screen either, although in the case of the 1975 film her voice can be heard in the voice-over narration and during the interviews. In *Fragmentos*, the voice-over narration is provided by an actress speaking in Finnish, highlighting Vázquez's distance from her native country and the distance of the film's enunciation, as its "authorial voice" inhabits a different body. It could be argued that this was a way of representing her subjectivity. Vázquez herself argues, in a conversation about the film:

Fragmentos de un diario inacabado is my unfinished diary, and, in this case, it is literally an unfinished diary because I came to Chile to make a film and I ended up having to leave the country, because I had entered secretly [...]. My personal vision... [is] not so personal, in the sense that I did not make myself a character, like the way Marilú exposed herself in her film, which I admire deeply, because I think she is very brave. Instead, I offered the personal nature of my reflection in the re-encounter with the landscape, with the people of my country, after eight years of being away. And in that process, I think that the people who shared it with me also grew, or felt they had grown. (Donoso Pinto, Ramírez Soto, 2016: 262-264).

The voice-over, present in the film and in the pages of Angelina's personal diary, is a specific, inherently subjective marker that gives the documentary a poetic cadence (Image 2), much like the Argentine film analysed above. [IMAGE 2] The close-ups show a personal diary and words written on paper under the day's date. Although the words are cut off, the voice-over fills in the sentences that we can read fragments of on screen, reciting them in a confessional tone. After this brief sequence, interspersed with shots of the streets of Santiago, the title *La situación* ["The Situation"] introduces the testimony of a woman who talks about the violence perpetrated by the military regime. Shots of newspaper cuttings are alternated



Image 2. Still-frame from the opening sequence of Fragmentos de un diario inacabado (Angelina Vázquez, 1983)

with intertitles detailing the arrest and murder of people in different parts of the country. The next scene, introduced with the title Las estrategias de sobrevivencia. Olla común ["Survival Strategies: Community Kitchen", documents the daily work of a group of women responsible for community kitchens who are protesting because they are not receiving food. This is how the film's narrative is constructed, alternating testimonies of different individuals (introduced with intertitles showing their names over a black background) and their everyday environment while the voice-over reflects on the footage and some personal archival materials, such as photographs of the interviewees. Although the first two situations are not specific to one individual in particular, from the third testimony on the focus is on concrete experiences of fully named subjects who reveal the truth of what is happening in different sectors of the country: culture and theatre, music, the trade unions, and the relatives of the disappeared. These sequences consist mostly of medium shots of the people interviewed in different settings, in some cases with fades to black and close-ups of their

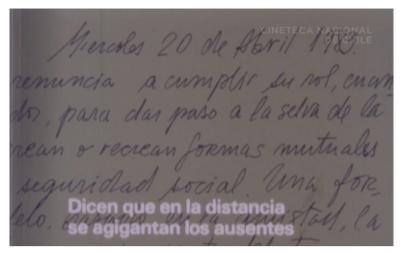


Image 3. Still-frame from the opening sequence of Fragmentos de un diario inacabado (Angelina Vázquez, 1983)

faces while they tell their stories. The testimonies possess a confessional quality, engaging with the spectators in what is almost a meditative state. Catalina Donoso Pinto (2018: 38) argues that these contributions function as a way of constructing the authorship of the film "based on multiple voices and experiences, and all of them are interchangeable with and connected to the director's own experience as key pieces of her personal view of the country she left behind. One could propose an exercise to identify the way each individual stands in for and complements Vázquez's missing presence." This seems an accurate reading in the sense that Angelina's distance from what forms part of the object of her discourse, due to her status as an exile and her deportation from the country, is at the same time what facilitates and enables the overlapping voices and the dialogues established between them, the director and the spectators. While it could thus be argued that the first person is fainter and less obvious than it is in Meerapfel's documentary, it is activated and redefined through the contributions of the others and the changes these people undergo as a result of their participation in the film<sup>3</sup> (Image 3).

Two of the testimonies featured in the film are of particular interest to this study. One is the testimony offered by Irma, the mother of Jorge Müller Silva, a filmmaker who was arrested and disappeared in 1974. After a shot of her on a train singing with a folk music group and the appearance of the intertitle with her name, she talks about her grandson asking her why she played the guitar if she was a "grandmother": this question and the testimony that follows it are key to understanding the construction of identity proposed in the film. Irma tells us: "Before my son disappeared, I was a well-heeled, common, wild middle-class homeowner who had cups of tea with friends and went to charity lunches and social gatherings. [...] After you lose someone you loved like your own life, you see things in a different

way, totally different." Irma's awakening emerges as a narrative arc throughout the sequence, upsetting certain preconceived ideas she harboured about her role as a mother and as a woman in society. Minutes after this reflexive moment, Irma confesses that her participation in the documentary prompted her to look at the photographs of her missing son for the first time in nine years. Some of these photographs are shown on screen while she speaks. This story of the change to Irma's identity and the effect of the filming process on her life foregrounds her subjectivity and establishes a clear dialogue with Angelina's.

A similar connection occurs later in the film with the testimony of the singer Isabel Aldunate. Isabel is first shown on screen singing in a café. The camera is positioned at the height of the tables, taking the point of view of the audience. After a brief excerpt from the concert, and the intertitle giving her name simply as "Isabel", she is framed in a medium shot, with the camera slowly zooming in on her face. She introduces herself as a 33-year-old singer and lawyer, whose whole life "was interrupted on 11 September." She explains: "At that time I had three children. For four or five years, my whole life was dedicated to looking after them [...] making meals, washing nappies. In a

way, it was a very unconscious time. When that period ended [...] I was faced with the necessity of having to come up with new projects; that was in 1978." At this moment, pictures of Isabel singing in different contexts and settings alternate with photos of her with her children. She explains that she began singing in towns where everybody was out of work; she ended her relationship, separated twice and left "absolutely everything" behind. "I'd been locked up for years and I had to do it," she says.

Once again, in Isabel's story we find this reference to a personal awakening that prompted her to move away from the places she had once known, to emigrate from her former world. The stories of these two women revolve around an identity shift involving a move that is personal, confessional and internal, an idea that is absent from the rest of the testimonies in the film. They thus establish a close connection to Vázquez's subjectivity, as each woman takes a critical, distanced view of her own identity.

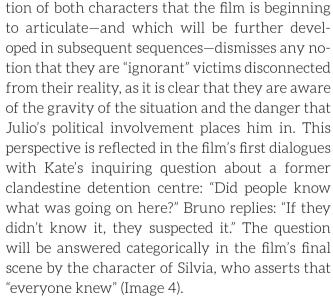
# THE TURNING POINT OF A WALL OF SILENCE

Different relationships and tensions between memory and subjectivity are also present in A Wall of Silence, the only film directed by Lita Stantic, who has had an extensive career as a producer. This feature film takes a highly original approach to the topic of the dictatorship in Argentina. On this point, Eseverri and Peña argue that the film represents "one of the milestones of post-dictatorial Argentine cinema, and a turning point in relation to the way Argentine films have constructed the memory of political militancy prior to the coup and state terrorism" (2013: 11). Two different spatio-temporal dynamics that run through the whole the film are presented right from the outset. One is related to the lives of a group of people in Buenos Aires, in 1990 and in 1976, and the other involves a fictional space-time (within the fictional story depicted in the film). On the one hand, the story revolves around a project proposed by Kate Benson, a British filmmaker<sup>4</sup> who travels to Argentina to shoot a film about the country's last civic-military dictatorship based on a screenplay by Bruno, a leftist professor who wrote the work with reference to the experiences of a student of his called Silvia (named Ana in the film to be made by Benson) during those years.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the film also follows Silvia in the present as she comes to terms with what happened to her under the dictatorship, after years of denying this part of her past. This layered spatiotemporal configuration establishes a distanced discursive construction from the beginning, as Stantic's treatment of the past is based on a storywithin-a-story device that subverts the monosemous approach that had characterised many of the realistic/naturalistic films made about the dictatorship in the previous decade (Cuarterolo, 2011).

The first time that the film's metafictional narrative emerges is in one of the shots of a scene being filmed with the actors playing Ana and Julio, who are having a conversation about their lives under the dictatorship. The camera shows them both in a full shot that captures a half-finished set of a wall and door in the background. The presentation of the space in this way signals this as an essay film; although this information is not confirmed to the spectators, it accentuates the artificial nature of the film-within-a-film device. Julio enters the scene through the door and tells Ana to prepare a bag for him because he has to leave. After a pause, she replies: "They're going to kill you." We then hear someone off-camera shout "cut". and Kate, the director, enters the shot and begins to offer them suggestions for their performance. To Julio, she explains: "You need to be convinced that your life is not in danger, to be able to go on." Then the woman playing Ana asks her: "Does Ana feel guilty... for not being at Julio's side in the fight?" Through these exchanges, the construc-



Image 4. Silvia and her daughter, María Elisa, in A Wall of Silence (Lita Stantic, 1993)



On the second occasion the metafictional narrative is presented, it is identified and transmuted with the cinematic image of the film itself. A subtitle in white letters reading "Buenos Aires, 1976" appears on screen while we see the characters Ana and Julio lying down in their room. From this moment on, the metafictional narrative alternates constantly and indistinguishably with the fiction narrative, telling the story from Ana's point of view. This represents what could be described as another thematic shift: the film within the film (and A Wall of Silence itself) focuses not on Julio's story, but on Ana/Silvia's, on her situation



Image 5. Silvia and her daughter in the final scene of A Wall of Silence (Lita Stantic, 1993)

after Julio is abducted and her life after the dictatorship. The main issue expressed through this character, which functions as an allusion to the prevailing tension in Argentine society, revolves around her refusal to remember, and at the same time her inability to forget. Her reluctance to revisit her past is made clear from the beginning, as she refuses to meet Kate, who asks to interview her. The idea that "people didn't want to talk about that subject" is reflected in various scenes throughout the film, underscoring Silvia's condition as an "internal exile": her estranged gaze and her way of inhabiting reality that is disconnected from her history. In the final scene with her daughter, in the same abandoned building shown at the beginning of the film, her ability to assert that "everyone knew" encapsulates her process of acknowledgement and understanding of her own past. After a long full shot of both characters from behind, the camera approaches them with a forward tracking shot (Image 5). [IMAGE 5] First, Silvia is shown in profile, followed by the daughter, who asks whether anyone knew what was going on in that place. After Silvia's response, the camera moves into capture a close-up of her daughter's gaze; then the image freezes and the film ends. This scene presents a journey between overlapping gazes, from the camera's (Stantic's) gaze to

Silvia's, and then concluding with her daughter's, the final character called upon to acknowledge the past. Drawing on the ideas of Laura Mulvey (1975) related to the system of gazes the converge in the cinematic apparatus (the camera's, the spectators' and the fictional characters'), it could be argued that the camera's—i.e., the director's—gaze in this film moves towards the female characters, whose gazes also intersect and alter their perceptions of themselves and reality.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

In this article, aspects of three Latin American films directed by women have been analysed, with attention to their methods of exploring the various forms of exile, migration, the trauma of dictatorships and the ways these elements are woven together with an autobiographical dimension and the configuration of female subjectivities. All three films depict an identity shift in both the directors and the subjects (real people and fictional characters) portrayed in them, based on the act of expressing in words what could not be spoken of or had been silenced. This shift is intimately intertwined with an indirect autobiographical investigation of the three directors: Jeanine Meerapfel's migration and return to a country in reconstruction after the collapse of the military junta, Angelina Vázquez's exile, and Lita Stantic's personal experiences of the dictatorship, on which several scenes and characters in her film are based. In this way, the multiple subjectivities present in the films—particularly those explored in this article engage in dialogue and overlap with the subjectivities of the filmmakers.

All three films thus construct a distanced enunciative position by means of techniques involving high levels of reflexivity and estrangement. At the same time, they offer a number of innovations over previous political and social films that have dealt with the same subject matter.

An articulated analysis of these films constitutes a useful contribution to the development of comparative studies (Lusnich, 2011) of Latin American cinema, particularly by women filmmakers who began pursuing successful careers in Europe with the construction of their own particular techniques and themes. ■

#### **NOTES**

- 1 Examples include the films Chile, no invoco tu nombre en vano [Chile, I Don't Invoke Your Name in Vain] (Gaston Ancelovici, 1983), Acta general de Chile [Chile: A General Record] (Miguel Littin, 1986) and En nombre de Dios [In the Name of God] (Patricio Guzmán, 1987).
- 2 This data was provided by the Argentine film researcher Fernando Martín Peña, prior to the screening of the film in his program Filmoteca, temas de Cine, broadcast by the Argentina's public broadcaster, TV Pública.
- 3 In the article by Ramírez Soto (2014) quoted above, the author describes the film as a precursor to the current style of Chilean autobiographical documentaries, noting that unlike other Chilean films about returnees in the 1980s, Vázquez integrates her own experience of exile directly into its formal structure.
- 4 The construction of this character is related to the film's status as a co-production between Argentina, Mexico and the United Kingdom. In the words of the director herself, due to the fact that Argentina's Instituto Nacional de Cine had no loan program at that time, film projects depended entirely on the prospects of securing foreign funding (Eseverri and Peña, 2013).
- On this point, it is important to keep in mind that although it is a fiction film, it has a strongly autobiographical quality, and the character of the British director functions as Stantic's alter ego. In addition, there is a shift in the temporal paradigm in this film, in a context where the politics of memory entered a period of crisis in Argentina in the 1990s compared to the previous decade and the pardons granted to the military.

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# FEMALE SUBJECTIVITIES FROM A DISTANCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THREE FILMS OF THE 1980S AND 1990S BY LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN FILMMAKERS

#### Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of three films directed by Latin American women filmmakers in the 1980s and early 1990s: Fragmentos de un diario inacabado [Fragments from an Unfinished Diaryl (Angelina Vázouez, 1983), Desembarcos - When Memory Speaks (Desembarcos, un taller de cine en Buenos Aires, Jeanine Meerapfel, 1989) and A Wall of Silence (Un muro de silencio, Lita Stantic, 1993). Although the first two are documentaries and the third is a fiction film, all three explore various situations of exile, migration and the enunciation of the self in terms of female subjectivities. This enunciative position facilitates discourses and subversions of identity, which is constructed as multiple and defined to differing degrees in terms of gender through the establishment of intersubjective relationships between the protagonists (the directors themselves or their alter egos) and other significant characters in the story. The study examines the different levels of reflexivity present in the films, the authorial presence of the filmmakers and the forms of geographical, subjective and narrative distancing.

#### Key words

Latin American cinema; Autobiographical documentary; Exile; Identity; Gender studies.

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# SUBJETIVIDADES FEMENINAS DESDE LA DISTANCIA. UN EXAMEN COMPARADO DE TRES FILMS DE LAS DÉCADAS DE LOS OCHENTA Y NOVENTA DE CINEASTAS LATINOAMERICANAS

#### Resumen

En el presente trabajo, se analizan, de modo comparado, tres películas de las décadas de los ochenta y principios de los noventa dirigidas por cineastas latinoamericanas: Fragmentos de un diario inacabado (Angelina Vázquez, 1983). Desembarcos (un taller de cine en Buenos Aires) (Jeanine Meerapfel, 1989) y Un muro de silencio (Lita Stantic, 1993). Aunque las dos primeras consisten en documentales y la última es un film de ficción, los tres largometrajes abordan diversas situaciones de exilio, migración y enunciación del «yo», en cuanto a subjetividades femeninas. Este lugar enunciativo habilita discursos y fisuras sobre la identidad, que se constituye desde lo múltiple, y se define, en mayor o menor medida, en términos de género (gender) a través de la puesta en práctica de relaciones intersubjetivas entre los personajes protagónicos (las directoras o sus alter ego) y otras personas significativas dentro de la narración. En el escrito, se examinan los distintos grados de reflexividad presentes en los films, la presencia autoral de las cineastas y las formas que adquiere el distanciamiento en su concepción geográfica, subjetiva y narrativa.

#### Palabras clave

Cine latinoamericano; Documental autobiográfico; Exilio; Identidad; Estudios de género.

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# ARCHIVAL MIGRATIONS AND "POETIC NOMADISM" IN EL ECO DE LAS CANCIONES (ANTONIA ROSSI, 2010)\*

ANA GONZÁLEZ CASERO

## INTRODUCTION: THE FILMIC BODY OF MEMORY

El eco de las canciones [The Echo of Songs] (Antonia Rossi, 2010) is a documentary whose narrative is associated with the concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997; 2021), which has also been described as "memory shot through with holes" (Raczymow, 1994), "vicarious memory" (Young, 2000), "late memory" or "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg, 2004), and "inherited memory" (Lury, 1998). All these terms designate a memory that is no longer direct because there is a generational distance between the historical events remembered and those remembering them. As Annette Kuhn (2002) points out, memory does not require one to have witnessed the original act, as the connection to a traumatic past is "mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch, 2012: 5). Living in the shadow of the past event, the sons and daughters of direct victims establish an emotional connection with the experience of the horror. The stories that emerge are marked by the discovery of violence, absence, exile or disappearance in a past lived outside the body, or at least shrouded in mystery, as it straddles the boundary between memory and childhood amnesia. Second-generation authors thus attempt to heal the wounds and harms of these episodes of repression through the creation of a network of memories and inventions, giving new meanings to inherited images, dissolving borders between genres and eliciting emotions as part of a reflection on the processes of memory (Quílez Esteve. 2014). This is a formula that Elisabeth Ramírez-Soto (2019) has given the name "cinema of affect" in the case of Chilean post-dictatorship documentary. In contrast to the "cinema of the affected" constructed on testimony and documentary evidence that characterised the 1990s, there has been an "affective turn" toward a cinema that is elusive and evocative in this regard, where the focus shifts from the human body to the filmic body (Ramírez-Soto, 2019: 4-5). Documentary production thus "oscillates-intersecting at times—between the unveiling of two types of bodies: those of the direct victims and those of the films" (Ramírez-Soto, 2019: 4).

This study explores the cinematic mechanisms implemented by Antonia Rossi in *Eleco de las canciones*. In this film, Rossi captures the process of constructing a provisional memory, an unstable phenomenon that requires constant negotiation with the device, interweaving and shaping the

aesthetic and content in a kind of mise en abyme. Because the memory being documented is fragmentary, Rossi makes use of found footage obtained from a wide variety of archival sources and reconstructs it by means of an unruly cinematic syntax, with the use of a collage technique that mirrors mnemonic operations based on the correlation of sensory information and contextual markers to aid the memory retrieval process. The sequencing of sound and image is not chronological but analogical; as Lattanzi points out, "the editing of archival material here is a complex, fragmented, evocative memory system that interweaves heterogeneous times, images and spaces [...] opening up its significant possibilities" (2022). It is important to note the presence of an associative form (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995) inherent in juxtaposition: there is thus a poetic contagion that is revealed in the application of metaphorical and parallel techniques; the grouping and repetition of images, sounds and noises that not only reflect the structure of memory and forgetting, but also evoke an imaginary gaze upon the place of origin. Rossi's unconventional filmmaking style possesses its own patterns to outline a minimalist, domestic and subjective approach. Essentially, she reflects on artistic practice as a threshold giving access to private worlds, and from this perspective she problematises the supposedly fixed nature of memory and identity.

Confined to the private sphere, the film is inscribed in the grammaticality of the first person. However, it plays at being and not being a true story of the authorial "I", shifting from the autobiographical form to autofiction (Arfuch, 2005). A filmmaker of the diaspora, Rossi subverts the personal dimension of her story and condenses the collective experience of a generation by recycling a diverse collection of materials. Her retrospective vision is underpinned by an accumulation of images of others; the past inhabits the present through the enunciative presence of a voice broken up into echoes.

Based on the considerations outlined above, it is possible to identify a number of techniques employed in Rossi's film: the use of archives, re-editing, poetic and metaphorical language, temporal confusions, a plurally constructed first-person voice and a reflexive approach to the cinematic medium. These audiovisual strategies are explored in the various sections of this article.

#### **CUTTINGS TO ASSEMBLE A FILMOGRAPHY**

The oeuvre of Antonia Rossi (b. Rome 1978) is marked by a methodological preference for fragmentation. The filmmaker "appropriates" materials from a wide range of media, formats, genres and sources, making use of documentary archives while also employing fictional elements. Severed from their original context, the still-frames are rendered ambiguous, thus acquiring a degree of openness to the creation of new meanings through various compositional methods. Her preferred expressive technique is collage, whereby she manipulates the preexisting footage, connecting and juxtaposing discrete images to create symbolic resonances or secondary meanings. She also places an emphasis on the gaps and the seams in her work, exposing the patching process and the marks of the fractures. In this way, she explores the discontinuity intrinsic to the editing of heterogeneous materials, a process that "accentuates 'the edges' of the image, denaturalises the editing, emphasizes parataxis, and visibly redefines the appropriated fragments by highlighting the disjunction between their original meanings and connotations and those acquired in their new context" (Weinrichter, 2009: 197). Rossi's ultimate aim is to destabilise the temporal dimension and expose the plurality of perspectives on the space, transgressing the illusion of reality that characterises the institutional mode of representation (García López and Gómez Vaquero, 2009). Rossi juxtaposes "distant" fragments for experimental, evocative purposes to bring out complex spa-

tio-temporal articulations that resemble a subjective perspective. In her *papier collé* works, video installations and filmography, she uses the collage technique to represent private experiences such as dreams, memories, or perceptual processes. Collages thus constitute "metaphoric fabrications of reality" (Arthur, 1999-2000: 66). Through this practice, Rossi explores ambivalent realms, imitating their operations in her filmmaking.

The film analysed here, *El eco de las canciones*, maps out some imagined memories founded on intimacy, division and rupture. Rossi superimposes footage, exposing the cuts, thereby invoking the feelings underlying the shared reality, where







Images 1-3. Still-frames of wandering in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

"the archival images do not convey information about a past to be reconstructed; instead, they get carried away with their evocative capacities in conjunction with the sound, vindicating the affective as a means of acquiring knowledge about a biographical past" (Lattanzi, 2022). It is a collage film whose technical strategy is putting together and picking apart the tangible materials, traces, remains and ruins contained in a wide range of archives. At the same time, Rossi sketches images that are entangled and integrated with the found footage. Her filmmaking weaves or threads together different textures and corporealities to document an exile that has no end. She creates symbolic storylines that evoke the tones of alienation (exile, return, homecoming). In this way, she creates her own "imaginary archive and collects clues to return to a country that is hers and yet not hers (anymore) but must be recovered, reconstructed, reinvented" (Bongers, 2016: 135). This life story of travelling and (re)locating is presented to us as a dispersed textual experience in which any refuge is inconceivable. What stands out in this story is the "poetic nomadism" (Bongers, 2016: 133) of images that capture geographical snippets, traces of the homeland and private corners, along with shifts between times and spaces without providing specific coordinates. The spacing out and suspension of time are essential features of this approach, as it operates by analogy and metaphor in "a system of allusions, repetitions, oppositions and correspondences" (Lattanzi, 2022), with a repetition of references to wandering, visible in the still-frames taken from Gulliver's Travels (Dave Fleischer, 1939),1 the drawings of nomads who travel "clinging to the contours of the earth," the animated maps that chart the journeys between Santiago and Rome, and the images of voyages in different modes of transport that reappear again and again throughout the film (Images 1-3).

Rossi uses this subtle approach again in her more recent films, such as *Una vez la noche* (2018), which has the appearance of an illustrated story-

book, as any illusion of movement has been removed and strategies such as voice-over, zoom and variable shots are used to provide volume and kineticism. In this case, the atypical nature of the materials used is due to the ungrammatical quality of the drawings, which transgresses any formal continuity in what is, furthermore, a chaotic narrative. There are also documentary inserts such as photographs and a series of images of fetish-objects. Collage is used in an undisciplined graphic combination where the contours of time are malleable and the spaces are sterile. Her feature film El espíritu de la araña [The Spirit of the Spider] (2024) examines her affinity for collage and the poetic exploration of the vicissitudes of memory. In this film she compiles, manipulates and reconstructs archival material, while creating a complex sound design network that denotes and detonates the images. The result is a visual constellation of shadow play, phantasmagoria and audiovisual footage related to the female body.

Collage thus underpins an experimental project aimed at reconstructing events of the past that have little or nothing to do with the historical world of the privileged class, but that are related instead to the phenomenological dimensions of those events. Rossi's is therefore not a passive or mimetic gaze but an inner gaze. Perhaps the only possible way to capture this sensibility in sounds and images is to uncover the latent properties of the archive. If we understand the archive as a regulated site, the choice of what to collect and preserve is governed by power, and it is therefore marked by hegemonic inclusions and exclusions (Derrida, 1997). Moreover, various contemporary theorists call into question the notion of the archive as a mere container or repository of documents, information and knowledge, conceiving of it instead as a system of counterweights that stores or destroys the marks of the past (Guasch, 2011). It is therefore an impossible, incomplete project for tomorrow's world. In this sense, past, present and future are interwoven, not in a linear progression, but in a way that opens cracks and chasms that render the absences palpable. Aesthetic experience and affective exploration render the opacities legible, thereby creating "contact zones" (Ahmed, 2015: 42), circulations and migrations. Searching among the cracks, recovering lost images and imaginaries, creating an archive from the waste, combining materials and opening them up to processes of resignification (Sánchez-Biosca, 2015) constitute acts of resistance (Bongers, 2016). Rossi thus aims to "glean" images that function as a residue of historical time, in order to conjure up this sensory reality. Like a collector, or the rag-picker described by Walter Benjamin in Unpacking My Library: A Speech on Collecting (1931), this filmmaker picks out materials from her own archives or those of others, and even rescues some that were previously discarded as insignificant, re-imagining these ephemeral, marginal elements to configure a particular "collection" charged with memory and meaning. This strategy contains an allegorical dimension, as the combination of scraps and traces drills through their original meaning, although flashes of that meaning remain, and in this way, the two illuminate each other. Also notable in this film is its construction of sound collages. The soundtrack is made up of pre-existing fragments that are manipulated, dissected and reassembled in combinations of the material, the metaphorical and the self-referential. The expressive digressions offered by these snippets of radio and television broadcasts, voices and noises from home movies, music and songs all reverberate in the chain of images. Through the clash of different layers and their respective depths, the audio augments the visuals, vesting them with new meanings. And the editing of sound and image also offers rhythmic nuances and counterpoints. The sonic modulations and interferences form a collage simultaneous with the shot or even within it, which expresses the concentration of the soundscape. The opposite effect can also be achieved by placing all the sounds

on the same level, in a regeneration that leads to noise and even silence due to audio saturation. The anatomical transposition of sounds and images sweeps us through the passages and landscapes of memory.

# ARCHI(VE)PELAGO: THE GEOGRAPHY OF POSTMEMORY

El eco de las canciones resounds with the power of a maritime metaphor. In a film that speaks to us of exile and alienation, images of a de-spatialised, liminal sea appear again and again (Images 4-6). In the years immediately after Augusto Pinochet's military coup in Chile in 1973, some 200,000 Chileans were forced into exile. This figure may have reached as high as 400,000 by 1988, when Pinochet's ban on exiles was finally lifted.

Antonia Rossi was born in Rome, where her family had gone into exile. In 1990, they returned to Chile. This idea of wandering the earth with no clear destination is figuratively represented by a sea whose symbolic scope dissolves in countless allusions. In L'Arcipelago (2000), Massimo Cacciari explores the ambivalence of the sea through its various names (Thalassa, Pélagos, Pontus, etc.), a strategy in keeping with the recurring presence of sea images in Rossi's film. The sea is a welcoming embrace, the mother goddess Thalassa, a route for incessant voyages; its waters may also represent the fluid nature of a blurred identity, not to mention the association of the sea with flooding, capsizing or being cast adrift. Perhaps the most powerful of these metonymic references is the one that suggests a connection between nomads and the land, and the search for water. These perceptions of the sea reproduce the physical and psychological displacement inherent in exile. The voice-over underscores this relationship, "it was said that my cradle was a boat rocking on the sea and that at some point it would go under" (00:10:17). In his book On Collective Memory (1950), Maurice Halbwachs explains that memory and identity, both

of the individual and of the social group, need a spatial framework in order to take shape. Continuing with the trope described above, the setting in which Rossi constructs her memory is the part of the sea that lies furthest from the land, the endless, rolling open sea (pélagos). As a biographical space, it is unstable due to its buoyancy; it is impossible to take root in these waters because there is no soil. It thus offers us only a broken identity and a second-hand memory.

One more idea related to the sea metaphor is worth considering here. The word "archipelago" etymologically designates the first area of the sea with islands. It could therefore be thought of as an "in-between space", a bridge (pontos) between the sea and the land. These images reflecting the constant movements of the characters are constructed as animated maps of an imaginary area split off from terra firme. The homeland appears isolated, spectral and distorted, its reconstruction seemingly impossible. Among the various associations established by the editing, the representations of the country are linked to images of weather phenomena wreaking havoc, in a juxtaposition of shots that establishes an imaginary of a forbidden and inhospitable land (Carvajal, 2012).

The director explores the condition of insularity that political exile brings with it. To this end, she seeks out a diverse range of materials to give shape to a story that eschews the recurring image of exile to take a position in peripheral and marginal imaginaries.<sup>2</sup> This somewhat frenzied sensory contexture is doomed to failure as a means of documenting facts and constructing an identity, but the filmmaker turns this essential failure into something evocative, tangentially opposed to the abuse of the archive. Her cinematographic style involves the combination of various forms of representation, including documentary and fiction, as well as a wide range of images and expressive registers. It is an archive that does not belong to her in the strict sense, but she uses it to turn the experience of others into her own and reality into fantasy.







Images 4-6. Images of the sea in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

With its reference to an origin, the word "archive" shares a connection with "archipelago". The film is thus founded on the spectral nature of a country and of a manipulated archive whose content is ghostly and unreal, because if raw data ever do appear, they do so in strange, distorted or hallucinatory ways. There is television footage of political events: the Days of National Protest in the 1980s, the earthquakes of 1985, the attempted assassination of Pinochet in 1986, the referendum of 1988, and the dictator's death in 2006. The aesthetic banality of the news is set in opposition against the poetic voracity of animated films,

found footage or images created using fades, overlays, elision and off-screen space.

The soundtrack is endowed with the same poetic sensibility as the visuals, as each component music, noise and vocal textures—has a symbolic function and organises the metaphorical enunciation of the narrative (Caffy and Falcón, 2020). Extradiegetic music operates on several registers, ranging from gentle background accompaniment to sinister digressions with a common theme: waves on the sea. In some scenes, the parameters are distorted by violently overlapping layers of sound, noise, atonality, distortions of timbre, audio saturation, silence or syncopation, synthetic textures or ruptures in the vocal track that remind us of the presence of the cinematic device. The special importance of sound in the film's construction is not limited to these resources, as there are also unexpected noises, asynchronous sounds, semantic uses of noise and silence, tropes and repetitions, discontinuities and dissonances between the audio and the visuals. The voice-over adopts an allegorical tone and plays with different volumes, tones and vocal nuances that enrich its contribution to the film.

# MATERIALITY OF THE DEVICE AND TRANSLUCENT IMAGES

The use of collage extends to the very surface of the shot by means of two expressive techniques: superimposed images and the inclusion of film outtakes. The director uses both of these to construct and reconstruct images through the accumulation of layers and simultaneous fragments. Foreign elements are also inserted into the image itself to break up its unitary nature, forming a pictorial collage within the film frame. For example, the exposure of the framing or the appearance of the frame within the frame directs the spectator's attention to the properties of the filming device, while underscoring the idea of cuts and boundaries inherent in collage.

Similarly, superimposed images, overlays, double exposures and multiple images such as lap dissolves produce a stratifying effect. A series of images creates a larger unit that is unstable and dynamic, i.e., conveying a strong sense of transience, as the images in question are veiled and unveiled. In her "cartography" of found footage, Nicole Brenez describes cross-cutting or superimposition as the "technique of highlighting certain images by superimposing other images on them" (2002: 95). Rossi makes metaphorical and metonymic use of lap dissolves between shots and superimposed images by regulating their simultaneous appearance on the screen and intervening in the degrees of visual predominance of each image. Thus, their features fade and intertwine to form

tear of an anachronistic film format like Super-8, the grains, scratches and edges on the film stock, the use of outtakes, the raw camera footage, the effects of emulsion, the combination of film, video and photography, the exploration of surfaces, the camera positions very close to bodies, objects and spaces, the adjustments of focus, the truncated shots and the reframing to expose the visible and the invisible are some of the technical strategies used to expose the filmmaking material.<sup>4</sup>

The audio is arranged as another material component by switching back and forth between synchronized and unsynchronized sound, noise and silence, elisions and syncopations. This materialism is not just a self-referential act but also possesses a sensory power that connects it with "hap-





Images 7 and 8. Outtakes and superimposed images in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

new figurations.<sup>3</sup> The encounter between them creates connections and resonances that straddle the line between transparency and opacity, in a sort of phenomenology of translucence (Peyraga, Gautreau *et al.*, 2016). And in the shift from one image to another, the rhythm of the change invites us to explore the filmic device itself and its storytelling activity (Peyraga, Gautreau *et al.*, 2016). This is an exercise in "cinematographic reflexivity" (Gerstenkorn, 1987: 7) that is reflected in the other strategy mentioned above, the exposure of the filmic exoskeleton. These proximate, unstable images introduce the latent states and material structure, the subtlety and brutality of the filmic body into the representation itself. The wear and

tic visuality" and "haptic listening" (Marks, 2000). According to Marks, haptic perception privileges embodied experience and sensory contact with the image. The observer/spectator becomes "vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing" (Marks, 2000: 185) and its distanced perception. Listening is also founded on this principle, as sounds have a tactile dimension in their unevenness and ambiguity. Marks stresses the embodied experience of cinema and the blurring of the boundaries of perception. In *Eleco de las canciones*, we can touch and be touched by images that overlap and merge with each other and with our own anatomy. A closer look at some of these compositions can illustrate

this point (Images 7 and 8). These examples juxtapose shots of different origins (live action and animated), such as a rotoscoped image of a redhaired woman walking at dawn or the check dam containing a violent storm. Suspended in the air, the figure gives sensory form both to motion and to motionlessness. In another sequence, the instability of the camera is made palpable. However, this movement has not resulted in the shot being discarded; on the contrary, it is incorporated in an imperfect register. The shaking possesses sensory qualities that are explored in terms of sensual and tactile proximity.

# WITH NOBODY'S VOICE AND A CHILD'S GAZE

In minute 00:01:25 of the film, we hear a voice-over that tells us: "I wake up with my eyes shut." In this way, Antonia Rossi responds to the call of the past, through something as volatile as sensibility and the waking dream state. With this statement, she proposes an exercise of memory with closed eyes. This secret inner gaze resembles a hypnagogic phenomenon: the field of vision is filled with luminous reflections of things previously perceived. By delving into one's private world, the memory of exile is revealed to be a game of apparitions and eclipses. The expatriate expe-

rience is an unstable and ambiguous mnemonic sign, as there can be no straight line between a sense belonging and a geographical location. Any place is simply where "my body" is; there is no anchor, only a constant coming and going. The subjective expression of alienation seems to place us in an autobiographical narrative, which is, however, contaminated by fiction. The first-person voice-over that accompanies the images contains the echo of those "thousands of children who, like a plague, were

born and grew up on the same borrowed patch of land" (00:10:45). The director's creative method depends on a long period of previous research, conducting a series of interviews with people who experienced their early childhood in exile. Out of the memories, impressions and sensations described in these discussions, she constructs a monologue that interweaves the personal with the collective.<sup>5</sup> Inhabited by the stories of others, this voice has a political consistency, because it confirms that possessing the past is impossible. This acousmatic character explores the lyricism of the images, articulating a poetic, metaphorical language that also provides a halting tempo, repetitions and durations as the images flow past.

While it is an adult voice that tells the story, the gaze evoked in this projection of memories is a child's. The filmmaker brings together these two periods of life by assigning them complementary roles. The adult recalls the memories in the present and drives the narration, while spatial, symbolic and historical references are elaborated from the child's perspective, based on what she felt in the past. The recreated character explores the extent to which the present is imbued with that other, undelimited time, because the evocative exercise assumes a certain coexistence of adulthood and childhood. One image appears repeatedly throughout the film: "Juana's eyes" (Im-



Image 9. Juana's eyes in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

age 9), a close-up shot of the face of a child whose gaze is becomes an unexpected protagonist. The voice-over, which accompanies the different appearances of the shot, expresses sensory experiences, dreams and memories of that past with something of a magical view of the world, blurring the boundary between reality and fiction as a result.

# FOUND FOOTAGE AND (RE)IMAGINED FOOTAGE

The desire to preserve the child's view in the recovery of the past informs the filmmaker's search for archival materials that are inscribed in a family register. She has found home movies-on Super-8 film and analogue video-of the Parra and Downey families and her fieldwork has turned up an important archive: the films of the Chilean folk group Inti Illimani. This amateur filmmaking lies at the very core of the film's conception. The elasticity and the absence of sequential structure of the original footage make it an open text (Zimmermann, 2008). The director intervenes in the flow of images of a private world, eroding and reshaping the fragmented actions typical of family films and incorporating them into an evocative, metaphorical chain. In other words, she provides them with an aesthetic base and a technical cohesion. The footage remains, of course, a remnant of meaning: the affectivity exuded by images created and preserved in a family environment. At the same time, this domestic dynamic has the effect of "enabling personal micronarratives to emerge as a significant element of our understanding of past events" (Baron, 2014: 121). El eco de las canciones sheds light on the little stories found in the reverse shot of history, manifesting an "aesthetic of unimportance, of the objects and the subjects of everyday life" (Catalá, 2010: 305). The breakdown of the everyday world hints at the historical conflict, thanks to the understanding established with a spectator who remembers

what was happening outside the frame. The home movie stitches together the on-screen and offscreen worlds through the life experiences shared by its participants. The potency of this universe prompts the director to engage in a metafilmic exploration that (re)creates this film. Some of the other footage has the appearance of home movies,6 as Rossi used a Super-8 camera to film new material that emulates technical aspects of the found footage: inconclusive scenes, narrative dispersion, indeterminate time-frames, indifference toward the setting in which the action takes place, poses and gazes to camera, interferences, gestures of aggression, abrupt cuts between shots, etc. (Odin, 2010: 51). With this intertextual operation, not only does she blur the boundary between reality and fiction, but she also offers a reflection on the power of cinema to capture shadows and save fragments of life from oblivion.

#### **ANALYSIS**

Having examined the aesthetic and technical features of the film, this section presents an analysis of sequences, or more precisely, associative chains. In the prelude to this mnemonic exercise, the first images are outtakes that lead us into an imaginary that is more abstract than figurative due to its residual nature. Overexposed images produce a higher level of spatial estrangement, and the temporal dimension is subject to an enigmatic alternate history (Image 10). In line with this approach, the soundtrack offers noises that may allude to the gentle rumble of the sea. This flaw in the representation, where neither sound nor visuals have defined contours, evokes the historical episode: the bombing of the Chilean presidential palace, La Moneda, on 11 September 1973. The event is transfigured into an abyss, an absolute blackness embedded with a distorted audio recording: a radio conversation between Pinochet and his military commanders. The omission of the iconic images of the bombing establishes a

profoundly affective connection with the traumatic past (Ramírez-Soto, 2018). The poetic voice awakens to illuminate the visual development, constructing a different timeframe that combines biographical details with historical facts. The voice-over and image metonymically activate the evocative framework. The voice's description suggests an adherence to minimalism, restricted to the sensory impressions of an uncertain time. Similarly, the images are limited to small spatial segments. Rossi manipulates the material of others to extract detail and cuts out still-frames from animated films with different textures based on the type of animation used—specifically, from Gu-







Images 10-12. Images of postmemory in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

lliver's Travels and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Larry Roemer and Kizo Nagashima, 1964). The narrative content of these excerpts deals with the imminence of catastrophe, reflected in the sound of flashes added to numerous shots. The allusion to electric shocks and the accumulation of images offer a metonymic reading of film collage as a multifaceted technique. She inserts a series of exterior shots of the city where her parents lived (Image 11); as we fly over the orderly urban grid, the voice-over tells us she is unfamiliar with it. Next. a framework is articulated around a postmemory sustained more by affect than by knowledge of the facts, offering visions of exile. We are shown old archival footage of an expedition to the Chilean glaciers. In the home movies, the characters are outlined as fleeting wisps: Juana's eyes, the mother's profile, the father's glasses reflecting the sea (Image 12). Rossi intersperses, superimposes, and finally overlays the footage of the expedition with animated maps and a visual trope that is repeated throughout the film: birds as an archetypal symbol of migration. The soundtrack imitates this additive strategy with the juxtaposition of sound effects: the musicality of a theremin, the audio of a military proclamation and recordings of Pinochet justifying the regime's extradition policy. A final shot reveals that this chain is not only elliptical but also metaphorical: accumulated belongings are shown like the remains of a shipwreck.

The sequence showing the attempted assassination of Pinochet coincides with a visit to Chile by the exiled family. Their brief return brings the girl face-to-face with the tyrant's omnipotence: "it was like looking at his face for the first time; I looked long and hard at his expressions, listening to his voice" (00:30:54). There follow news images that are either manipulated in the editing to enlarge the details of Pinochet's face or permeated with other images of a dreamlike quality (Image 13). Added to this scene are animated war scenes, film excerpts of explosions and a reference to a dream about the death of her family. The voice-

over continues by telling of the journey back to Rome, which "was dampened by the explosion of a nuclear plant" (00:32:50). These two events, the assassination attempt and the Chernobyl accident, depart from linear time to slip into symbolic time. The journey back to Italy is intertwined with a visual rhythm of destruction (Images 14 and 15): maps of Italy and Chile battered by some kind of wind god, archive footage of Chernobyl and a gale-force blast that sweeps away everything in its path. The symbolic intention of this series of shots is to represent an individual threatened by two regions on the brink of extinction.

In another sequence, the visuals include home movie footage of what appears to be a political gathering of exiles. The one remembering is situated in that child's world where the ways of adults are unknown, mysterious and unreadable, and can only be decoded in sensory terms: "a movement, a gaze, or the way of holding a glass, attitudes, expressions and names piled up, constructing the history of a far-off place" (12:30-13:37). This fragment is stitched together with family footage whose common theme is childhood. A tenuous symbolic connection serves to shift the timeframe, which is still vague, because no date is given. Nor are there any specific spatial clues, although there is a poetic tempo, in addition to a density of images that transport us to a place marked by the weight of everyday life: the home. A series of home movies with indoor scenes that "are about vitality, enjoyment, and activities such as dancing and playing" (Van Alphen, 2011: 61). Into these portraits of ordinary life slips the historical event. In elusive language, the political issue of exile is hinted at. One example of this is the shot of a woman whose gaze to the world outside the story, so characteristic of the aesthetic canon of family films, offers a glimpse of the forced nature of her distance from home (Image 16). We return to the footage of the exiles' meeting, but this time it is explored more fully through the manipulation of the footage (zooms and pans). Little



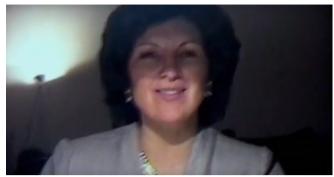




Images 13-15. Images of destruction in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

indications serve to reconstruct the banishment and political violence of the dictatorship (Images 17 and 18).

Finally, there is the series of images that allude to the exiles' return. The magnitude of the odyssey is now unfathomable, given that the return is to a fantasy realm with no mooring in real life. It is, once again, an alienating experience. This is why the combination of visuals used to represent it takes us into outer space (Images 19-21). Punctuated by television archives (the official announcement of the lifting of the ban on exiles returning to the country), the homecoming is reconstructed using a constellation of images







Images 16-18. Excerpts from home movies in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

of weightlessness. Animated still-frames of trees uprooted from the ground, footage of falling airships, a tracking shot over an empty airport or non-place and fragments of an airline safety video. Also shown are documentaries of space missions, but their original pacing is disrupted—accelerated, suspended or slowed down. The poetic association of outer space with the return journey is consolidated with footage that offers a view of the Earth seen from a spaceship in orbit, a cosmonaut falling into the atmosphere and an open parachute dissolving into a map of Chile. Added to these extraterrestrial scenes are shots of a fly-

ing saucer landing, taken from the Italian sci-fi parody film *The Twelve-Handed Men of Mars* (I marziani hanno 12 mani, Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia, 1964). The voice-over confesses to a fear of her memories being "hijacked"; hence, the need to amass "clues". The sensory expression of this kind of specular alienation is made complete with animated images of a storm shaking Gulliver's ship, and excerpts from a stop-motion film showing animals fleeing with nowhere to run. Upon their return, the city of Santiago is a darkened landscape; this is followed by footage of the streets as they are today. In other words, this strange place is approached in a dreamlike, unreal







Images 19-21. Images of returning in El eco de las canciones (Antonia Rossi, 2010)

state. Next, we see superimposed nocturnal silhouettes from *Tableaux d'une exposition* (Alexandre Alexeieff and Claire Parker, 1972), an animated film made using the pinscreen technique. The voice-over concludes that "sleepwalkers must not be woken up because they will never move again" (00:44:45). The homecoming requires not just the reconstruction of a homeland, but also a collective reflection on the processes of exile, the temporary nature of the host countries and the claim to the country of origin (Benedetti, 1984).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

El eco de las canciones is an illustrative example of a work of postmemory that straddles the line between autofiction and metafiction (Quílez Esteve. 2015). It thus constitutes a radical allusion to the very mechanisms of discursive construction. Various techniques are brought into play in this film. First, the use of metonymy and fragmentation give this film the quality of an interstitial production. Rossi weaves a genealogy, collecting archival materials that she picks apart and patches together using the collage technique. On the other hand, every remnant and vestige presented is imbued with a subjective perspective, because she is aware of the forces of destruction involved in every act of preservation. She recycles discarded elements and vests monosemous versions of the past with new meanings on a personal, sensory level. In this way, she explores illusions and speculations in a thwarted attempt to recover an irretrievable past. It is thus possible to identify a poetic turn in the association of images, with the recurrence to certain tropes. The allegorical disruptions of the segments can be centrifugal (in the chain of associations) or centripetal (within the shot itself). Rossi thus explores the potential of a collage technique beyond superimposed images sound collage and cross-cutting—and combines its material variations. This fragmentary technique reflects the dispersed nature of memory and the

emotions associated with it, creating a mosaic that shifts back and forth between the personal and the collective. We are thus drawn into a dislocated identity that the story reconstructs and deconstructs repeatedly. Rossi captures dissonant voices to put together a collective memory, delving into the experiences of others in order to understand her own. One final point of reflection involves the filmmaker's investigation and experimentation. Based on the meticulous examination of home movie archives, an unfocused practice, Rossi transforms these private records into a public aesthetic discourse that speaks of loss, alienation and nostalgia. This process gives the everyday a new meaning, with a symbolic weight within the film narrative, while also foregrounding it in a pastiche approach involving the recreation of a home movie aesthetic.

In short, *El eco de las canciones* is a rambling evocation made up of fragments, bursts of light and complex soundscapes, a filmmaking exercise that transcends the conventional documentary narrative to become an audiovisual poem about memory, rootlessness and identity. ■

#### **NOTES**

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- 1 Various sequences from *Gulliver's Travels* appear in the film. This choice is especially significant because it reflects the filmmaking process and the experience that Rossi sought to capture in her project: "in one of the conversations the story of Gulliver [a book that one of the people interviewed had read as a child in exile] came up. I thought about it and noticed a connection between the character and my personal experience, the feelings of estrangement and alienation I felt. Gulliver is a nomad, a stranger who observes every new world he finds from a distance and who is ultimately expelled to a place completely foreign

- to him. The animations illustrated these feelings and possessed great visual power" (A. Rossi, personal communication, 20 June 2024).
- 2 A. Rossi (personal communication, 20 June 2024).
- 3 A. Rossi (personal communication, 20 June 2024).
- 4 A. Rossi (personal communication, 20 June 2024).
- 5 A. Rossi (personal communication, 20 June 2024).
- 6 A. Rossi (personal communication, 20 June 2024).

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# ARCHIVAL MIGRATIONS AND "POETIC NOMADISM" IN EL ECO DE LAS CANCIONES (ANTONIA ROSSI, 2010)

#### Abstract

This article presents an analysis of a film that reflects on the "postmemory" of Chilean exile and return, *El eco de las canciones* (Antonia Rossi, 2010). The study attempts to map the way Rossi draws on archives to develop an evocation of an episode of political violence, shifting the referential use of these sources towards a contingent, poetic and open approach. At the same time, it explores the capacity of the documentary to extrapolate subjective experience and generate a notion of a community of memory. The analysis involves a review of some of the narrative strategies developed in a first-person documentary that is in fact constructed in the plural, as well as a consideration of paratextual elements that enter into a dialogue with the film's diegetic universe.

#### Key words

Postmemory; Exile and Alienation; Archive; Poetic Language.

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# MIGRACIONES DE ARCHIVO Y «NOMADISMO POÉTICO» EN EL ECO DE LAS CANCIONES (ANTONIA ROSSI, 2010)

#### Resumen

El presente trabajo analiza una obra que reflexiona en torno a la «posmemoria» del exilio y el retorno chileno, *El eco de las canciones* (2010), dirigida por Antonia Rossi. Se intenta cartografiar el modo en que esta cineasta trabaja la evocación de un episodio de violencia política desde el archivo, desplazando su uso referencial hacia uno contingente, poético y abierto. Por otro lado, se subraya la capacidad del documental de extrapolar la experiencia subjetiva y generar una noción de comunidad mnémica. Para llevar a cabo el análisis, se revisan, primero, algunas de las estrategias narrativas desarrolladas por un documental en primera persona, que es, en verdad, construido pluralmente, para, con posterioridad, detenerse en elementos paratextuales que dialogan con el universo diegético.

#### Palabras clave

Posmemoria; Exilio y desarraigo; Archivo; Lenguaje poético.

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# MEMORY(IES) DRAWN: THE REPRESENTATION OF EXILE IN THE ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY: JOSEP (AUREL, 2020)\*

ROBERT ARNAU ROSELLÓ

# I. INTRODUCTION: ANIMATION AS DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL

In recent decades, contemporary documentary cinema has undergone a profound transformation that has expanded the traditional conception of the genre, which has always been closely associated with the indexical value of the cinematographic image and its supposedly analogous relationship with reality. This transformation, resulting from multiple hybrid productions, has pushed the genre's original boundaries so that it now overlaps with other apparently unrelated and even supposedly opposing forms (Arnau, Sorolla and Marzal, 2023). In this regard, although documentary and animation have had parallel histories that have rarely intersected, the relationship between them is by no means new. However, in recent years there has been a powerful resurgence of the connection between them, reflected in the development of a heterogeneous corpus of productions presumably classifiable in a category of its own: a new hybrid creative space, experimental by nature, characterised by the use of discursive strategies that allow filmmakers to reflect on memory, war, and its traumatic consequences. This article offers an analysis of the relationship established between imagination, subjec-

tivity, and memory in the animated documentary (or documentary animation, depending on the author concerned), exploring its process of construction of the truth effect (Zunzunegui and Zumalde, 2019: 27), with particular attention to the unique nature of the authorial voices that emerge, the key role played by traumatic experiences of the past as catalysts in this type of film, and its particular processes of signification. From this perspective, the Spanish animated film Josep (Aurel, 2020) offers a fascinating case study because of a visual composition resulting from a complex coupling of reality and imagination, documentary and animation, memory and narrative, which places it at the creative cutting edge of contemporary documentaries produced in Spain. With a polyphony of narrative, expressive, diegetic, visual, intertextual. and meta-referential elements in the construction of its visual enunciation, and consequently, in its processes of signification, Josep is a key film in the animated depiction of Spanish exile in the wake of the Civil War, based on the dialectical (post)memory established between Josep Bartolí's drawings and Aurel's animations. The use of documentary animation as the story's main expressive element inspires reflection on the nature of such animation and its capacity to affirm its own value "documentalising", which is comparable

to that of the traditional (and sacrosanct) photographic document.

# 2. THE NATURE AND SPECIFICITY OF THE ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY

The animated documentary is completely ignored in classical film theory. Indeed, neither Nichols (1997), nor Renov (2004), nor Winston (1995) make reference to it, apparently forgetting that John Grierson himself, one of the pioneering directors of the documentary genre, was a great promoter of collaborations between documentary filmmakers and animators. Plantinga (1997) is the only pioneering theorist whose approach permits a consideration of the animated documentary as a potentially viable means of representing reality. However, on the question of its specific nature, DelGaudio (1997) is the first author to assert its unique identity, initiating a debate about the possible emergence of a new genre with her suggestion that animated documentaries develop a representation and reconstruction of reality in a new register that is based not so much on mimesis as on the subjectivity and personal testimony of the creator. Along the same lines, Wells (1997; 1998) proposes a definition for the complex territory occupied by this genre, describing the animated documentary as a production that uses animation with a kind of testimonial or documentary objective, thereby providing a conceptual foundation for subsequent research on this particular creative space. On the other hand, Lawandos's conception (2002) focuses on analysing the nature of the animated documentary, identifying a certain iconic quality that approaches indexicality with its own expressive mechanisms, although by means of a very specific code. More recently, Kriger (2012), Martinelli (2012) and Honess Roe (2013) have all pointed to a subversion of the classical documentary's pretension to indexicality as one of the main hallmarks of animated documentaries. The work of Honess Roe (2013), which constitutes

the first systematic study of this particular relationship between documentary and animation, proposes a characterization of this unique burgeoning genre that is now so widely quoted that it may practically be deemed the standard definition. For this author, the animated documentary is the product of the intersection of the modes of representation of the documentary and those of animation. She defines it as an audiovisual work produced digitally, filmed, or scratched directly on celluloid with three main characteristics: "(i) it has been recorded or created frame by frame; (ii) it is about the world rather than a world wholly imagined by its creator; and (iii) it has been presented as a documentary by its producers and/ or received as a documentary by audiences, festivals or critics" (2013: 4). Although this definition is the most oft-cited in this specific field of study, it must be acknowledged that it suffers from a few limitations that cannot be explored in detail here due to questions of space. As Moral Martín argues, "the wordiness of the definition does not conceal certain epistemological limitations that undermine a clear delimitation of the category. Indeed, the moment we begin to explore each of the three conditions, the first doubts begin to appear" (2025: 42). In any case, for a more comprehensive understanding of the concept, the studies by Ward (2005), Khavaji (2011), Formenti (2014) and Skoller (2011), or more recently, Murray and Ehrlich (2018) and Ehrlich (2021) are essential, as they lay firm foundations for a more extensive analysis of the phenomenon. In Spain, only a few authors have considered this field, such as Català (2010), Vidal (2011) and Cock (2012), who make incidental reference to the existence of a hybrid space between documentary and animation. Other studies of relevance, such as those by García López (2013; 2019), Sánchez-Navarro (2013; 2019), Burgos (2015), Fenoll (2018, 2019), Moral Martín (2020), Moral Martín and Del Caz (2021), Martí López (2020), Lorenzo Hernández (2021), Martín Sanz (2021) and Zylberman (2022), have specifi-

cally treated the animated documentary as an object of study, but only partially, focusing in each case on specific aspects of the phenomenon.

# 3. DOCUMENT, SUBJECTIVITY, AND DENUNCIATION IN JOSEP (AUREL, 2020)

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that the feature film analysed here is a unique, atypical work, whose hybrid and markedly experimental nature renders it difficult to classify according to any of the established genre categories of the audiovisual industry. This is of course one of the things that make it such an interesting object of study. Amidst the extraordinary thematic and technical diversity of the vast corpus of animated documentaries produced in the last decade, Josep stands out for its way of bringing together a range of highly disparate approaches, expressive elements whose combination reflects the many different ways of representing reality in animated images, with forms of expression drawn from the fiction film, animation, and documentary genres. This film, directed by Aurélien Froment (under the alias Aurel), relies on a particular way of structuring the story as a basic pillar in the development of the narrative around which the different plotlines pivot, while explicitly and repeatedly breaking away from the linear approach to adopt a branching (or rhizomatic) construction developed in keeping with the type of enunciation and the mechanisms used to mobilise it, as will be shown below. The story told in the film is placed in a real historical context, at the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the years immediately after it. This period serves as a historical anchor for the narrative and the graphic testimony of a character who is also real, the Catalan artist Josep Bartolí (1910-1985), who had been largely forgotten in Spain. Towards the end of the war, in February 1939, the French government set up concentration camps to deal with the waves of Republican refugees entering the country to flee Franco's dictatorship. The chances of survival were slim: "The human river continued to flood France. Nobody had foreseen it or prepared for it" (Montseny, 1969: 22). Among the countless prisoners was Josep Bartolí, a brilliant artist and dedicated Marxist who had fought against the Franco regime, whose graphic testimony serves as the basis for the story. His life in the camp, his drawings, his friendship with one of the gendarmes, and his escape and subsequent exile in Mexico and the United States are the story's main plot points. During his exile in New York, he becomes involved in one of the most avant-garde artistic environments of the era, where he begins publishing his drawings and illustrations in periodicals such as Holiday Magazine and the Saturday Evening Post and he even works in the film industry as a set designer. In 1973, he receives the prestigious Mark Rothko Award for Fine Arts, in recognition of the significance of an oeuvre characterised by an interest in political and social issues that will continue to be a focus of his work until his death in 1995, in the same city that received him as an exile fifty years earlier. However, Aurel's film is not just a biography, but also a grim portrait of the treatment of Spanish refugees (Lorenzo Hernández, 2021), depicted specifically through Bartoli's experiences and his work, in a filmic metonymy that portrays a part as a means of representing the whole.

The film also employs various techniques in order to play with different expressive forms, based on a combination and manipulation of elements such as temporality, meta-referentiality, and narratorial confusion. An example of this is the painstaking work of weaving together different time-frames, which disrupt the narrative with constant shifts back and forth in time between the different stages of Josep's life, with a chromatic treatment constructed around dialectic and contrast: the anguish of exile, his escape to France over the Pyrenees, the deplorable living conditions in the French concentration camps, his flight to Paris and detention by the Gestapo,

and finally, his successive exiles in Tunisia, Mexico. and New York. This mosaic of scenes of his life unfolds in a cinematic time that wanders between past and present, deliberately departing from a linear narrative to weave together disparate spaces and times and even taking a certain degree of licence with the representation, for example, of the chronology of events. The whole story is narrated from the perspective of the present (anchored in the contemporary moment of the production of the film itself), when the gendarme Serge, now an old man, reconstructs the story as he tells it to his young grandson (who is now also a budding illustrator). This interplay of seemingly disordered and disconnected temporal layers develops as the story progresses to offer a multidimensional view of Josep's character, his historical-geographical context and, by extension, what he symbolises: the Spanish Republican exile.

This playful approach is equally evident in the masterful manipulation of the enunciation, or in the explicit confusion of narrators that propels most of the story and catches the viewer offguard with a clever diegetic twist. From the very beginning, the film establishes an identification between the narrator and the protagonist, so that it seems (or is made to seem) that the narrator is Bartolí himself; however, in an unexpected twist we discover (well into the development of the narrative) that it is actually Serge, a French gendarme who befriends Bartolí and becomes the story's co-protagonist. This twist is neither inconsequential nor accidental; on the contrary, it underpins the story, which thus abandons the point of view of the victims to adopt instead the point of view of the perpetrators (although with the key nuance that this perpetrator is a benevolent one who does not take part in the repression imposed by the French state and ends up becoming a close friend of Bartolí). This could be said to constitute the shift from the victim's to the perpetrator's trauma proposed by Morag (2013), which highlights its psychological effects and "demands a complex

negotiation of the mismatches between post-traumatic memories" (Sánchez-Biosca, 2016: 14).

Another example can be found in the lack of motion in the film's animation, replicating the illustrations of Bartolí that serve as the source of the images. Indeed, the static quality of the graphics makes this more of an "illustrated" film than an "animated" film (if we restrict the definition of "animation" strictly to images in which the characters move). This quality reinforces the identification between the two graphic approaches (Bartoli's drawings and Aurel's images) and evokes a pre-photographic visual regime as an essential foundation of its discursive construction. The static condition of the comic drawing in its documentary form is pre-photographic, but at the same time it reflects the influence of the motion picture on visual forms, both moving and still (Català, 2011: 56). In this respect, it is possible to distinguish two categories of sequences that are diametrically opposed in terms of their treatment of time through the animation: one that makes direct reference to the past in the French camps, which is more static and uses an earthy colour scheme of dark, muted tones with somewhat discontinuous 2D animation based essentially on the immobile nature of the drawings of human figures; and another that portrays the present of the narrative (the time when the story is being told), which uses a very broad palette of intense colours and a notable variety of hues, as well as more fluid animation, with much more obvious movement. In this way, the filmmaker deliberately eschews the style of hyperrealism that dominates contemporary 3D animation in a quest for textures and effects that resemble those of other pictorial techniques, such as the watercolour painting.

# 4. SELF-REFLEXIVITY, META-REFERENTIALITY, AND ENUNCIATIVE INTERTEXTUALITIES

At this point, it is worth delving further into some of the aspects discussed above and focus the analysis on the self-reflexive, meta-referential, and intertextual quality of the story and how this multifarious nature is reflected in the film's visual enunciation. The ways in which the story is organised and the elements used in its construction reveal the main discursive strategies of the film, which thus becomes a kind of multi-purpose laboratory for testing out a diverse range of techniques and bringing together disparate elements (of the text itself or of other texts) around the narrative core. On this basis, the film functions as a self-reflexive essay on memory that examines its own disjointed nature using certain specific techniques. Two film sequences encapsulate this operation particularly well. The first is a sequence that serves as an anchor for the reflection offered explicitly in the sequence that follows it. Serge recalls a night on the seashore in the concentration camp with Josep in which we see Frida Kahlo in bright, intense colours, emerging from the waters of the Mediterranean to ask Josep to light her cigarette while he is talking to Serge. This completely implausible scene constitutes a moment of magical realism that fuses reality and fantasy to evoke both the central theme of the film—the power of the imagination (in drawing or illustration) as a means of chronicling reality—and the unique nature of documentary animation, with its ability to combine significant relationships and statements

THE FILM FUNCTIONS AS A SELF-REFLEXIVE ESSAY ON MEMORY THAT EXAMINES ITS OWN DISJOINTED NATURE USING CERTAIN SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES like this in a remarkably natural way. In the second sequence, which is located in the present (the contemporary time-frame, when the story is being told), Serge tells his grandson of the trip he made to Mexico with Josep to visit Frida Kahlo. At this moment, his grandson asks him whether she is the same woman who visited them in the camp, as depicted in the previous sequence. And it is here that the film itself reveals its perspective, through the protagonist himself, when he replies: "No. how would she get into the camp? Your memory is off." The reference to memory here is direct, exposing its selective, elliptical, zigzagging, essentially narrative nature, with all that these qualities imply. All memories, including the protagonist's (and thus, the memory on which the film relies), suffer distortions that are often involuntary, although no less biased for being so. This is a courageous and risky assertion, as it may make the spectator doubt the veracity of the text itself. Precisely to avoid this possibility, the story is constructed with a chronology possible only in cinematic time, overlapping different superimposed time-frames that alternate in a logic that is neither linear nor causal, to pose this essential conundrum without ever resolving it. What is the nature of memory? The answer to this question, it is understood, is left up to the spectator. It is an honest, technically elaborate ethical approach that places us squarely at the epicentre of a debate as complex as it is necessary.

The film also functions as a meta-referential essay on the art of drawing, constructing its own story on the basis of graphic and/or visual elements characteristic of (and specific to) animation and illustration. Like other animated documentaries, it offers a reflection on drawing (essentially, the image) through enunciative elements that are inherent to its very nature. There are numerous examples of this throughout the film, although there are certain sequences that depict the relationship in a subtler way. Right from the beginning, some of the essential dialectics of the mise-

en-scène are hinted at artistically. In the opening sequence, while the popular song "A las Barricadas" (an anthem of the anti-Franco resistance that symbolises the Spanish people's active struggle to defend democratic values) plays in the background, the greyscale images and the darkness of the scene contrast with the presence of a single colour: red, which spreads over the ground until it reaches a white shirt caught on a tree branch, flapping in the wind. It is the colour of blood, violence, pain, and executions. The scene gradually gives way to gently falling snow and silence, white blankness to the sound of a quietly blowing wind. This scene expresses the essence of exile: surrender (the blood-stained shirt as a white flag) and imposed silence, the acceptance of defeat, the collapse of a political project, and the loss of hope for survival. Despite their capitulation, they are killed or crammed into concentration camps, dehumanised. But Bartolí manages to survive despite the devastating shock he suffers, and over the course of his life he will be able to move from the black and white of his drawings to the colour of his later paintings, in which red is assigned a special value, just as it is in the film. The symbolic value of red and its use in transitions between sequences as a kind of chromatic evocation of blood, as well as in other dramatic elements of the story (such as the Algerian guards' hats, known as fezzes or tarbooshes), locate us fully inside the pictures Bartolí painted in New York, revealing how the use of colour unfolds in his work after the trauma of exile.

The relationship between Aurel's images and Bartoli's drawings is the basic element that sets the tone and the graphic texture of the film. The identification between the two styles is expressed through various techniques, articulated by means of a wide variety of strategies, combinations, and

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUREL'S IMAGES AND BARTOLÍ'S DRAWINGS IS THE BASIC ELEMENT THAT SETS THE TONE AND THE GRAPHIC TEXTURE OF THE FILM.

appeals to the spectator. On this basis, the film asserts the documentary value of its source material as the main argument for its own existence and connects with certain artistic traditions that it expressly evokes. One of the clearest examples can be found in a shot of a gendarme assaulting a woman, taking advantage of her weakness and helplessness (evoking the rape, abuse, violence and

generally inhumane treatment faced by exiled Spanish women in France). This shot is effectively a copy of a drawing by Bartolí that portrays these abuses, whose figurative expression alludes to the visual motif of the abused naked woman in the iconographic tradition of European painting, exemplified in Gentileschi's Susanna and the Elders (1610). Here, Susanna represents the exiled woman, or the besieged Spanish Republic itself, brutally stripped of its legitimacy (Image 1).





Image I. Gendarme and a woman. Shot from the film Josep (Aurel, 2020) and original by Bartolí

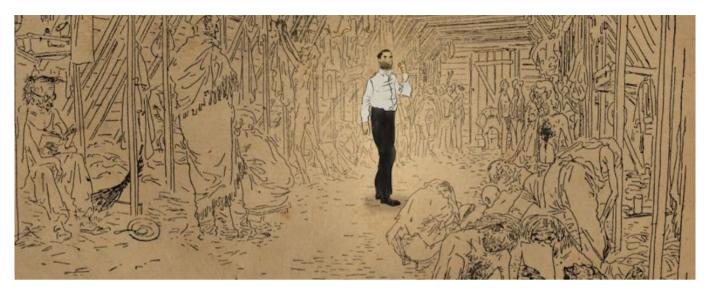


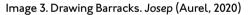
Image 2. Josep in his own drawing. Josep (Aurel, 2020)

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge a fundamental fact of the film's discursive construction, i.e., that the integration of Bartoli's drawings into the body of the narrative necessarily vests them with new meanings. This is due not only to their placement in a new narrative context, in a new text, but also to the very fact of their insertion into a cinematic discourse, now converted into film shots, whose meaning is determined by their position in the syntagmatic chain that characterises cinematic language (Sánchez-Biosca, 2010). This new semantic context gives each of Bartoli's drawings a specific meaning that is not subordinated to the meaning of the story but completes or complements it and synthesises the sequences into which it is inserted. The meaning thus arises out of the combination of these two main elements to establish a dialogue based on their particular contribution to the intentions of the text. On one level, the design, size, angle, and composition of many of the film's shots are based on drawings by Bartolí that never actually appear on screen themselves, such as the images of the concentration camp and the prisoners behind the wire fence. Other shots are literal reproductions of Bartoli's drawings that are juxtaposed by means of lap dissolves with the originals, which thus become filmic material. On a second level, the meaning emerges out of the way the two graphic styles are edited together, such as the sequence in which a group of children in the concentration camp catch a dog. The sequential arrangement of the film's illustrations with Bartolí's drawings generates the ultimate meaning of the story. While the film's images (Aurel) show the dog being captured, the drawings show the boys eating meat, and then the remains of the corpse. If we consider the materiality of this particular enunciation, the film's message is clear: the harsh reality is left to Bartolí to portray. Once again, there is a contrast between colour and black and white, between the fine line and the rough sketch. On a third level, the film deploys two distinct strategies to construct its meaning: on the one hand, through a combination of the two elements, not by means of the editing or by juxtaposition, but through an incorporation of both, an intervention of one in the other (as when Bartolí himself walks inside one of his drawings of the prisoners' barracks) (Image 2); and on the other hand, through the animation of Bartolí's original drawings, such as in the case of the process of building the concentration camp, a unique document of that macabre work that portrays the materials, stages, and forced labour involved in its construction in considerable detail (Image 3).

Both the time-frames and the settings of the story, and even the characters, are embedded in a very deliberate chromatic conception expressed in the tonal arc of the film. From the very beginning, with the appearance of the film's title, JO-SEP. in white letters on a black background, the filmmaker hints at the lack of colour in Bartoli's drawings of the camps, which are expressed in pure black and white tones that are "harsh, violent, that's what things were like there," as Josep himself explains later in the film. Greyscale images, the technique used for horror, predominate in the traumatic sequences. However, colour emerges in certain sequences. The progressive appearance of a subdued colour in the camps introduces a tonal modulation (dull, earthy, predominantly brown colours) that leads finally to the vivid manifestation of luminous, saturated, intensely bright colours (in the sequences with Frida Kahlo in Mexico and also in the scenes showing his paintings in New York). This chromatic dialectic expressed on screen functions as a visual translation of Josep's psychological states in the periods that these sequences represent: the terror, pain, dehumanisation, and trauma of the concentration

camps in contrast to the freedom, art, and activist memory of exile in Bartolí's life. In the materiality of the images themselves there are visual signs of this duality of art and life that defines his career and an explicit assertion of the value of drawing as documentary material.

Beyond the considerations outlined above, it would be impossible to overlook an operation employed in the film that gives rise to a synthetic meaning, supported by a symbolic parataxis that facilitates a clear interpretation of its enunciation. During a brief moment of transition between the first sequences of the film, a shot shows an aircraft squadron forming a swastika as it advances toward the French flag flapping in the wind. The symbol formed by the planes literally engulfs the flag, placing the Nazi regime and the collaboration of occupied France on the same level, with the impending fusion of the two symbols. But it need not only be read in this literal sense, as it may also be understood as a perfect encapsulation of the process of assimilation, conversion, and dehumanisation of a country whose treatment of Spanish exiles reproduced many of the stigmatising actions of Nazism (Image 4).





Right from their initial conception, the intertextual relationships established with other texts are direct, as they are presented as explicit quotations in the film's visual enunciation: the book *Campos de Concentración 1939-194...* (Bartolí and Molins i Fàbrega, 1944), an album containing Bartolí's original drawings and text by Narcís Molins i Fàbrega, which was published in Spain in 2007, more than 60 years after the publication

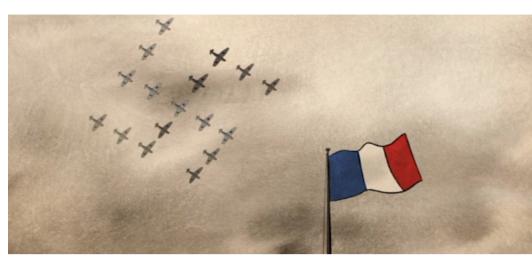


Image 4. Aircraft and Flag. Josep (Aurel, 2020)

of its first (and only) edition in Mexico; and the book La Retirada. Éxodo y exilio de los republicanos españoles (García, Bartoli and Bartoli, 2021), written by Josep's nephew in tribute to his uncle. As intertextuality operates at different levels in different sequences throughout the film, it is worth highlighting the significance of some of these references (implicit citations) made by the filmmaker because they determine the iconographic nature of the film itself, not only because of the presence of Bartolí's illustrations as subjective yet probative elements, but also because of the repeated artistic references. On the other hand, the conversion of some of the perpetrators into animals (pigs in this particular case) at certain points of the narrative connects the text to Art Spiegelman's graphic novel Maus (1986), whose storyline is closely related to the plot of Josep. The animalisation of these characters constitutes a graphic expression of the fact that the French gendarmes suffered greatly under Nazi rule. but in turn inflicted indescribable suffering upon their Spanish prisoners, much like the collaborationist Poles in Maus.

But the film also makes use of the tenebrist chiaroscuro that characterises Baroque art in Caravaggio's style, specifically Gerrit van Honthorst's *Christ before Caiaphas* (1617), to express the abuse of power through the use of light, and the photo-

graphic iconography of the concentration camps represented by Francisco Boix's photographs, to cite just a few examples.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS: THE DRAWING AS AN INDEX, FORMAL VARIATIONS OF THE EXILE'S MEMORY

Documentary animation is ultimately a tool whose potential lies in its ability to render the invisible visible through a kind of shifting between the real and the imaginary. It offers an image very different from the indexical dimension underpinning the documentary tradition and explores both reality and subjectivity from new perspectives, in a game of echoes and resonances that draws on techniques of other art forms and reconstructs them with its own codes. This new exploration reveals an urgent need to reflect on specific aspects of war and exile that have been neglected, undervalued, or completely forgotten until now. Evidence of this can be found in the existence of a number of films that have depicted the traumas of the Spanish Civil War and/or its consequences, such as 30 años de oscuridad [30 Years of Darkness] (Manuel H. Martín, 2011), Dead Horses (Cavalls morts, Anna Solanas, Marc Riba, 2016), El olvido [Oblivion] (Xenia Grey, Cristina Vaello, 2018),

Palabras para un fin del mundo [Words for an End of the World] (Manuel Menchón, 2020) and Josep (Aurel, 2020). The original impulse of the pioneers of the genre who have explored traumatic events through animation, such as Persepolis (Vicent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, 2007), Waltz with Bashir (Ari Folman, 2008), The Missing Picture (Rithy Panh, 2013), and Chris the Swiss (Anja Kofmel, 2018) is now making its presence felt in Spanish documentary animation.

In this sense, Josep takes us on a kaleidoscopic journey through the life of Josep Bartolí during certain periods of his exile (especially his life in the French concentration camps and his subsequent emigration to Mexico and the United States) and the vicissitudes of his struggle to survive. His story is captured in a film that serves as an explicit condemnation of the cruelty, violence, xenophobia, and hatred directed at the prisoners in these camps, most of whom were anti-fascists. Based on a disruptive, non-linear narrative combining multiple time-frames, the film constructs a story in which the enunciation is repeatedly rendered explicit or subverted (for example, with the use of Bartoli's original drawings). The stratification of meaning described above takes shape in a kind of choral approach combined with a unique narrative complexity: the technique of playing with the different time-frames of the story is alternated with other elements of the enunciation, such as a carefully orchestrated narratorial confusion (explicit and deliberate), and the repeated use of intertextuality (painting, literature, documentary films, comics) that broaden the horizon of meaning in the film, connecting it with other text types and art forms. It is thus a polyphonic film articulated around the use of two types of drawings (Bartolí's originals and Aurel's images) that weave together different narrative time-frames subtly embedded in the different settings of the story. The narrative progresses on the basis of the multiple echoes that resonate between the story's different layers, but also with the aid of a vast palette of expressive elements. These include the different types of drawings and their relationship with the animation that underpins the plot, the symbolic use of colour to bring dialectical chromatic contexts into opposition, and the sound design reflected in the soundtrack (an essential element that articulates the filmic narrative, which drawings on paper obviously lack).

Josep Bartolí is depicted in the film as an artist who develops an oeuvre of resistance and political protest in which the drawing assumes the role of a weapon, as an impulse, a vital need, and a testimony. His drawings serve as the substratum and graphic material of the film, positioned in formal terms between caricature, photography, and avant-garde art (a rare variety of graphic art that includes includes realist, expressionist, surrealist and hyperrealist features). His style is unmistakably personal, raw, adaptable and diverse, reflecting a unique gaze that defines an extensive and widely recognised pictorial oeuvre. His illustrations, which are given movement in the film, explicitly signal the brutality, violence, and trauma of exile, but more than just the index of a referent, they are the index of a gaze, and the element that encapsulates both his experience of and his personal perspective on the concentration camps and the repression that the Spanish Republican exiles suffered there. In short, the aim of Josep is not to reproduce reality but to document how it was experienced (Zylbermann, 2022). It is thus a film about the memory of exile and the act of drawing itself, in which Bartoli's drawing acts as the main character, justifying its insertion as indexical support for the animated story. The film text itself expresses this intention in its enunciation. The point of view is positioned between testimony to and denunciation of the brutality and repression suffered by Spanish exiles in the French concentration camps. The film reveals the hardships of Bartolí's exile while integrating his own drawings into the development and progression of the story in a way that reflects

the indexical value of his subjectivity as a probative element, beyond its explicitly personal, imaginary, and constructed nature.

IT IS A FILM ABOUT THE MEMORY OF EXILE AND THE ACT OF DRAWING ITSELF, IN WHICH BARTOLÍ'S DRAWING ACTS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER, JUSTIFYING ITS INSERTION AS INDEXICAL SUPPORT FOR THE ANIMATED STORY.

### **NOTE**

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### MEMORY(IES) DRAWN: THE REPRESENTATION OF EXILE IN THE ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY: JOSEP (AUREL, 2020)

#### Abstract

Although hybrid forms combining animation and documentary film have existed since the earliest days of cinema, in recent years there has been a resurgence of the connection between these two genres. the magnitude of which can be seen in the development of a heterogeneous corpus of productions that belong to a category of their own. The animated documentary constitutes a mixed and diverse creative space, open to visual experimentation and the use of discursive strategies that are markedly authorial, reflexive, and evocative of memory. In this sense, the Spanish film Josep (Aurel, 2020) offers a fascinating case study due to its particular characteristics, which are analysed in this article using the methodology of the film analysis to reveal its particular processes of signification and its firm commitment to affirming the indexical value of Josep Bartoli's subjectivity as a probative element, beyond its explicitly personal, imaginary, and constructed nature. The film's expressive material facilitates a dialectical, critical reading, whose meaning relies on a very precise formal organisation of its audiovisual enunciation that vindicates the memory of exile through drawing and animation, while condemning the brutality of fascism, repression, and war. Contact: rarnau@uji.es

### Key words

Animation Film; Documentary Film; Animated Documentary; Drawing; Exile; Memory; Spanish Civil War; Repression.

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# MEMORIA(S) DEL TRAZO. LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL EXILIO EN LA ANIMACIÓN DOCUMENTAL: JOSEP (AUREL, 2020)

#### Resumen

A pesar de que la hibridación entre animación y cine documental se ha fraguado desde los inicios del cinematógrafo, hoy en día asistimos a una revitalización del vínculo entre ellos, cuva magnitud se puede advertir en la emergencia de un corpus heterogéneo de producciones que se inscriben en ese terreno específico. Un espacio creativo mixto y diverso, abierto a la experimentación visual y al despliegue de estrategias discursivas de marcado carácter autoral, memorístico y reflexivo. En este sentido, el film Josep (Aurel, 2020) es un caso de estudio ineludible en el ámbito español debido a sus especificidades, que analizaremos a partir de la metodología del análisis fílmico para desvelar sus particulares procesos de significación y su firme voluntad de reivindicar el valor indicial de la subjetividad de Josep como elemento probatorio, más allá de su carácter explícitamente personal, imaginario y construido. La materia expresiva del film promueve una lectura dialéctica, crítica, cuyo sentido descansa en una muy precisa organización formal de sus enunciados audiovisuales que reivindica la memoria del exilio a través del dibujo y la animación, al mismo tiempo que denuncia la barbarie del fascismo, la represión y la guerra.

#### Palabras clave

Cine de Animación; Cine Documental; Animación documental; Dibujo; Exilio; Memoria; Guerra Civil; Represión.

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rolla-Romero. He has also co-edited the books Más allá del documento. Derivas y ampliaciones del cine de lo real contemporáneo (Tirant Lo Blanch, 2023) with Teresa Sorolla-Romero and Javier Marzal Felici, and Nuevos retos de la imagen: cuerpos, escrituras, voces (Tirant Lo Blanch, 2024) with Marta Martín Núñez, Shaila García Catalán and Aarón Rodríguez Serrano. . Contact: rarnau@uji.es

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También ha coeditado los libros *Más allá del documento. Derivas* y ampliaciones del cine de lo real contemporáneo (Tirant Lo Blanch, 2023), con Teresa Sorolla-Romero, y Javier Marzal Felici, y *Nuevos retos de la imagen: cuerpos, escrituras, voces* (Tirant Lo Blanch, 2024), con Marta Martín Núñez, Shaila García Catalán y Aarón Rodríguez Serrano. Contacto: rarnau@uji.es

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# DIALOGUE

# THE HOUSE AS EXILE

Interview with

# LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

# THE HOUSE AS EXILE

# INTERVIEW WITH LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

MATEI CHIHAIA ANDREA LUQUIN CALVO

Published in 2007, Laura Alcoba's novel Manèges: Petite histoire argentine is based on its author's experience of exile. Other works by the author include Le bleu des abeilles (The Blue of the Bees. 2013), La danse de l'araignée (Dance of the Spider, 2017), which together with *Manèges* form a trilogy, and most recently Par la Forêt (Through the Forest, 2022). When still a child, Alcoba was granted asylum in France together with her mother, giving her a different language in which to express the memories of her childhood during Argentina's last military dictatorship. Enthusiastically received by literary critics and audiences alike. Alcoba's work of autofiction has been translated into several languages, including Spanish and English. Leopoldo Brizuela's Spanish translation of Manèges was published under the title La casa de los coneios—also translated into English under the title The Rabbit House—and became canonical reading almost immediately upon publication. The novel tells the story of an eight-year-old girl who lives with her mother and other activists against Argentina's dictatorship, in a house that conceals a clandestine printing press used to produce the historic militant magazine *Evita Montonera*. Together with its real-world inspiration—the Casa Mariani-Teruggi, which today is a national historical monument in Argentina—it could be argued that *The Rabbit House*, a widely read and discussed novel, constitutes a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory of recent Argentine history.

In 2020, the director and screenwriter Valeria Selinger (Foliesophies, 2006; Le Sixième, 2002), who is also of Argentine origin, added an audiovisual dimension to this lieu de mémoire with her film adaptation to Alcoba's novel. The film—an Argentine-French-Spanish co-production¹ that took the Spanish book title (released in English as The Rabbits' House)—foregrounds the perspective of its young protagonist to tell the story of her

# **DIALOGUE** · LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

fugitive experience in very few words. Fear of betrayal, covert communication, censorship, shyness and shame—all vectors for the silence and dread that run throughout the film—contribute to the intensity of a motion picture that has received several nominations and awards at international festivals, including the New York Latino Film Festival, Seattle Latino Film Festival, Guayaquil International Film Festival, and Taormina Film Fest.

In a conversation on a video call to Paris, France (where both women live), the writer Laura Alcoba and the director Valeria Selinger offer their reflections on *The Rabbits' House*, discussing

the complexities involved in every film adaptation of a novel, while also acknowledging the role that the cinematic image plays in the creation of visual documents of memories related to violence and exile. Both creators explore the way these images are constructed based on the possibilities offered by cinematic language, considering the multiple dimensions opened up by the distance of exile, especially from the perspective of childhood memories, as well as the tensions that arise between the artist's fervent need for personal expression and the construction of a collective document/lieu de mémoire.

# Valeria, do you remember the first time you read *The Rabbit House* and when you knew you wanted to make a film adaptation of the book?

Valeria Selinger (VS): Yes, I remember perfectly. I was staying near Barcelona, in Platja d'Aro to be exact. My mother had a holiday flat there. Because of her job she receives a lot of books, so every time I go I ask her for a book to read there. She said to me: "Here, this is for you." I took the book and sat down by the public swimming pool to read it. I finished it in a few hours, very quickly. While I was reading it, I visualised images for a possible film. Later on, I went to a lot of presentations where Laura talked about her readers, and I realised that what had happened to me was very similar to what happened to them with her book: a real identification with it. What I had seen while reading The Rabbit House were simply fragments of my own life reflected in the life of this young girl, Laura.

Laura, we would agree with Valeria that your book has a very cinematic quality. When you wrote *The Rabbit House*, did you have any visual points of reference? And on this point, what role does the image play in relation to memory—a memory that could be described as comprised of recollections of the images of places you've experienced?

Laura Alcoba (LA): The truth is that in the first stage of writing it, I didn't really know what I was going to do with it. I wrote the book out of a fervent need to write, but I was aware that by writing it I was rescuing images from the past, that in a way I was writing something like the photo album I never had. In fact, there is a whole element that is particular to the book and that Valeria took up in the film: the fact they weren't allowed to take photos. This is important because despite the fact our lives are filled with images, there were no photographic documents of that period and no family story, which was very strange. No stories, no vestiges, no photographs. In the first stage of writing

the book, I was aware that I was very specifically rescuing images. What I wrote at first were like mental pictures of the images I was able to reconstruct. Out of those images I constructed the book. In fact, I didn't start with a story, but with what I remembered: two or three lines about images, and then based on that I put together the story. I think that the feeling of a powerfully visual dimension of the book, which many readers tell me they've had and which Valeria noticed, arises out of the fact that its raw material was exclusively visual.

To what extent does cinematic language, as the language of the image, offer ways that are different from literary forms to depict violence, disappearance or exile? To give an example, one of the most significant scenes in the film is when the mother announces her decision to leave Argentina. This introduces a very interesting dialogue between "those who stay and those who leave." Are there elements in the cinematic imagery of this film that can expand or feed back into the memory-image presented in the book, or offer different perspectives or meanings?

LA: Yes, clearly for me it was important for Valeria to make her own film, that she wasn't just making a visual cinematic transcription of the book. I think there are a number of elements in Valeria's film that, without betraying the book, are unique to a cinematic form of expression. In fact, in the scene of the mother's departure, when we know the mother is leaving, there are a number of elements that are not quite the same in the book, but that contribute something and give her departure a feeling that is almost more dramatic, or in any case more embodied.

VS: For me, a book is words printed on a page, where in reality there is no image. The images are the invention of the reader, projections in the reader's mind. On the other hand, in a film, the images are projected on the screen. So there is a kind of "game of mirrors" between the narrative material of the book and the narrative material

that becomes the film. In this case, they tell the same story, but with different components: one with sounds and images, the other with words and what those words mean. I think possibly that particular scene, when the mother announces she's leaving, is where my own moment of breakdown is as a reader of the book—and the moment that most connects to my own story because my mother also left the country, although under different circumstances and at a different time. The details are different, but it is the moment where I identify the girl Laura most with my adolescent self. What I took away most from that moment was the intimacy between mother and daughter. In that shot, taken with a fixed camera, I wanted to highlight that space alone—with two beds and minimal lighting, because it's nighttime-where the characters move to communicate what they are saying to each other and what they leave unsaid. Precisely in that scene, the girl says a lot with her silence and with her eyes, with that kind of rejection of the information her mother is sharing with her. At the same time, for me that's the moment when the girl is forced to grow up, when she stops being a child, because now she has to live a different story. Within the structure of the film, that announcement is the last scene that propels us towards the denouement in the book. It's an important moment because it's also one of the few moments when the girl and her mother have a real dialogue. There are other shorter dialogues between them, when the mother is crying or walking hurriedly to prison, but that scene is pretty much the moment of greatest intimacy between mother and daughter.

In the book, there is an adult voice telling the story that marks a distance from the childhood memory being recounted. This voice not only appears at the end of the book but also at the beginning, when Laura writes "I am going to recall that particular Argentine insanity." In relation to the presence of this adult voice, how did you

# make the decision to focus on the child's memory as the axis of the story in the film?

VS: In reality, the film doesn't take the child's memory. When you write a screenplay, even a synopsis, you always write in the present indicative tense because the film unfolds in the present indicative of the screening. The film tells the story from the girl's perspective, but it isn't her memory, because what the girl is experiencing at that moment is her present. Personally, I don't particularly like voice-overs in films. It's something that I have a certain aversion to, except when they're used in films like Marguerite Duras's, with a particular aesthetic or artistic purpose. The first idea, which wasn't mine but was suggested by the first crew I had, was a voice-over narrating the film: obviously, I rejected that idea. I understand why these adult voices can be there, why they exist and have to be written in the book. And in fact it's lovely that the book opens with "hello, Diana, I'm going to write you a letter." I find it very intense, but in the film I don't think it would have made sense, because we see Diana alive. It's precisely the difference between the mental image that the reader of a book creates and the sound and image that exists when we watch a film, as a viewer.

The book begins precisely with a quote by Gerald de Nerval, "A memory, my friend, we live only in the future or in the past," and in the first pages we read: "The fact that I am now gathering together my memories in order to describe the Argentina of the dictatorship, the Montoneros and the reign of terror, all from a child's perspective, is not so much to help me remember as to find out whether, afterwards, I can begin to forget." We want to ask you about that tension between the need to forget what happened-by letting it out, Laura, through your writing-and that memory which, once told, is not forgotten but made present for others. How do you manage to shape the tension between the memory of the person who has lived through the events being told-who seeks

# "closure" for her own story—and the construction of a testimony whose presence serves others not to forget, but as an "opening" to this story?

LA: Yes, it's made present. It's true that the adult voice is there in The Rabbit House, but it appears in a very limited way, just at the beginning of the book, at the end and in that little chapter about the Spanish word embute. But in reality, the book isn't written as a recollection. It's true that I used my memories, but what came to me was in the present tense: through the child's voice, through an "it's like this, now," returning fully to the rabbit house, but not with the logic of memory. The question "what do I remember?" came before I started writing, but from the moment I started to write, the present came to me and the child's voice came to me: "La Plata, 1976," in the present, "we are there." The present in the book is there, not just in the very, very brief preface, which is the letter to Diana, and at the end, because the whole book is written based on the presence of that experience in the present, in the "we are there." That's what was really important to me, and perhaps it's also what makes the book so open to adaptation in that way, or open to that presence, as Valeria put it, to that immediacy of cinema's "we are there," which in a certain way was already in the book. It's not about remembering, it's not about evoking, but about being there again, in that moment. VS: What cinema also makes it possible to do, with this book, is just what you said at the beginning, Laura. The fact that there are no photos and that all the photos need to be invented. The fact that there are people who died, there are survivors of this story, and there are no photos. So this was like a task to take on, a huge commitment to try to do it. At every step we took to make the film, the value and the weight of that commitment was there. We were making images of that history that didn't exist before, that were in the minds of some people and that had killed others.

The "rabbit house" referred to in the book and the film is recognised today as a historical monument in Argentina. It is a memorial site named Casa Mariani-Teruggi, a "house of memory" or "the house on Calle 30". In this sense, does the film constitute a document capable of "triggering memory" for the present? Is it a work constructed to address this "lack of documents" that can show what has never been told and needs to be? In other words, in what sense can this film also be constructed as an archive-document of memory?

VS: I think so. Cinema has that quality. Even a burlesque comedy, I mean, any kind of genre-if we admit the existence of genres-has a documentary function. There are things called costumes, scenery, which speak of an era and a way of filming that also conveys a certain style or period. Anything filmed is always partly a documentary. A Latin American telenovela is also a documentary, because it portrays the particular traits of a society at a given time, in a given place and in a given era. In this particular story, of course, the weight of what we call "memory" was important. There was, on the one hand, the story told in the book. In my opinion, the book is wonderful; Laura's writing is just beautiful, the story really touches me, I love it. On the other hand, there is the weight of the work with memory at the level of social commitment, at the historical level. Because it is a very clearly defined period, a very controversial period in the history of Argentina.

The documentary footage used in *The Rabbits'* House was taken from an Argentine film called Resistir (Jorge Cedrón, 1978). How was the decision made to include excerpts from this documentary in your film, Valeria? What is its importance in the narrative construction of *The Rabbits'* House?

**VS:** It was hard, first of all, to find documentary footage from this period. That film was the only one I found that I liked. It was an anonymously made film, because the director whose name ap-

pears on it doesn't really exist. The real filmmaker is a person who was abducted by the regime, and it was made using archival footage. So the footage I took came from Jorge Cedrón's film, but it's not even really his footage. He found it and I was given the rights by his daughter and nephew, who sold us those excerpts and told us that the filmmaker himself didn't know where they had come from, because it was a very chaotic time. Moreover, the laws regarding film rights were not like they are now. People filmed whatever they could, however they could, and it would be passed on from person to person. I don't know how Cedrón ended up with that footage. Actually, there's a lot of footage in the film that isn't from that period. There are several periods covered in that documentary, which tells the whole history of the Montoneros [the activist organisation that operated the "rabbit house"]. You can tell sometimes from the police or military uniforms. I kind of did the same thing: I took the excerpts that I thought I could use, regardless of the era they came from.

The decision to use this footage was precisely to show the opposite idea; I mean, I absolutely didn't want the film to look like a documentary, to have to explain "here this happens" or "this is the situation" or "this is the president." Is there an explanation? Yes, with the titles at the end. But, well, at that point the viewer has seen the film and if they want to read them they will, and if they don't they won't. Explaining things would have meant abandoning the child's perspective. I just wanted to explain things by showing what the girl saw. It seemed a good idea to me to be able to give an antithesis, in the introduction, with a little bit of what the girl didn't see. That footage is there, in the title credits, besides the film's opening narration. In fact, the frame [aspect ratio] is also smaller: it's four thirds. Then we mixed it with an image filmed by us of the mother and the girl running, and then the screen opens out into scope format, which is the aspect ratio we used in the film.

Further to these documentary excerpts, as you already pointed out, Laura, one of the passages of the book analyses the origin of the Spanish word *embute*, questioning its omission from the Spanish dictionary and pointing out that this term always appears in relation to Argentina, and that it has something of a unique meaning for Argentines...

LA: Less so now, I suppose. It's a word that was very much a slang term and it wasn't widely understood; even in Argentina very few people understood it. And that was the point of the word, you see? The fact that it was a word with a very particular usage, referring to a space for protecting and hiding things...

In the specific context of exile or violent conflicts, words are constantly being created to describe or try to explain the processes of repression or situations being experienced. Is this research/reflection appearing in the book about the word embute also part of your own quest to make sense of what you experienced? Is it a term that represents something, not only for you but also for that period? And again with this question we return to the issue of the relationship between the individual and society...

LA: There's one element here that, for me, it's crucial that it actually doesn't appear in the film—and it's normal that it doesn't appear—and that's the fact that I wrote the book in French. That was the first difficulty in the verbal construction: that what I wrote was entirely in French. I'm convinced that I couldn't have written the book in Spanish, because the language I write in is French. [When I started writing.] the first word that came to me was a word in a Spanish that was also a private Spanish, filled with slang. It was a paradox, an additional difficulty, for me, to make sense of all this in French. But I think it actually helped me. Many people who had experiences like this in childhood remain locked up in a kind of pact of silence that is very difficult to break [because] as children—at the same time they join the pact—they assimilate the need to hide and to say nothing about that very strange reality. I've met a lot of people of my generation in Argentina who've told me things like: "I experienced something similar, and I still can't talk about it; thank you for writing the book." I believe that the distance, the geographical and linguistic distance, really helped me talk about that experience and that silence from a different place.

If there is exile in my writing it's there, in the writing, but not explicitly. That first book of mine doesn't talk about exile, but it's written from the perspective of a form of exile, from a distance, from another shore. In the film, necessarily, that doesn't happen, because the perspective is fully on the events [depicted]. It's important to remember that The Rabbit House, in the form you read it and as Valeria read it, is a translation of a book I wrote called Manèges, which was published by Gallimard. If exile is there, in reality, it's essential but not thematic, not explicit. There was a strangeness that was really very powerful for me when I wrote dialogues in French that were basically in my memory in Spanish. Actually, I think that helped me a lot. Although, as I said at the beginning, the story is told from inside, there in 1976, I wrote it all in another language. That helped me overcome the silence and the fear of talking, which fully forms part of that experience. Actually, in her adaptation, Valeria gave a lot of room, fully inhabiting, in cinematic terms, the silence in that child who keeps mum. I think what helped me break the silence was to write, to tell the story of that very strange experience with different words.

Without doubt, silence is fully present in *The Rabbits' House*, as is fear: the fear of giving everything away, always being careful about what you say. The film creates a whole atmosphere in which silence and fear are presented from that distance which, as you point out, allows us to see another dimension of the experi-

ence. María Zambrano argued that exile, in its separation, enables us to understand aspects that others—those who remain "inside"—cannot see or say about their own reality. Now, Valeria, we have two questions for you: How do these sensations translate into cinematic language? And how can this be done from your perspective, from your own distance?

**VS**: On the one hand. I think one of the brilliant aspects of Laura's book-besides the fact that it tells the story in French—is precisely the fact that she speaks, putting silence into words. In the book there is one word next to the other, and what they tell is precisely that silence. That's what grabbed my attention, what I liked, what attracted me to this book and the story it tells, living far away both in time and space—from the period. It's what connects Laura's story to the story that I myself could have lived; it's like a bonus, a trump card. Because my Argentina, the one I know, is the Argentina of that era. People talk and dress like they did in that era, people think like they did in that era. While I still go very often—and in 2006 and 2007 I even lived for a year and a half in Argentina—that is the Argentina that moves me. So constructing a period film was easy, because it's what I knew. If I had been a different age, it would have been a different story. In fact, when the actors spoke—language is something that evolves very quickly, and Argentine Spanish evolves even faster-they used idioms, expressions and a lot of diminutives all over the place that weren't right for that era. It was something that kept taking me out of the scene, as I needed to constantly correct it so that they would try to talk the way people talked then.

The music plays an important role in the silence. It's a bit like "a cherry on top", because Laura introduced me to Daniel Teruggi (Diana Teruggi's brother), who wanted to do the music for free. I think it was when I had told Laura first that I wanted music with noises, and the music Daniel does was just the kind of thing I had in mind. For

# **DIALOGUE** · LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

me, the music served to fill the girl's silences. Not only does the music say what the girl doesn't, but also, in a way, the silence is expressed, as I said before, in everything the girl explains and tells us through her gaze. Indeed, if the girl's gaze hadn't been an expression of the silence and of the need to hold her tongue, her mother would probably have to be explaining to her: "look, we're going to do this here, for such and such a reason." There would have to be explanations all the time; there would be scenes of things that happen. But it's not like that, precisely to amplify the girl's silence.

Regarding the actor who plays the leading role, Valeria, did you ask Laura for any information to choose and/or do the casting work with her? And Laura, did you have contact with the actor during filming or afterwards? In other interviews you've mentioned that your mother saw the film and that she even felt that there was a physical resemblance between you and the actor who plays you. Was there any specific preparation work with the actor or in choosing her? It is often said that working with child actors is difficult...

LA: For me, the resemblance wasn't important. The girl is not me. I don't identify myself with her at all; it was not something that was important to me. So, yes, my mother did say that. My father said the opposite. The truth is that it wasn't what mattered. Valeria was kind enough to send me two little screen tests with two potential girls, to see what I thought. I said that I thought there was one who was more expressive. That seemed important to me; not which one looked more like me or which one I could identify with, that was never it. Regarding the tests Valeria sent me, I said: "I think there is one that I feel has more presence." And it turned out that she was also the one she liked. I didn't meet or talk to the girl at all beforehand, because this was an actor and a film, it wasn't about finding a "mini-me" or telling her "it wasn't like that," not at all. She's the girl who plays the character in *The Rabbit's House*. She's not me at all. But afterwards, I did have the opportunity to see her and tell her that I had found her performance moving.

VS: Yes, physically, let's say, there was no preamble. We did two casting calls for the girl and there were blondes, redheads, brunettes, tall girls, short girls: the physical characteristics of the girls didn't matter at all. What mattered was something else; above all, it was the gaze. And to me, from the very moment of the casting, Mora-the actor's name is Mora Iramain García—captivated me with her eyes and how she was able to handle this question of the silences and to convey emotion. Because ultimately that's what the film needed: the ability to convey emotion with her eyes, with her postures, with her body; as she conveyed it, without needing monologues, or sentences, or even dialogue. Her mother brought her to the casting call because of her own personal story, as it turned out that the girl's grandparents were among the disappeared. When she told me this, I said, "No, this girl can't be the actor, because she's going to break down on me; after two scenes she'll be crying, she's not going to be able to do it." So I pushed, I mean, I was more "brutal" in the casting call with her. I told her: "Look, since you know the history of the military dictatorship and all, let's imagine that the soldiers are there, the ones who took and captured your grandparents. What would you say to them?" And her response was perfect. Then I said: "now, let's imagine you have to do the same thing, but without saying anything to them. What do you do? The soldiers are there. How do you talk to them without talking to them?" She did it in a way that the three of us who were doing the casting were left teary-eyed. Suddenly, Mora got up and said: "Hey, girls, I'm acting. Don't cry." By then she had won us over. The truth is that I was really lucky because, yes, although in general making a film with children is difficult, this girl is exceptional and it was very easy to make a film with her.

Another point that we want to raise is the capacity that works of art have in these contexts to find pathways towards reconciliation, restitution or justice, in a society broken by its violent history. To what extent do you consider that your work plays a role in this? For example, in both the film and the book, the children stolen by the military dictatorship are identified as an unresolved issue in Argentine history and society. We want to ask you both: do you think of art as a way to confront, reconcile or rebuild what was broken?

VS: I think so, but not because of the stories it tells, not because in this story we talk about people who were savage killers or about stolen children, but because the way the atmosphere is represented has a lot of depth. Through the film I tried to tell the story with very few elements and with a type of cinematic narrativity that I believe helped avoid a certain banality in the discourse. I don't know whether I succeeded, but in my view the political side of any artistic work has more to do with form than content. Obviously, there is a thematic core to this story told in Laura's book—as the source text—and this film—as its adaptation that has a strong political dimension with a relatively clear and well-informed ideological stance. But it seems to me that if a film or a book can help to debate ideas and change a reality, whatever it may be, to fight for what is right, or to find the missing children, it isn't so much because of what the story is as for how it is told. Because of the way the creators decide to tell it. I don't think that one without the other would work. Then there are viewers of other types of films that have worked successfully, really well, in addressing these topics: films from Argentina and other countries that deal with similar issues and that are films that also help. Laura, what do you think?

LA: I'm always very careful with topics that relate to a moment in Argentine history that obviously and inevitably raises a whole range of questions and political issues. In fact, I don't like dogmatic art and I'm quite fearful of it. I think taking the

perspective of a little girl to tell the story keeps [the book] from getting tied down to something dogmatic. The girl is there because she's there; she has no militant position to justify. The Montoneros weren't right either; it wasn't like "these ones were right, and these ones weren't", or "that movement or the other was right." Writing from that perspective was kind of imposed on me when I wrote it. I think it raises multiple questions that are more subtle, more complex. And that's the good thing, that the film totally respected the child's point of view with all its complexity. The child is there without having chosen to be; this is very important, and it's also there in the film. She's there because of the violence of the situation, because of external violence, but it isn't justifying any kind of position. She's there, and it's even more violent because of that. All of that is there, as questions raised, without any answer put forward: there's no dogmatic point of view. In any case, in my book there never was. I think of course that the film raises a lot of questions, because it touches a very painful moment in Argentina's memory. I didn't write a militant book, and I don't think the film is militant either, because militancy is always narrower.

VS: Of course, that's what I meant by depth. There's an obvious connection with the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, with the issue of the stolen children. I liked the fact that in addition to telling a very beautiful, very intense and well-written story, there was a connection with that part of Argentina's history that touches me on a personal and individual level. If both Laura's book and the film can contribute to finding the children who have still yet to be found, that would be great, but it isn't the reason you do this. Because otherwise, it would be a bit like positioning yourself as God: who are we to claim that what we're doing will lead to the discovery of the missing children who haven't been found up to now? The film and the book describe history in a particular way, but, in any case, they speak of history with a capital "H". And, from that perspective, as we're talking about history, there actually is a commitment.

To conclude, you both speak of the importance of recounting history through a "little story", which is also the subtitle of the book in French (Manèges. Petite histoire argentine). In other words, history affects people, and in that storytelling process, there is a phenomenon of speaking-listening to the memory of the second- or third-generation exiles who are faced with banishment or repression that, as you point out, raises more questions about what happened and about the place they have in the events depicted. Also taking into account the multiple types of distance that you've pointed out, who is The Rabbit House written and filmed for?

LA: I can simply refer to the complexity, or above all the individuality I talked about at the beginning, the fact that I wrote it in French, in Paris. I think that at the time I was writing, a form of storytelling began to emerge that for me was like recounting that moment to someone who knew nothing about it; in other words, it was for everyone, it wasn't targeting a particular audience. For example, when the book was later translated and launched in Argentina, I was asked a lot of guestions about how I position myself generationally. And I would say: "But I'm not; I don't belong to any generation. I wrote from a different place." I didn't feel I identified at all with a way of positioning myself in an Argentine discourse. I didn't even know that the book was going to be translated. For me, it was to say something and rescue something from the total silence, from that experience that was so huge, so strange. So it wasn't aimed at a particular reader; I didn't think specifically of an Argentine reader, or a Hispanic American reader. It was to salvage something from that sea, from that ocean of silence, about that very individual experience, which I actually still held somewhere in my mind and body. So Valeria might say something else, but that was really how I wrote it.

VS: Writing a book, or writing, even if it isn't a book, is already something huge and very powerful that requires a lot of concentration and work, a lot of things. Making a film involves a tech crew as well: cameras, lighting, a human team, a lot of people working on it, a financial team. Huge amounts of resources are needed. Considering all this, I think a film is basically always made out of the desire of the person who initiates it. What it mobilises is desire. Desire and need, which is almost the same thing in this respect, as something that cannot be stopped, an overriding need. There is a kind of inner urgency that nobody can even explain. Now, years later, it's impossible for me to explain what that desire, that overriding need, was based on. But that's how it was. I think there's a moment in writing, whatever it might be, when you create something, which is like when the boat really starts moving through the deep water and you start sailing inside what you're doing. And for that to happen, there has to be that deep desire that enables you to spend hours and hours and hours going over and over that same text, or that same scene, whatever you're doing. Perhaps I could connect this to the previous question, because it seems to me that this did not arise, either for me or for Laura, as an act of vindication. Perhaps the words "to find out whether I can begin to forget" are kind of what Laura's book and my film are about... This story is more an act of resistance than an act of vindication. So resisting is what you can do with this history so that it continues to exist. It brings together this vital need to move through this history with making this history exist.

#### **NOTES**

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# THE HOUSE AS EXILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

#### Abstract

Laura Alcoba's novel *Manèges*. Petite histoire argentine (2007), based on the memory of her childhood during Argentina's last military dictatorship, and its film adaptation by the filmmaker Valeria Selinger (*The Rabbits' House*, 2020) serve as a framework for this dialogue with these two creators. The interview explores the complexities in the production of any film adaptation, while also considering the expressive potential of the film image and cinematic language for the creation of visual documents of memories related to violence and exile, both personal and collective.

#### Key words

The Rabbits' House; Argentine military dictatorship; Film adaptation; Memory; Exile; Violence.

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# LA CASA COMO EXILIO: ENTREVISTA CON LAURA ALCOBA Y VALERIA SELINGER

#### Resumen

La novela Manèges. Petite histoire argentine (2007), de la escritora Laura Alcoba, basada en la memoria de su infancia durante la última dictadura militar argentina, y su adaptación cinematográfica, realizada por la cineasta Valeria Selinger (La casa de los conejos, 2020), sirven de marco para este diálogo con ambas creadoras. La entrevista no solo aborda la compleja realización que conlleva toda adaptación cinematográfica, sino que también plantea las posibilidades de expresión que poseen la imagen y el lenguaje cinematográficos para la creación de documentos visuales de memorias sobre la violencia y el exilio, tanto personales como colectivos.

#### Palabras clave

La casa de los conejos; Última dictadura argentina; Adaptación cinematográfica; Memoria; Exilio; Violencia.

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# (DIS)AGREEMENTS

# CREATIONS OUTSIDE THE FRAME

## introduction

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Matei Chihaia Andrea Luquin Calvo

## I introduction

MATEI CHIHAIA
ANDREA LUQUIN CALVO

When we began coordinating this issue of *L'Atalante*, it seemed to us that this section's name —"(Dis)Agreements"—very neatly encapsulates a key concept for navigating through the various dimensions of exile films.

Even limiting the discussion, as this edition of "(Dis)Agreements" does, to the specific historical cases of Argentinian, Chilean and Spanish exiles and their connections with a host country like Mexico, we would argue that the concept that may serve best to understand these films is something like the "rhizome" posited by Deleuze and Guattari (1976). If our aim is to explain certain filmmaking approaches whose complexity, based on the notion of exile as a permanent state of being outside (which thus spreads out to incorporate other approaches and/or to create new connections in places where films are being made in exile), the historiographies of so-called "exile films" cannot be limited to the identification of their relationships in terms of simple storylines, individual biographies, aesthetic movements, generations or national history. Exile films have the capacity to articulate geographical, generational, cultural and political interactions that intersect with subjectivities and communities, crossing different spaces and times to form multiple, complex lines of convergence beyond the established artistic fields (in Bourdieu's [1991] sense of the term).

However, while this conception may help us frame the study of the phenomenon of exile, it is paradoxically unable to obviate or overlook the specifically political fact that gave rise to it: expulsion from a modern nation-state. As Mari Paz Balibrea and Sebastiaan Faber point out (Balibrea, 2017), the Spanish Republican exile experience constitutes "a historiographical anomaly" (2017: 19), as although it cannot be separated from its condition as a phenomenon produced historically by a nation-state (being the outcome of the violent action of the Franco regime), in reality it existed precisely outside the idea of the nation, "in a mul-

tiplicity of times and spaces alien to the concept of nation/homeland shared by its victims" (Balibrea, 2017: 19).

Although Balibrea's reflection refers specifically to Spanish Republican exile-the longest of the exiles that concern us here, characterised by a unique condition of "absence multiplied by time" (Aub, 1995: 542) that sets it apart from the experiences of Latin American exiles—the underlying proposition made by Balibrea and Faber points to the problematic nature of historiography aimed at addressing any case of exile. For these authors, the difficulty lies in the fact that exile, as a noun, occurs outside the spatio-temporal context of the nation that serves as its adjective in a twofold frame of recognition (Balibrea, 2017): on the one hand, as an "Argentinian", "Chilean" or "Spanish" exile, and on the other, as a classification of "exiled" actors and directors (who will forever wear this indelible epithet, even retroactively attached to the work they did before they were forced from their homelands). This underscores the complexity of incorporating the work of exiled filmmakers into a traditional "national" reading of film history. This problem is not new to film theory, which has often reflected on the meaning, scope and limitations of the concept of "national cinema" in the context of film production, distribution and consumption, as well as its use in nationalist discourses (Sorlin, 1997; Elsaesser, 1997; Rosen, 1995; Higson, 1989; Hjort and MacKenzie, 2000; Schmidt-Welle and Wehr, 2015). Moreover, in its explorations of industrial and textual practices that go beyond conceptions of national collective identity, film theory has developed the analytical category of "transnational cinema" (Higbee and Lim, 2010; Shaw and De La Garza, 2010). But although such reflections are underpinned by an understanding of "exile films" as works that facilitate criticism of conceptions of national identity due to their construction outside the frameworks of recognition of the nation-state, they cannot sidestep the reality that such films are inevitably

associated with these frameworks due to the political nature of their classification.

Exile films thus challenge the traditionally established spaces for narrating identity, calling into question its construction from the perspective of the place these films present, a place existing outside the frameworks of recognition of the historiographies of which they form part: stories about schools, nations and shared cultural heritage. For this reason, their role as testimony and memory also plays a key role in the processes of recoverv of democratic life-or of life in an existential sense after the individual and collective traumas of exile—and to the construction of new political spaces for peaceful coexistence. Films made in exile—or the constructions of exile in various media—thus become key sites for analysis, criticism and reflection, and their recovery and dissemination are associated with the role that "historical memory" (Dickhaut, 2005; Mira Delli-Zotti and Esteban, 2008; Rosas-Salazar, 2024) and archives (Spiller, 2023) play in the construction of a society's historical narrative and identity. In this respect, laws aimed at recognising this memory enacted or proposed in Argentina, Chile and Spain have achieved very different degrees of success in each country.

In this necessary recovery of exile films, the location of the archives that contain them is a key task, but not as a reference that is merely added to the nation's historical narrative or as a possibility of configuring a kind of history parallel to it. Exile film archives reveal expressive techniques in both documentary and fiction forms—that can help us understand that "historical events have various dimensions; they have an inside, a depth, like a personal life" (Zambrano, 1998: 255). The multiple dimensions of these films range from open forms of political affirmation and resistance to aesthetic approaches and/or techniques based on personal, intimate views to tell us a story that has not just happened to someone, but a story that is ours, that continues to happen to each of us,

that continues to affect present generations. Exile films are thus not a phenomenon of the past, as exiles continue to speak in them, constructing discourses about their historical encounter with our lives, whereby their story touches us as something we recognise, and also as something that calls on us to act. In this way, they continue to create multiple connections and intersections.

This edition of "Dis(Agreements)" places the focus on that place outside the frame of discourses of identity, where we can trace a historiography of "Spanish and Hispanic American exile films" that encompasses the personal, the public and the political. These are films that are anchored—through their qualification with adjectives—to questions of the memory and history of the different nations to which they belong, but that at the same time always maintain the particular essence of exile that transcends them. To explore these ideas, this section presents a dialogue between different individuals and nations, as Mónica Villarroel (researcher and former director of Cineteca Nacional de Chile), Guillermo Logar (filmmaker, Spain), Melissa Mutchinick (researcher, Argentina), Luis Iborra (filmmaker and archivist, Mexico) and Olga Sánchez Tapia (filmmaker, Mexico) offer their responses to a range of questions about the recovery of exile films, their place in film historiography, their relationships with memory and processes of democratic transition, the aesthetic techniques they use to construct a personal expression marked by history, and their influence on contemporary modes of film production. With their responses, these creatives identify different points of convergence that spread out and back again through those multiple spaces and times that characterise every exile experience.

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### discussion

I. In view of the traditional reading of film history in national terms, what place do so-called "exile films" occupy in the construction of this historiography? Do the exiles' countries of origin seek to claim these works and their creators as their own, or are they understood as belonging to the host countries, and therefore as partly foreign?

#### Mónica Villarroel

It is possible to analyse these films in terms of the concept of transnational cinema, where the boundaries between the national and the foreign are less fixed. This idea doesn't exclude the nation. but it allows us to interweave it, observing filmmaking experiences, practices and registers that involve situations of transit, mobility and flexibility of political, cultural and aesthetic boundaries. In "Exile, Archives, and Transnational Film History: The Returns of Chilean Exile Cinema" (2022), José Miguel Palacios uses this classification for the case of Chilean exile films. These films can complete a historiography that is still in the process of being written. I agree with Palacios on the need to question the "national" paradigm and to understand these productions in a context of belonging that includes them, recovers them as their own and recognises other connections with the host

countries. But the big problem with recovering them is their scattered nature. Archives in countries such as Sweden. Canada. Germany. France. Cuba, and to some extent Spain and others have played a key role in preserving these film productions. National archives have made efforts to bring these films back through partnership agreements between film libraries, based on the concept of repatriation, considering them to be part of a national heritage. I had the job of promoting and following up on these actions while I was director of Cineteca Nacional de Chile (2015-2022). By 2023, we had recovered 115 films and recordings from eight countries. That was in addition to voluntary deposits made by the filmmakers themselves. Little by little, they've been digitised and made available online, but it isn't enough. For example, Raúl Ruiz's filmography is still in archives in France, Portugal and the United States.

#### Guillermo Logar

On the one hand, in my experience with the development of projects addressing questions of memory for both television and film in Spain, our industry shows a clear lack of interest in recovering our past. There are screenwriters, directors and some independent producers who have spent decades pursuing projects exploring episodes in our last eighty years of history. Very few of those projects end up coming to fruition despite their efforts. From an institutional point of view, I see no substantial change regardless of who is in power. It's an issue that is beyond everyone. The question of memory in our country's audiovisual industry is a veritable obstacle course that is almost impossible to run when you're a filmmaker operating outside the mainstream like me. I would also say that the efforts of the current progressive government to place historical memory and culture at the heart of its political action are, at best, too slow to meet the immediate challenges, and at worst, inadequate because they tend to peter out before achieving any real change. On the other hand, to highlight the extraordinary efforts of other institutions and their teams, thanks to Filmoteca Española, the San Sebastian Festival and the Reina Sofía Museum, in recent years we've been able to enjoy film cycles dedicated to directors such as José María Berzosa, to see Les Anges exterminés [The Exterminated Angels] (Michel Mitrani, 1968), written by José Bergamín, and to enjoy a restored version of José Antonio Nieves Conde's Furrows (Surcos, 1951), among other great opportunities.

We need a major national plan that will promote the recovery of the memory of exile, a comprehensive strategy that can combine the efforts of individuals, schools, regional administrations and the national government. But this idea is not even being discussed. For example, 2024 marked the 85th anniversary of the arrival of Spanish exiles in Mexico. Curiously, the host country organ-

ised more commemorative activities than we did. Isn't that astonishing?

#### Melissa Mutchinick

In terms of film historiography, I think the question of the origin of films made by filmmakers in exile forms part of a whole set of problems that are intrinsic to exile itself. In this regard, I believe that exile films suffer the same fate as exiled people; somehow they lose their sense of belonging, or they belong a little bit to both worlds. To date I haven't seen evidence of any cultural or political will to recover these works as part of the national heritage of their countries of origin. It's true that there have been some specific studies. For example, in Argentina, Javier Campo (2017) published a study that surveys the documentary films made by filmmakers in exile during the Dirty War (1976-1984). I think that raising this issue when we think about national film histories would be a very enriching way of understanding the social and political contexts that shape film productions, bearing in mind that the 20th century is filled with stories of migration and exile.

#### Luis Iborra

In the case of Spanish exiles in the Mexican film industry, which is the case I'm most familiar with, I think that there were only a few isolated cases of exiles setting out to make films about exile, such as On the Empty Balcony (En el balcón vacío, Jomí García Ascot, 1962), or Carlos Velo's 16 short films under the title Los republicanos españoles en el exilio [Spanish Republicans in Exile] (1984). In general, most filmmakers, actors and technicians integrated fully into Mexican society, and many even took Mexican citizenship. In aesthetic and narrative terms they adapted to local themes, cultures and issues from Mexican perspectives, making films that were essentially as Mexican as the ones made by native filmmakers, such as the work of Luis Buñuel, Luis Alcoriza or Carlos Velo himself. On the other hand, there

were lesser-known filmmakers who made hundreds or dozens of successful Mexican films, such as Jaime Salvador, José Diaz Morales and Miguel Morayta; actors who are remembered in Mexican cinema, such as Ángel Garasa, Miguel Arenas, Anita Blanch, Amparo Morillo, José Baviera, Prudencia Grifell and Julio Villareal: and composers such as Antonio Díaz Conde. who wrote the music for more than two hundred films, including the first and last films of Emilio "El Indio" Fernández. There were also filmmakers who founded schools and changed how the Mexican film industry operated in different ways, such as Josep Renau, who made posters for more than two hundred films in Mexico, introduced the compressed air gun technique and became a major influence on advertising in the Golden Age of Mexican cinema.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

To situate exile films in the construction of historiography, two factors need to be taken into account: the genre, meaning whether it is a documentary or fiction film; and the time-frame, meaning whether it is a story that could be considered contemporary or a period piece. In the first case, contemporary material has the possibility of gaining immediate recognition by dealing with the current reality in an act of denunciation. In the second case, it takes some time to assimilate the historical facts and develop a story out of them, which is why the result can be set anywhere in this construction and acquire a different meaning for each person who identifies with the content. That is precisely the paradox of being an exile: you always belong to your country of origin, but you also belong to the host country, and you feel foreign in both places. But this is not the case with films, because cinema is universal: it has no borders.

## 2. To what extent can films by exiles and about exile be identified as sources of memory/ testimony that challenge official historical discourses?

#### Mónica Villarroel

Films by exiles and about exile are not only a source of memory/testimony (which don't necessarily challenge official discourses, as they are also diverse); they are also other stories from a collective or an individual perspective, ranging from the personal to the social, and they contribute to the development of that memory. The films of Angelina Vásquez in Finland, Marilú Mallet in Canada, Orlando Lübbert in Germany, Claudio Sapiaín in Sweden, Valeria Sarmiento and Raúl Ruiz in France and many others offer a wide range of different perspectives.

#### Guillermo Logar

Audiovisual production is one of our main sources of knowledge about reality, as is literature. In

this context, Jordi Soler's book Los rojos de ultramar [The Reds from across the Sea] (2004) deserves special mention, as it's one of the most striking works on the exile experience of recent times. In Spain, despite its enormous value as a tool for understanding our reality, cinema continues to be underestimated as an instrument for social change. The official discourse, regardless of who is in power, is still controlled by the same forces as always. Films today aren't controlled by the Ministry of Information and Tourism; there isn't any need, because the private platforms and television networks, which are only interested in profits, have built an assembly line of inane products suitable for all audiences that preclude any possibility of reflection, subversion, or politics. It's blank cinema for an anaesthetised society.

#### Melissa Mutchinick

To every extent. Although they can work to different degrees, depending on the approach to the theme and the style of the film in question. I think it's important to identify the difference here between films in exile, meaning films that were made by exiled filmmakers, and films about exile. In the first case, it is their production conditions that give them the quality of testimony: they are the concrete expression of the fact that they couldn't be made in their countries of origin, and that the professionals who made them couldn't continue working in their own country, because doing so would even have put their lives at risk. In the second case, films that deal with the subject of exile clearly constitute a source of memory through the different perspectives and travels of the exiles, the shared and individual experiences, or the impact that exile has on people's lives and on their families.

In both cases, these films contribute to the collective construction of each nation's memory, based on their accounts of a phenomenon that has shaped much of the history of countries in Latin America and Europe. To determine how they challenge the official discourses, it would be necessary to analyse the unique political, aesthetic and discursive features of these films.

#### Luis Iborra

I think that some exile films represent a completely free perspective by many filmmakers that would never have been possible if they had stayed in Franco's Spain. Thanks to exile, they were able to enjoy the development and freedoms that existed in Mexico from the 1930s to the 1970s, [which enabled them] to address and explore issues that would never have made it past the Spanish censors. [All this was] despite the fact that they also had to deal with the difficulties of integrating into a workforce controlled by the trade union system established in Mexico, as well as the country's institutional censorship. Nevertheless, Spanish filmmakers were able to pursue successful careers in Mexico, like Luis Buñuel did with groundbreaking films such as Nazarín (1959), The Young and the Damned (Los olvidados, 1951), Viridiana (1961) and The Exterminating Angel (El ángel exterminador, 1962). Outside of Mexico, I think that the political documentary style of José María Berzosa, a Spanish director exiled in France, might qualify as a perfect example of a source of memory that challenges the official historical discourses. With his documentary Arriba España! (1976), filmed in secret and released a year after Franco's death, he was one of the major exponents of the anti-Franco political documentary. Another example is his documentary on the Pinochet dictatorship, Pinochet and His Three Generals (Pinochet et ses trois généraux), filmed in 1973 and released in 2004.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

To the extent that it is the main reason to make films of this kind. Not only does it help expose and raise awareness [about the injustices] but also in many cases it helps for healing process. It is through art that many people are able to endure the harsh reality that forced them into exile.

## 3. What role do or can "exile films" play in the processes of return, reconciliation or democratic transition in Spain and Latin America?

#### Mónica Villarroel

Just after democracy had been restored in Chile. the 1990 Viña del Mar Film Festival, the Festival del Reencuentro [Reencounter Festival], screened works for the first time by Chilean and other Latin American filmmakers in exile engaging in dialogue with those who had stayed in the country during the dictatorship. This reflected the challenge of creating films under very adverse conditions in both cases. Although the screenings of these films are usually limited to festivals, archival exhibitions, museums and other institutions dedicated to preserving memory and promoting human rights, they facilitate a very necessary reencounter and contribute to social processes that can rebuild bonds and heal deep wounds in our countries. Events such as the Havana Film Festival, the DOK Leipzig or the Berlinale, to name a few, allowed exiled filmmakers from Latin America and elsewhere to present their films and be given a voice. Unfortunately, access to these films is still only partial and their return has been slow, with contributions by researchers such as Palacios, who created a catalogue estimating about 230 Chilean exile films and investigated the processes of return, or the Argentinian Mariano Mestman and his studies based on the third world cinema archives recovered in Canada in the context of the International Conference for a New Cinema held in Montreal in 1974, among other projects that have contributed to these processes, such as the work I've done with Isabel Mardones on Chilean cinema in Germany, titled Señales contra el olvido. Cine chileno recobrado [Signs against Oblivion: Chilean Cinema Recovered] (2012).

#### Guillermo Logar

A crucial task is to introduce these films to the new generations. To do this, we need more film cycles and talks, greater dissemination in schools and the establishment of thematic courses, especially in film schools. We urgently need to change the perception of historical memory held by all the generations of filmmakers coexisting at this critical time for our country. This is a task that we all need to be involved in. In addition, in Spain we have the opportunity to share experiences with the communities of filmmakers in Argentina and Chile, who have much to teach us about democratic transition processes and how they are reflected in audiovisual productions.

#### Melissa Mutchinick

I don't know, I wouldn't know how to specify whether they play a specific role in that. But I think the process of return or transition towards democracy is different from the process of reconciliation. For me personally, the notion of reconciliation is dangerous, because it assumes within it an idea of letting bygones be bygones, forgiving and forgetting, which works against the construction of the memory of the people. It's difficult to think about the possibility of reconciliation when there are still crimes against humanity that have yet to be tried in court, victims of abductions who still don't know their history or their true identity, and bodies of the disappeared that still can't be buried. In any case, I think that "exile films" contribute to the development of critical thinking, exposing the various human rights violations committed by repressive governments, and taking a more militant approach to filmmaking, facilitating an awakening in certain sectors of society in both Spain and Latin America that could slowly erode the power of the repressive apparatuses of the dictatorial states.

#### Luis Iborra

I think they should play a much more important role than they do today, because these films are barely known unless they're films that don't re-

late to exile per se. In the case of Mexico, Mexicans have adopted the exiles as their own and no importance is given to their place of origin, while in Spain, I feel that there is a mixture of apathy and ignorance. I myself barely knew many of the exiles working in the film industry and the hundreds of "exile films" that exist until I got involved in one of the projects. I think it is very important for them to become better known, because their cultural richness could help people in the coun-

tries of origin reassess the perception they have of their exiles.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

Many of these films not only complement the processes, but also trigger social movements to promote human rights. The power of cinema is incredible in this sense. It depends on each case and on many factors, but it definitely plays a very important role.

4. Do these films constitute a way of engaging or establishing a dialogue both with the film industry of the country of origin and with its society and culture, or are they more commonly stories reflecting a personal understanding of the exile experience?

#### Mónica Villarroel

There are intimate stories and others that conform to a different logic, in dialogue with the industries of their host countries. For example, the filmography of Sebastián Alarcón, produced by the former Soviet Union's state film studio Mosfilm, addresses both universal and local issues, sometimes very closely related to issues in Eastern Europe. Another example is the Chilean filmmaker exiled in Mexico Miguel Littin, who was one of the beneficiaries of the Mexican Film Industry Renewal Plan promoted by the government of President Luis Echeverría, which provided him with generous funding for films such as Letters from Marusia (Actas de Marusia, 1975), an unusual case similar to Mexican films such as Felipe Cazals's Canoa, also released in 1975. Carmen Castillo, a Chilean exile who later settled in France, has made very personal documentaries about the coup in her country, such as Calle Santa Fe (2007) and another made for French television that explores the collective experience of asylum seekers in the French embassy in Chile. I don't think these films seek to call for or establish dialogues consciously, but films made in Chile itself have also addressed and continue to examine issues related to the coup, trauma and human rights.

#### Guillermo Logar

Films are the way filmmakers express their inner lives, their doubts and their fears. Although they reflect their personal experiences, they can resonate deeply with other exiles who see themselves reflected on the screen. The fate of the exile varies, but the pain and sadness, and the feeling of being transplanted or *transtrerrado*, as the philosopher José Gaos described it, are experiences that are probably very similar for all exiles. They are universal.

#### Melissa Mutchinick

I would say that all films engage in a kind of dialogue with their era, even those that we might consider more polemical. In those films in particular, I think there is also an intentional aim to create an opportunity for engagement and reflection, as ways of thinking and collective construction that are woven together through different individual stories. Personal tales weave together the narrative of history; in other words, it is the little individual stories that help us understand the nature of the events that shape history in general terms.

#### Luis Iborra

They might encourage a dialogue if these films were promoted more in the countries of origin, or even in the exiles' communities of origin, contributing to the expansion of their culture towards the host country and helping preserve the memory of these people who pursued successful careers in the world of cinema in countries other than their own. It is precisely the large number and immense diversity of films made by exiles that make them very valuable tools for establishing these cultural dialogues to promote greater intergenerational understanding.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

Both. The feedback will depend on the communication strategies developed around the film. In my case, the dialogue with the audience after film screenings is essential and immediately reveals the degree of connection that the audience had with the film. The level of empathy that a film can elicit is amazing, as is the internal response that develops in each individual, especially when the subject matter is familiar to them.

## 5. Do exile films share common concerns, approaches and/or aesthetic techniques in their film narratives? If so, what are they?

#### Mónica Villarroel

In the Chilean case, which is the one I'm most familiar with, the predominant feature was the thematic and aesthetic diversity resulting from very different modes of production. At first the coup d'état, the trauma and the denunciation of the crimes of the dictatorship were common concerns, but then the focus of the stories diversified. although the exile condition was a constant. As I mentioned before, there were directors who made feature films with big budgets covered by public film studios and others who worked independently or under the aegis of European film institutes or television broadcasters. Raúl Ruiz made several productions with the INA in France, but there are films shot on video or 16mm film by anonymous collectives, some of which have been preserved in Spain. Other very personal stories of the exile experience, such as Antonio Skármeta's films, based on literary or theatrical works, represent very different quests.

#### Guillermo Logar

I think I've addressed this in my previous answer.

#### Melissa Mutchinick

I think so, although I'm not aware of a single essential trait that defines them all. There is a kind of common atmosphere that surrounds them, which is related to the unique view they offer of the world they depict. The setting, the places where the stories unfold are given a special prominence (the streets, the architecture, the dynamics of the cities). However, the approaches and aesthetic techniques can vary, and this also depends on whether we're talking about fiction or documentary films. Among the latter, I see certain recurring strategies or techniques, such as working with archival material from different sources, often family archives such as audio cassettes, letters, photographs, home movies or videos.

#### Luis Iborra

If there's anything they have in common, for me, it is the ability to collaborate and involve compatriots in the filmmaking process, as many of these films are the product of collaborations between several screenwriters, and there were also actors, line producers, soundtrack composers, poster designers, producers and film critics. And many, many of

these films are interrelated because several of the artistic or technical contributions were made by exiles. In more contemporary filmographies you can find a lot more connections and similarities, as most of these films to varying degrees have the aim of preserving and disseminating the personal memory of certain individuals, especially people who have been of some importance in the cultural, scientific or academic sphere.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

They definitely share common concerns, usually the concern to tell a story that calls for the protection of human rights. The approaches are not necessarily the same, although there can be similarities. I don't think there are common aesthetic techniques, because each film is such a personal matter that they can hardly resemble each other too much.

## 6. Within the scope of contemporary filmmaking and production, what are the characteristic features of the exile film?

#### Mónica Villarroel

The subject of exile is still present in interesting documentaries made by the children of the diaspora or the descendants of victims of dictatorships in Latin America, who offer new perspectives. I would also include filmmakers who were exiled and have returned to the topic of the coup d'état with autobiographical approaches, such as Emilio Pacull, or others such as Patricio Guzmán, also based in France, but who is still filming documentaries in Chile with a focus on human rights and memory. Exile can tell us about the condition of the diaspora, but there were short, medium-length and feature-length films made in the documentary, fiction and animation genres that we haven't been able to identify in their entirety. However, today we have a broader idea of the films made in and about exile. And I would conclude with the example of Bear Story (La historia de un oso, Gabriel Osorio, 2014), an Oscar-winning animated short inspired by the story of the director's grandfather, Leopoldo Osorio, who lived in exile in the United Kingdom, where he started a new family, after spending two years in prison during the Pinochet dictatorship.

#### Guillermo Logar

As far as the question of the 20th-century Spanish exile is concerned. I wouldn't venture to define

an "exile film" label for today. However, exile as a theme still has a strong presence in contemporary cinema. The definition of exile needs to acknowledge that the political factors that drive people to leave their home also include terrible economic circumstances arising from political mismanagement in their countries of origin, and in the countries of the so-called First World. All of this forms part of the same issue. It is a theme that continues to inspire filmmakers. Recent examples are Io Capitano (Matteo Garrone, 2023), all of Kaurismäki's work and contemporary Mexican films such as Diego Quemada-Díez's The Golden Dream (La jaula de oro, 2013). In the case of Spain, we need to remember where we came from in order to rethink our role as a host country. The recent debates over immigration are unacceptable and we cannot allow hate speech, disinformation and deeply inhumane attitudes to continue permeating the rest of our society. Cinema needs to play a key role in the culture wars that the international far right, I'm afraid to say, is currently winning.

#### Melissa Mutchinick

In recent years, I've noticed an increase and a special interest in the subject of exile in various artistic fields, not just audiovisual productions, but also literature and theatre, among others. One of the things that I think characterises these new pro-

ductions that I would like to highlight here in particular is the voice of the children of exile, their lived experiences and how the exile of their mothers and/or fathers has marked their history and their identity (in many cases having been born in their families' host country). I think this approach to the issue of exile children is very important, because it broadens and expands the dimensions of exile and the consequences it has for different generations. In Laura Alcoba's books continuing the trilogy she began with The Rabbit House (2007), Le bleu des abeilles (The Blue of the Bees, 2013) and La danse de l'araignée (Dance of the Spider, 2017), the narrator's voice is the same girl (the author herself) now living in exile, having to adapt to a new culture and a new language, and growing up between two worlds. Our House in Cuba (La guardería, Virginia Croatto, 2015), The (Im)possible Oblivion (El [im] posible olvido, Andrés Habegger, 2016), Partidos, voces del exilio [Parties, Voices of Exile] (Silvia Di Florio, 2022) and Chronicles of an Exile (Crónicas de un exilio. Pablo Guallar and Micaela Montes Rojas, 2023) are all documentaries that address the exile experience of this second generation, either directly or indirectly, narrated in the first person by their protagonists and revealing the impact of exile on the whole family network.

#### Luis Iborra

In contemporary production, at least in the last twenty years, I think the trend has gone more towards telling the personal stories of some of the many exiled individuals, focusing the story of the

film on the lives, experiences and/or art works of important characters, sometimes also from the intimate and personal perspective of the descendants of exile, in such cases with a completely different and unique gaze, such as the films of Laura Gárdos Velo or Juan Francisco Urrusti. In addition. I feel that there's another movement or initiative marked by an abundance of films dealing with exile that have benefited from institutional support. Public broadcasters and cultural institutions (such as Canal22, TVUNAM, Filmoteca de la UNAM, Canal Once, Filmoteca Española and TV de Galicia) have been driving forces, sometimes involved in the production, co-production and/ or even direction of significant films about important exile figures.

#### Olga Sánchez Tapia

I feel that if exile films have a common denominator, it is intimacy. As I mentioned before, the vast majority are very personal stories and that is noticeable.

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## I conclusion

MATEI CHIHAIA
ANDREA LUQUIN CALVO

While the historiography of exile films begins with their necessary recovery from the archives, that recovery must go further than merely recording their presence or their testimony and delve into the forms of reappropriation and recognition they offer societies as a vital part of the construction of a common space. The place that exile films give that space—as a form of inquiry and critique—challenges narratives that depend on a national, regional or generational definition of art, revealing a vanishing point, a narrative outside the frame that can give the development of a critical memory a different focus, from both collective and multiple individual perspectives.

The recovery of these exile films is still a work in progress. It is a road that has been taken at different speeds in different Spanish-speaking countries, as reflected in the cases of Argentina, Chile and Spain discussed in this section. In this reflection, the issues that have emerged point directly to the question of what memory and what democratic foundation we want to construct in our societies.

From this perspective, without a clear cultural and political will to recover these exile films, the complex space for criticism and reflection that they help construct runs the risk of shrinking or even disappearing altogether. Once a mere phenomenon of the film library or festival in our societies, they have since come to be reflected in contemporary cinema in narratives or depictions that

can easily be incorporated into the hegemonic stories of national reconciliation told in mainstream films made by major studios and platforms. This use in products intended more for mass consumption than for the recovery of the memory of exiles ultimately disengages their critical capacity, along with the opportunity offered by any gaze from the outside to tell us something about ourselves.

Nevertheless, the meeting points, lines of convergence and connections established by exile films are still present in the places that received them and recognised them as their own, in the contemporary filmmakers who explore the memory of exile and their own relationship with it, in the new films made by the so-called *second*- and *third*-generation exiles, and in the discovery of their connections with other exiles and realities displaced by violence and immigration of the 21st century, to which cinema has also turned its gaze. It is here, in all these places, that exile films continue to touch us with their stories, reminding us of their call for full recognition of the exile experience.

#### **CREATIONS OUT OF FRAME**

#### Abstract

This section of "(Dis)Agreements" offers some reflections on the so-called "exile films" made in the Argentinian, Chilean, Spanish and Mexican contexts, framing them in terms of the paradox represented by their historiography, as film traditions that developed outside the spatio-temporal context of the nation-state they are identified with. Mónica Villarroel, Guillermo Logar, Melissa Mutchinick, Luis Iborra and Olga Sánchez Tapia respond to questions regarding the role that these exile films have in shaping a "national" film history, the importance of their recovery and identification as sources of memory and/or testimony, their contribution to democratic restoration processes, their construction based on collective or personal narratives, their techniques of aesthetic expression and their legacy and influence on contemporary films dealing with the subject of exile.

#### Key words

Exile films; Historiography; Memory; Recovery; Spanish exile; Argentinian exile; Chilean exile; Spanish exile in Mexico.

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#### **CREACIONES FUERA DE CAMPO**

#### Resumen

La presente sección de «(Des)encuentros» muestra algunas reflexiones realizadas alrededor de las denominadas «cinematografías del exilo», en los contextos argentino, chileno, español y mexicano, enmarcándolas dentro de la paradoja que representa su historiografía, al tratarse de cinematografías que se desarrollan fuera del espacio y tiempo del Estado-nación que las identifica. Mónica Villarroel, Guillermo Logar, Melissa Mutchinick, Luis Iborra y Olga Sánchez Tapia responden a las cuestiones formuladas con relación al lugar que estas «cinematografías del exilo» ocupan en la conformación de una historia del cine en clave nacional, la relevancia de su recuperación e identificación como una fuente de memoria y/o testimonio, su papel en los procesos de recuperación democrática, su realización desde el relato colectivo o personal, así como sus formas de expresión estética y su influencia y legado en las actuales producciones sobre la temática del exilio.

#### Palabras clave

Cinematografías del exilio; Historiografía; Memoria; Recuperación; Exilio español; Exilio argentino; Exilio chileno; Exilio español en México.

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TOWARDS A METAMODERN CINEMA: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A DEBATE BETWEEN METAMODERNISM AND FILM WRITING

Aarón Rodríguez Serrano

THE PATH OF THE IMPOSTOR: MOTIFS AND SELF-REFERENCE IN THE WAR IS OVER (LA GUERRE EST FINIE, ALAIN RESNAIS, 1966)

Gustavo Montes Rodríguez, Vicente Sanz de León, Saida Santana Mahmut

MEMORY AND ATONEMENT: FORM, TIME AND VOICE IN FILMING OTHELLO

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NOTES ON Z: JORGE SEMPRÚN AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT IN FICTION FILM

Jordi Revert

## TOWARDS A METAMODERN CINEMA: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A DEBATE BETWEEN METAMODERNISM AND FILM WRITING\*

AARÓN RODRÍGUEZ SERRANO

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the last decade, the concept of *metamodernism* began finding its way into the field of the philosophy of art. Although its origins can be traced back to the 1970s, in literary theory (Zavarzadeh, 1975: 69) its development had been largely ignored until the publication of two seminal—and in some senses diametrically opposed—texts reignited public discussion about its relevance to the field.

The first of these texts was a monograph coordinated by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (2017) containing a remarkable collection of articles that sought to account for a shift in the nature of the artistic process, albeit with some internal contradictions and terminological confusions, in relation to what they described as a new "structure of feeling", as tentatively suggested (rather than theorised) by Robert Williams in a text related to film theory

(Williams and Orrom, 1954: 40). At the risk of oversimplification, there was a general consensus among the various contributors to the 2017 publication that the technological changes of the last twenty years, in addition to the various crises (environmental and economic, as well as crises related to identity, gender, etc.) afflicting society since the beginning of this century, had given rise to a new cultural ecosystem, which in turn had fostered a new set of artistic strategies with their own identifiable characteristics that could now begin to be studied. To this end, they proposed three key questions for analysis: historicity, affect and depth.

The second text, which is no less important, is Jason Ananda Josephson Storm's exacting 2021 publication proposing no less than a complete reformulation of all the epistemological fields of knowledge based on a hypothetical new state of knowledge that he also gives the name "metamodernism", which he characterises as a way of

overcoming the terminological dead ends that deconstruction leads us into, the ethical impasse of postmodern nihilism and the political blind alley that points to the need to reconfigure the relationship between reality, values and knowledge. Josephson Storm himself (2021: 289) seeks to dissociate his proposal from the aesthetic theory of Van den Akker et al., stressing that the problematic labels "modernity" and "postmodernity" used by other authors were largely inoperative and that their lack of terminological clarity doomed their efforts to the production of further confusion. Instead, rather than describing metamodernism as a current cultural condition, he proposes it as an entirely new paradigm for delimiting knowledge.

It should be noted that the main objective of this article is to interrogate both of these positions from the specific perspective of film theory, with the aim of leveraging the theoretical advantages of both approaches and connecting them to the legacy of previously established discussions within the field of film studies. Although the respective positions of van den Akker and Josephson Storm are effectively irreconcilable, they constitute two excellent theses for development in an effort to achieve a synthesis. After all, Josephson Storm himself explicitly draws on a method based on the Hegelian dialectic, suggesting that perhaps the endeavour I propose here is not entirely divorced from his particular analytical approach.

For the purpose of this analysis, it must first be accepted that a new condition of cultural existence has been gradually establishing itself in Western societies in recent years. This new condition encompasses the processes of constant acceleration (mechanistic, professional and environmental) that have eroded the most concrete aspects of our relationship with time (Tanner, 2022), our perception of the body, our symbolic frameworks (Català, 2016) and even the very essence of *audiovisual truth* as we understand it (Zunzunegui and Zumalde, 2019). The extent to which this affective landscape reflects a hypothetical "structure of

IT MUST FIRST BE ACCEPTED THAT A NEW CONDITION OF CULTURAL EXISTENCE HAS BEEN GRADUALLY ESTABLISHING ITSELF IN WESTERN SOCIETIES IN RECENT YEARS. THIS NEW CONDITION ENCOMPASSES THE PROCESSES OF CONSTANT ACCELERATION (MECHANISTIC, PROFESSIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL) THAT HAVE ERODED THE MOST CONCRETE ASPECTS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TIME OUR PERCEPTION OF THE BODY, OUR SYMBOLIC FRAMEWORKS AND EVEN THE VERY ESSENCE OF AUDIOVISUAL TRUTH AS WE UNDERSTAND IT

feeling" is unclear, but it is evident that it has given rise to a new conceptualisation of images that has an impact on film language and the way stories are created and received. However, as Josephson Storm would argue, it is not enough merely to explain these developments according to a series of hermetic categories—quirky cinema (Mac-Dowell, 2017), mumblecore (Bretal, Porta, & Zgaib, 2023), the "Other New Spanish Cinema Made by Women" (García Catalán, Rodríguez Serrano and Martín Núñez, 2022; Guillamón, 2020) or the "post-documentary" (Català, 2021), for example that obviously operate autonomously and have already been successfully mapped. Instead, the complexities of the conceptual dance of our times require us to accept the instability of these labels and attempt to systematically categorise a range of features that blur into and contradict each other, and yet operate concretely within the films. This may seem paradoxical unless we accept the challenge of knowledge in our times: inevitably renouncing essentialist positions, but at the same time seeking out the connections and resonances between apparently isolated events which, in an objectifiable and analytical way (in this case,

through film analysis), offer a complex, profound picture of the moment in which we are living.

On the other hand, the history of film theory has been unable to escape contradictory movements like these, which have eroded labels and generated all kinds of misunderstandings: Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1997) had to leave masterpieces of Classical Hollywood cinema out of their celebrated canon to be able to identify common technical features. The ending to Miracle in Milan (Miracolo a Milano, Vittorio de Sica, 1951) forced André Bazin (2001) to rethink its relationship with realism. Christian Metz (2002) found that his grande syntagmatique was incapable of offering an accurate reading of Pierrot Le Fou (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965). These felicitous stumbling blocks, rather than exposing errors in a theoretical system, demonstrate the enormous complexity of the realities of cinema and the fact that films are always, so to speak, a step ahead of the analysts who try to make sense of them. It would hardly be surprising if the same were true of a hypothetical "metamodernist cinema" whose features can begin to be mapped here, even while acknowledging the difficulties that such a task involves.

It is also important to point out a small detail regarding the selection of the corpus of films analysed in this article. As will become clear, contemporary Spanish films are the main focus here, with brief references to other peripheral film industries that are rarely considered for the purpose of establishing canons and proposing assorted essentialist features of cinema. This focus on the Spanish context has both an ethical objective, to affirm contemporary Spanish cinema as a sufficiently powerful player to participate actively in international theoretical debates, and a political one, to challenge the habit of citing the film movements and theoretical approaches of the English-speaking world as the definitive points of reference for our times. Indeed, scholars have already begun studying American metamodernist cinema, based on a corpus obviously composed

of filmmakers they believe best fit the category (Wes Anderson, Miranda July, Greta Gerwig, etc.). However, it may be interesting to expand on these initial studies with a consideration of films of different origins. There is also clearly a need for research on the specific relationship between metamodernism and Spanish cinema based on the traditions, sources, developments and contrasts that characterise Spanish film history and theory, but given the complexities of such an undertaking, I will leave it for a future (and hopefully imminent) study.

#### 2. WHAT IS METAMODERNIST CINEMA?

To begin, it is important to clear up a terminological error with a long history, related to the difference between what could be classified as "modern thought", referring to the sum of overarching concepts or grand narratives that emerged, for better or worse, in the centuries from the establishment of the Cartesian notion of the self through to the supposed triumph of Western capitalism, and "modern cinema", designating the period of film history from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, which was characterised by the development of stylistic features and thematic and technical operations that subverted the institutional mode of representation, often using formulas that reflect the politics of the filmmakers (Font, 2002; Martin, 2008). A similar distinction must be made between "postmodern thought", which may encompass the Heideggerian project of the destruction of metaphysics and the concept of deconstruction (or the understanding of it in pop culture, which ironically challenged any possibility of attaining truth), and "postmodern cinema", with its obsession with hybridisation, pastiche and intertextual references as discursive strategies. This is where the problems begin, as much of the existing literature on postmodern cinema tends to focus its attention not so much on the technical mechanisms used to construct meaning

as on the "content" or thematic elements that the label seems to imply, albeit from ideological perspectives as diverse as secular humanism (Imbert, 2018), film theology (Orellana and Martínez Lucena, 2010) and cultural studies (Deleyto, 2003). It could be argued that this lack of consideration of the specific features of postmodern film form is simply a logical consequence of the dominance of approaches to film analysis based on post-structuralism and its particular interest in reading (for or against) the ideological messages of the film rather than the particular formal processes used to construct meaning. There are notable exceptions of course, such as the materialist approaches of Roberto Aaba (2019) and Mariel Manrique's essays on contemporary cinema (2024).

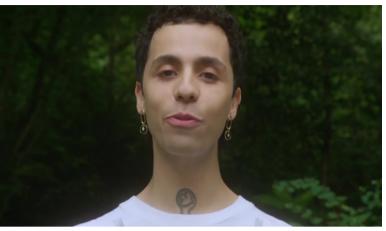
Perhaps the most striking aspect of the literature published to date on metamodernism is the confusion resulting from the exclusive attention given to "thought" as the foundation on which to explore the arts, whereby cinema is considered either an "example" for the purpose of supporting an argument or a mere consequence of the battle of ideas being waged in a hypothetical higher sphere. In other words, the literature fails entirely to take into account specifically cinematographic elements (film form), instead subjecting cinema yet again to the inevitable discursive logocentrism of the philosophy of art.

Although these problems are generally overlooked in the field of philosophy, in the field of film studies the situation is quite different. The labels modern cinema and postmodern cinema and the ways they have been used have been actively questioned for the last thirty years. For example, Iván Bort and Francisco Javier Gómez Tarín (2012) rejected the very possibility of the evolution of modern cinema, citing the rarefaction of stylistic features and the inevitable consistency of the filmmakers' politics. That same year, Carlos Losilla (2012) analysed the interstices of classicism to debunk the narrative of linear evolution, concluding with his notion of cinematic "anti-his-

tory" (Losilla, 2023). More recently, Marta Piñol (Piñol Lloret, 2022) connected the main stylistic aspects of the emptiness of modern cinema to a movement that clearly exceeds the paradigms of postmodernity, i.e., slow cinema (Ferragut and Sharp-Casas, 2023). The notions of these authors tie in with parallel concepts such as Annalisa Mirizio's new "romantic cinema" (2023), Howard Finn's "international modernism" (2022) and other theories that all hint at what the very core idea of the metamodernist project, that a bridge, connection, or dialogue has been established between the thematic and formal features of modern cinema and postmodern cinema.

It is worth considering here the particular meaning that van den Akker et al. give to the prefix meta-, which is not used so much in the usual sense of reflection on the concept to which it applies (as in metacinema, for example), but to the Platonic notion of metaxis ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\xi\dot{\nu}$ ). In film studies, this meta- functions as an attempt to subvert the binary implicitly established in film history between modernity and postmodernity.

Although the dismantling of conceptual binaries has its origins in Derrida's deconstruction project, in the case of cinema it necessarily requires reflection not only on the film's content, but also on the specific question of its form. For example, Orlando, My Political Biography (Orlando, Ma Biographie Politique, Paul B. Preciado, 2023) is a film located precisely at the intersection between the legacies of the modern political pamphlet and the ironic mechanisms of postmodern cinema. Preciado's film is uncompromising in its attempt to turn its underlying theme of overcoming gender binaries into a specific aesthetic proposal that translates the essentialist impossibilities of film history itself. To do this, Preciado unhesitatingly hybridises characteristic mechanisms of the essay film style of the late 1960s and 1970s (the gaze direct to camera [Figure 1] and the use of a voice-over that imposes a thesis development) with purely postmodern features such as the vin-







Figures 1, 2 and 3. Orlando, My Political Biography (Orlando, Ma Biographie Politique, Paul B. Preciado, 2023)

dication of kitsch (e.g., the shots of statues with their hyper-emphasised composition [Figure 2]) and camp styles (the clumsy, ugly filming of the party in the office [Figure 3]).

As the above clearly shows, metamodernism is not simply a matter of *subjects* (the *body*, *identity*)

or even of *labels/styles* (quirky cinema or women's cinema, a label explicitly incompatible with the supposed rejection of binaries); instead, it directly targets the most fundamental problem of film writing. It is therefore worth attempting to identify and classify certain notions of contemporary cinema for the purposes of this new conceptual framework.

## 3. THE QUESTION OF METAMODERNIST WRITING STYLES

The question of the "return of modernity" has inevitably made recurring appearances in the literature in this field since the 1990s. On the global scene, it was already present in the "new cinephilia" movements (Rosenbaum and Martin, 2011) and their vindication of the writing styles of Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, But it could also be found in studies of film production closer to home, such as the anthologies of articles exploring the phenomenon in European cinema (Font and Losilla, 2007) and, more recently, specifically in Spain (Cornejo, 2021). There is abundant evidence that the so-called "emerging film industries" kept alive a certain way of relating to the theoretical issue of realism or authorship, although the question remains open for its relevance todav.

On the one hand, there have been numerous criticisms—often from within—of "festival cinema" (Guillot, 2021), and of the problems associated with script labs and the hypothetical homogenisation of certain approaches to film writing that lead to what is usually described—often disparagingly—as "formalism". On the other, it is equally true that if it were not for the institutional mechanisms that foster and protect marginalised film industries, many of the films that challenge the prevailing cinematic canon would have no possibility of reaching a wider audience. The question that arises between these two tensions directly touches on the nature of film writing: have a set of

stylistic features that are inevitably characteristic of so-called "festival cinema" today (the gaze to camera, enhancement of the "reality effect", dead time, the aimlessness of the protagonists, the disruption of enunciative transparency, etc.) simply atrophied, or conversely, is there really a definitive evolution that reflects the changing times?

There is no doubt that digital technologies have altered the possibilities of global distribution (Quintana, 2011), although cinema has now been effectively displaced both in terms of the preservation of individual subjectivities (largely fulfilled by social media, with its vast repositories of video clips that mark the passage of each individual's time) and in terms of the political expectations it embodies.2 It is also true that alterations to exhibition mechanisms in the post-pandemic era are bringing about a range of sociological changes: cinemas, in the few urban centres where they still exist, are today also repositories of content-live broadcasts, video game competitions, motivational talks for companies—in which the screening of films is marked by a homogenising tendency and a habitual domination of theatres solely on the weekend of their première.

The idea of cinema as expressed in successive notions of modernity-from Bazinian realism with its constant commitment to showing the world, to the modern cinema that served as a tool for social reflection in the context of the upheavals of the 1960s-has been effectively abolished, leaving a kind of cinema floating in a void of meaning in which each film seems to have to account for its own existence. In other words, according to its boldest theorists, modern cinema seemed to acquire a kind of essentialist, fundamental purpose that was inevitably doomed to failure. In terms of its capacity to capture reality, one need only consider how any Hollywood production today makes use of completely distorted, manipulated digital sequence shots that dramatically dismantle Bazin's famous dictum of "editing prohibited". And its power to convey memories

has been rendered irrelevant by the fact that any individual with a degree of technological ability can now compose their own little archive of experiences irrespective of their gender, class, race or identity. This has confirmed that the old dream of visibility as a form of emancipation and a call to social commitment<sup>3</sup> was partly mistaken: in very many cases, the images of the workers reveal their aspirations to climb the turbo-capitalist ladder.

Metamodernist film writing is thus based on the acceptance of this failure and the explicit need to overcome this constant remoteness from reality. On the one hand, it seems clear that cinema can no longer aspire to a hypothetical status of truth that was once assumed to be practically intrinsic to the ontological projects of realism. Moreover, the imposition of a completely artificial and distorted postmodern image4-not to mention the subsequent incorporation of shots generated entirely by AI, with the inevitably sinister sense of estrangement this elicits—has ultimately resulted in a deficiency of the gaze, the sensation that an inhospitable abyss exists between the real world and the world shown on screen. This is why the first identifiable action of this new movement is a questioning of the very mechanisms of filmmak-

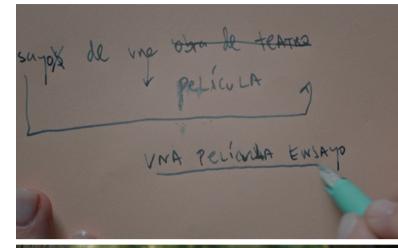
THE IDEA OF CINEMA AS EXPRESSED IN SUCCESSIVE NOTIONS OF MODERNITY—FROM BAZINIAN REALISM WITH ITS CONSTANT COMMITMENT TO SHOWING THE WORLD, TO THE MODERN CINEMA THAT SERVED AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL REFLECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UPHEAVALS OF THE 1960S—HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY ABOLISHED, LEAVING A KIND OF CINEMA FLOATING IN A VOID OF MEANING IN WHICH EACH FILM SEEMS TO HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR ITS OWN EXISTENCE.

ing, albeit always in favour of a writing style that aspires (in vain) to endow the world with meaning.

A simple example can illustrate this more clearly. The film The Girls Are Alright (Las chicas están bien, Itsaso Arana, 2023) consciously adopts certain features of modernity: it is presented as an essay film ("una película ensayo") (Figure 4); it breaks the fourth wall with one of the protagonists explicitly addressing "the camera" (Figure 5): and it distorts the different narrative levels to generate a dislocation of time-frames and spaces that seems to blur the lines between the rehearsal of a play and life itself (Figure 6). The film is constructed entirely upon its flirtation with extra-textual truth: the actors use their real names and participate in the creation by improvising the scenes, the barely sketched plots are based on personal experiences, and Barbara Lennie even reflects on her pregnancy while the camera captures it in real time.

This mixture of real, rehearsed, fictionalised and manipulated elements ultimately creates an appealing combination of ideas, emotions, conversations and deviations that unabashedly challenge the "structure of feeling" mentioned above: through a purging of narrative elements and a deliberately light (but never ingenuous) atmosphere that brings it into dialogue with the basic principles of eccentric cinema, Arana offers a film that straddles the line between the (modern) commitment to presenting reality and (postmodern) playfulness.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that Arana herself uses the term "essay" to describe her own work. In his monograph on the essay film, Josep Català (2014: 199) points out that films included in this category explicitly reject both the closed work method characteristic of objective science and the parataxis of its structure. Indeed, Arana's film is more of an exploration of the everyday and the ephemeral, evident in the accumulation of meaningful material that constitutes its structure: the different fragments of the







Figures 4, 5 and 6. The Girls Are Alright (Las chicas están bien, Itsaso Arana, 2023)

rehearsals, but also of games, intimate exchanges and parties that overlap organically rather than in any pre-designed way, where the pleasure of aimlessness and the vitality of the unexpected

construct a unique experience. In opposition to conventional documentary methods with their thematic and formal rigidity, and equally in contrast to self-contained, controlled fiction narratives, Arana's film benefits from an airiness that blurs the line between the traditional fiction/non-fiction binary.

The Girls Are Alright also offers a sense of the distance Spanish cinema has taken from the proposals of developing countries that have shaped the canon of the "New Cinephilia", evident in a comparison of the strategy of disruption used by Abbas Kiarostami in the exquisite *Taste of Cherry* (Ta'm e guilass, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997) with the reformulation operated by Arana's body in the equally praiseworthy You Have to Come and See It (Tenéis que venir a verla, Jonás Trueba, 2022) and finally, with the magical and sweetly ironic tone of the ending to Arana's own film. In the first film, the disruptive strategy relies on the aimlessness of a character who wishes to die, based on which Kiarostami offers an alluring and complex reflection on family, religion, politics and science. In short, the weight of death imposes its bleakness on all of the material until the whole enunciative framework literally collapses, unable to resolve the larger ethical dilemma posed by the film (Figures 7 and 8).

Jonás Trueba's decision to reformulate this strategy 18 years later resulted in a film far removed from the clichés of modern cinema: with a much humbler approach and a sweet, wistful and humane atmosphere that replaces the frigidity of the distancing method, Trueba's film is structured exclusively around four characters behind whom lies a latent question of lost youth and the mechanisms of acceptance of the future. The characters exist in an immense smallness of commuter trains, suburban flats and thwarted expectations. At the end of the film, when Itsaso Arana's character is shown urinating, laughing and then being captured by the whole film crew, the reflection is tinged with an inevitably bitter irony (Figures 9





Figures 7 and 8. The Taste of Cherry (Ta'm e guilass, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997)

and 10). We are still in the terrain of the big questions (about the future, lost time, etc.) but the tone is necessarily introspective and pensive.

However, *The Girls Are Alright* employs this strategy of disrupting the mechanisms of enunciation right from the first minute, constantly hybridising genres and positions in what can only be expressed as an explicit quest for a future. In their monologues the characters do not shy away from worries about death, or uneasiness about the future, or any of the other topics identified above in Kiarostami's and Trueba films. The difference here is simply the ability to propose different, clearly positive perspectives in every age group: sexual desire, artistic creation, love, motherhood and overcoming grief are possible answers that the actors *rehearse*—the similarity between the





Figures 9 and 10. You Have to Come and See It (Tenéis que venir a verla, Jonah Trueba, 2022)

Spanish words ensayar ("rehearse") and ensayo (essay) reminds us that this is explicitly presented as an essay film—to the various hardships they face in their lives.

This wilfully optimistic (and, as noted above, never ingenuous) approach is taken to its ultimate consequences with the fusion of the fairy tale and the end of the film itself: "Can I give you a movie kiss?" one of the protagonists asks the hypothetical "prince", who is holding a toad. And shortly after this, before the credits roll, we hear

other voices: "It looks like the end... are you sure you're alright? / I've never been asked so many times whether I'm alright on a film shoot." Once again, the whole operation hybridises modernity and postmodernity in a quest for new territories where what is written is clearly the possibility of a future.

## 4. THE PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE: METAMODERNISM AS OVERCOMING

If we accept that one of the main problems in metamodernist cinema is its relationship with the vectors of reality, the material and the mechanisms used to erase the marks of enunciation, the next step is to consider this whole relationship in relation to the problem of openness to the future. This is especially necessary given the contemporary tendency to assign excessive importance to a perspective imported from the English-speaking world, represented in particular by theorists like Mark Fisher, who have conflated criticism of capitalism with a supposed inability to imagine futures within the social frameworks in which they themselves wrote. During the final decades of the 20th century, thinkers of this kind—almost always white men living in powerful nations who found it extremely difficult to take an intersectional approach—developed a sort of apocalyptic tendency which, despite their various insightful contributions, put them at risk of running into a

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theoretical (political, aesthetic, existential) cul-desac that was completely incompatible with the wondrous discoveries of metamodernist cinema.

Indeed, the return to simplicity, to the concrete question of intimacy or the "structure of feelings", cannot be given over entirely to a sort of narcissistic daze. This is one of the risks present in many cases of so-called "contemporary autofiction", which are often characterised by easily identifiable clichés (members of wealthy families, the exposure of family scars, a kind of solipsism in discourses on identity, etc.) that prove rather ineffective for imagining possible futures. To put it as clearly as possible, the return to the past that characterises metamodernism is not reduced to a mere settling of scores with the suffering of each individual (in the end, to some extent we all have our own little wounds and unfinished business): rather, it is clearly projected into the future, in some way shaping a better global society for the whole world. And it does this, of course, by means of an exploration of specific audiovisual strategies.

The earliest outlines of this kind of approach began to emerge years ago in the work of the most gifted postmodern directors: Nanni Moretti's Aprile (1998) is an early example of a film constructed according to the postulates of autofiction (Mendieta Rodríguez, 2017) with a twist in which a private event (the birth of his son) ends up serving as a vehicle for the projection of a possible victory for progressive forces in Italy. The subsequent emergence of female filmmakers associated with fourth-wave feminism took up this heritage and configured a crucible of possibilities in which dialogues about intimacy, the body, the need to create a new shared story, or in many cases simply the ability to seize the opportunity to make films triggered all kinds of reflections on the societies we could be building in the future.

Examples of this include recent Spanish films such as 20,000 Species of Bees (Estíbaliz Urresola Solaguren, 2023) and La maternal (Pilar Palomero, 2022), which encapsulate Shaila García Catalán's

concise definition of a film as a potential "listening device" (2024: 31). This is an idea that can be taken further, as this "listening" is not merely an act of archiving, of memory, or of restoration of the past (it is well known that an excess of memory has often had a counterproductive, atrophying effect in our societies); it also functions as the only key that can open up a possible future: in the parent's listening are the pieces on which we can build our own relationships with others. This is the journey taken in Lullaby (Cinco lobitos, Alauda Ruiz de Azúa, 2022), with Amaia's (Laia Costa) last words to her daughter ("Let's go home, my love"), Ana's (Luna Pamiés) final monologue in The Water (El agua, Elena López Riera, 2022), and of course Celia's (Andrea Fandos) decision to sing with her own voice at the end of Schoolgirls (Las niñas, Pilar Palomero, 2020). These are gestures, words, textual operators that never give into Fisher's political and existential defeatism; instead, by being filmed and inserted into a particular fictional universe, they radically alter our expectations of the future.

This is perhaps one of the greatest assets of metamodernist cinema: its conscious confrontation of the inevitable paralysis that emerges out of certain fragments of Fisher's work with the positive possibilities of nostalgia that were already present in Tanner's. The return to the past-to the childhood home, to the parent's reconsideration, to the repressed content of an ideologically shaped past—hardly ever has a paralysing effect; on the contrary, it sets off specific mechanisms of political and social action, and even of affective and personal care. Examples can be found in two films that use the same technique (the split screen): The Year of Discovery (El año del descubrimiento, Luis López Carrasco, 2020) and Cabala Caníbal (Daniel V. Villamediana, 2014). In both films, listening and the use of archives support the exploration of a particular social and personal upheaval that calls for a response in the present. The first film offers an estranged, embittered look at workers' tensions in a Spain dressed up in tri-

umphalism, while the second proposes a dreamlike labyrinth of family fantasies that clash with sparks of everyday life set in a very extreme present, even to the point of being symbolically embodied in the timeline of the film itself. Both cases seem to underscore Tanner's suggestion that it is unwise to leave the handling of folklore, nostalgia or elements associated with a hypothetical shared past in the hands of the far right.

However, such assertions should always be taken with caution. The search for future possibilities necessarily involves avoiding any kind of thematic and formal conventionalism; the moment that recognisable stylistic features can be attributed to a whole generation, it runs the risk of becoming a predictable, hackneyed and hollow formula. Films of this kind are constructed in a context of structural fragility in Spain, which involves a level of support for their creators that is constant but prone to errors. These films stand out for their complex diversity and richness, despite the malice of certain critics who try to reduce their achievements to a set of categories that are often used pejoratively ("feminism", "sensibility", "intimacy"), overlooking the fact that each film takes its own particular position, and in so doing, perfectly embodies the metamodernist project, as an active, positive contribution to the meticulous construction of a complex symbolic framework that can open up the possibility of a better future for those yet to come.

#### 5. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have sought to offer some preliminary insights into the slippery classification of "metamodernist cinema", which will require further development and refinement in the future. However, the basic idea outlined here is clear, that a new approach to filmmaking has been developing since the early 2000s, and that its main features include a reconsideration of the body and the

affects, a complex relationship with the past and a call for greater thematic and formal complexity.

Building on some of the more felicitous ideas that other authors have proposed in relation to bodies and affects (Checa Bañuz, 2018), metamodernism seems to constitute a vindication of the most specific aspects of each individual experience insofar, paradoxically, as it can be communicated and even shared. In an era when binary essentialism is being challenged, the bodies presented are split between the unavoidable weight of their identities or labels ("woman", "racialised", "trans", "Catalan", "Spanish", "immigrant", "documentary maker") and the specific weight of their personal experience, which they convey as best as

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they can through a collection of stylistic strategies and themes halfway between auteur signatures and new models of technological audiovisual communication. In a context of excessive social media exposure and the weight of discourses on identity, each metamodernist film strives to find an individual (but not narcissistic) voice.

On the question of historicity, it has been made clear here that the weight of nostalgia can be abrasive. This is reflected in the abuse of Fisher's notion of hauntology (as opposed to Derrida's original understanding of the concept, which points in a very different direction, toward the possibility of a future), which has already been subject to sensitive corrections and extensions

by authors such as the aforementioned Grafton Tanner or, in the Spanish context, Brunella Tedesco (2022), Ana Carrasco Conde (2017) and Pablo Sánchez (Sánchez Blasco, 2023). The idea that the contemporary ecosystem of film production is anaesthetised with mechanisms of nostalgia, repetition and euphoric recall is actually a legacy of postmodernity that needs to be balanced by an acknowledgement of the success of films as diverse as A Brighter Tomorrow (Il sol dell'avvenire, Nanni Moretti, 2023) or Love and Revolution (Te estoy amando locamente, Alejandro Marin, 2023), which engage in a radical and optimistic reconsideration of past suffering that is neither victimising nor indulgent, but that points directly towards the possibility of a better future.

Finally, in relation to depth, this article has shown that by embracing airiness or fragility, films such as *The Girls Are Alright* never veer off into enunciative simplicity or gawky ingenuousness. On the contrary, the paradox of metamodernism is that the filmmakers who flirt with quirkiness are at the same time able to vest their creations with an immense thematic and formal depth. This strategy offers an exciting opportunity to appropriate and overcome the camp and kitsch postures that dominated postmodern approaches, without necessarily collapsing into an otherwise ineffective evocation of the *auteurial* mechanisms of modernity.

The triple mapping offered in this article can serve as a preliminary blueprint for a reinterpretation of the films being made today. What it offers, from a constructive perspective free of apocalyptic gloom, is a vision of cinema that is not paralysed by its "deaths" or its "melancholy" (a nostalgic posture that often runs the risk of leading to reactionary stances), but instead is in perpetual movement toward a future that neither conceals nor succumbs to its shadows. By overcoming angst and irony, metamodernist cinema takes up its commitments to reality, the individual and the world, to start its history all over again

as often as necessary. Moreover, while "analysis and interpretation [...] constitute a practice that involves the subject who reads and puts the truth of the enunciation into play" (González Hortigüela & Canga Sosa, 2023: 312), the question of how to conduct a metamodernist film analysis or interpretation remains in the air. But that is undoubtedly a question that will have to be answered in the years to come.

#### **NOTES**

- \* This work has been supported by the research project Discursive Strategies of Dissent in Contemporary Spanish Documentary Practices (DOESCO) (code UJI-B2021-32) led by Javier Marzal Felici and Marta Martín Núñez, funded by the Universitat Jaume I through the competitive call for research projects for the period 2022-2024.
- I am aware of the potential for confusion surrounding the possible uses of "metamodernism" and "metamodernity". I have chosen to use "metamodernism" here based on its use in van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's text, although this question has been examined previously by authors such as Dina Stoev (2022), and even in the Spanish-speaking world by Elena Oliveras (2019) and Luis Freites (2018).
- 2 For example, in the first edition of *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2022), references dedicated to cinema are extremely limited compared to the countless texts dedicated to political storytelling, fake news, *infoxication* and other fields of study that have been fashionable among academics for some time now. It is also worth noting that the Routledge volume contains no contributions from Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking authors, which also raises questions about the insistent, reductionist and biased configuration of narratological knowledge proposed by the Anglosphere.
- 3 It is worth remembering that this dream was present both in accounts of cinema with marks of Catholic phenomenology, such as Andre Bazin's, and in the materialist, progressive perspective of Jonas Mekas.

4 See Shaila García Catalán's theoretical reflection on post-classical cinema and sinister contemplation (2019: 28-30).

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# TOWARDS A METAMODERN CINEMA: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A DEBATE BETWEEN METAMODERNISM AND FILM WRITING

#### Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the hypothetical existence of a metamodernist cinema, with reference to the three key ideas proposed by Van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen: affects, historicity and depth. It explores the possibility of a type of cinema that during the last two decades has participated in the questioning of the clichés of postmodernity in search of a "between" space, recovering certain legacies of modernity. This idea is located in the general context of film theories in the wake of the New Cinephilia, which have pointed to the resurgence of a certain notion of "international modernity" that itself coincided with the emergence of a whole range of new styles, categories and schools: from mumblecore to quirky cinema, from the Other New Spanish Cinema Made by Women to the rise of autofiction. Characteristics and concepts common to these movements are proposed here in an effort to clarify these developments on the basis of two key features: the way metamodernist cinema reflects on film writing itself; and the way it configures and proposes different possible worlds that avoid the trap of nostalgia by projecting themselves into the future.

#### Key words

Metamodernity; Spanish Cinema; Film Critic; Theories of Cinema; Nostalgia.

#### Bio Note

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#### HACIA UN CINE METAMODERNO: ELEMENTOS CRÍTICOS PARA EL DEBATE ENTRE METAMODERNISMO Y ESCRITURA FÍLMICA

#### Resumen

El artículo propone una reflexión en torno a la hipotética existencia de un cine metamodernista, tomando como referencia los tres campos propuestos en el trabajo de den Akker, Gibbons y Vermeulen: los afectos, la historicidad y la complejidad. Exploraremos la posibilidad de un cine que durante las dos últimas décadas ha participado en el cuestionamiento de los lugares comunes de la posmodernidad en busca de un «entre», una recuperación de ciertas herencias de la modernidad. Esta idea queda situada en el contexto general de las teorías del cine posteriores a la Nueva Cinefilia, que ya apuntaban al resurgimiento de una cierta idea de «modernidad internacional» que coincidía, a su vez, con el surgimiento de toda una serie de nuevos estilos, categorías y escuelas: del Mumblecore al Cine Quirky, del Otro Nuevo Cine Español Femenino al auge de la autoficción. Proponemos aquí rasgos e ideas comunes a dichos movimientos que permiten clarificar lo que ocurre a partir de dos grandes hitos: la reflexión sobre la propia escritura cinematográfica y la manera en la que, al proyectarse hacia el futuro, configura y propone diferentes mundos posibles que esquivan la trampa de la nostalgia.

#### Palabras clave

Metamodernidad; Cine español; Crítica de cine; Teorías del Cine; Nostalgia.

#### Nota curricular

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# THE PATH OF THE IMPOSTOR: MOTIFS AND SELF-REFERENCE IN THE WAR IS OVER (LA GUERRE EST FINIE, ALAIN RESNAIS, 1966)

GUSTAVO MONTES RODRÍGUEZ VICENTE SANZ DE LEÓN SAIDA SANTANA MAHMUT

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In Jorge Semprún's novel Veinte años y un día, the narrator explains that it is hard for him to write novels because on each page he is confronted by the reality of his own experience, by his memory. "Why make things up," he asks, "when you have had such a novelesque life, filled with infinite narrative material?"1 (Semprún, 2003: 250). This tension between fiction and memory is one of the characteristic features of Jorge Semprún's literary and film work, as "a life scattered by exile is a life whose only permanent identity is memory"<sup>2</sup> (Alliès, 1994: 23). Semprún's life, like that of his narrator, does indeed seem novelesque. Exiled in France at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, he joined the French Resistance, survived internment in a concentration camp, and worked as a member of the Spanish Communist Party in exile. An anti-Franco activist, communist dissident, novelist and screenwriter who also

served as Minister of Culture in Felipe González's government from 1988 to 1991, Semprún, whose centenary was celebrated in 2023, enjoyed a creative career that was one of the "most multifaceted possible in the European and particularly in the Spanish context over the course of the 20th century" (Jimeno Aranda, 2017: 60). His work resembles a kind of interminable palimpsest, a single text that is "constantly being rewritten with new information, judgements weighed by experience. narrative resources that become increasingly complex" (Fernández, 2004: 69). His multiple identities are present in most of his works, sometimes overlapping, thanks to his particular style of shifting between times and places in a structure marked by time jumps and digressions. Semprún's characters appear to be doubles of the author himself, reconstructed in the incessant quest associated with problematising the identity of the exile (Rodríguez, 2022), which is expressed

as a border territory both for the author and for his characters.

Jorge Semprún's second film as a screenwriter, The War Is Over (La guerre est finie, Alain Resnais, 1966), is articulated around two recurring motifs: the impostor and the journey. These two themes would be reappear almost exactly a decade later in one of his best-known novels, Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez (Semprún, 1977, translated in 1979 as Autobiography of Federico Sanchez and the Communist Underground in Spain), and later in his subsequent work. The film's protagonist is a communist activist who returns to France on a fake passport after a mission to undermine the Franco dictatorship. His border crossing marks the beginning of a process of concealment that will require him to assume different identities in order to cover up his mission's objective: to organise a general strike that would trigger the downfall of the dictatorship, according to his party comrades, although the protagonist himself is sceptical about its chances of success. Nevertheless, he is a professional revolutionary, as he himself insists, and he will follow through on a plan that inevitably entails the use of deception. Although his imposture has him questioning his true identity, he returns to Spain out of a moral sense of duty, making for the border with another fake passport in a circular denouement. In The War Is Over, the "hero's journey," as the anthropologist Joseph Campbell (2023) calls it, follows the path of the impostor. Deception, disguise, falsification and the risk of being exposed govern the action on a constant journey back and forth across the border.

### A MODEL FOR ANALYSING IMPOSTURE

The impostor motif has been explored extensively in literature, theatre and film (Montes y Sanz de León, 2021). According to Frenzel's canonical definition, the motif is the "basic component of a plotline" (1976: 7), the latter being understood to

refer to the structure of events that articulate the narrative. In combination with other motifs, it establishes the development of the story. Motifs are recurring narrative situations that are "replete, therefore, with human meaning" (Kayser, 1972: 77), constituting "narrative microstructures" (Doležel, 1999: 59), or the "schematised representation of events, situations, characters, objects or spaces" (Frenzel, 2003: 47) that have been developed since ancient times, passing from one story to the next. The impostor motif, for example, appears in Homer's Odyssey, as a figure associated with deception. On his return to Ithaca, Odysseus pretends to be a beggar when he challenges the suitors who are competing for Penelope's hand. And he also disguises himself earlier in the story when he faces the Cyclops on Trinacria, as the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes describes it:

The Odyssey is the story of a man who must disguise himself to get what he wants: to return to Ithaca. To escape the giant Polyphemus, he declares that he is Nobody. But only Nobody can become somebody else. Travelling in disguise, Odysseus is at the same time held captive by a collective, archetypal past that identifies him. [...] By means of this strategy, Homer allows us to see the work as it is being made. Through disguise and deceit, the poet gives us access to the autobiography of the poem. (Fuentes, 1993: 89)

In *The War Is Over*, the cross-border journey of Diego Mora, who, like Odysseus, carries the burden of a past of war and exile, is also a journey of deceit. As Semprún himself explains, "I chose [...] a future through political commitment [...]. I became another person, Federico Sánchez, so that I could continue to be someone" (1993: 29). Through the strategy of imposture, the author exposes this "autobiography" of the text as it unfolds before the spectator, which is also the autobiography of Semprún himself in a vicarious sense, reconstructed through a twofold lie: the structure of the process of imposture; and the text itself as a product, as a mimetic simulation of reality.

# THE CROSS-BORDER JOURNEY OF DIEGO MORA, WHO, LIKE ODYSSEUS, CARRIES THE BURDEN OF A PAST OF WAR AND EXILE, IS ALSO A JOURNEY OF DECEIT.

The impostor motif is a characteristic feature of spy novels and films, which have much in common with the narrative approach of The War Is Over. In such stories, the impostor's deceit serves as a vehicle for the narrative based on two conflicting patterns of logic that give rise to two types of stories depending on the focalisation of the action: the imposture story, where the character acts to protect the secret against the action of others; and the revelation story, which shows a character engaged in the task of investigating to uncover the secret (Montes, 2009). In both cases, the concealment determines the development of the story, as all imposture entails the possibility of revelation. The War Is Over belongs to the category of the imposture story, with a character immersed in a constant process of concealment sustained by disguise and deception.

The aim of this analysis is to identify the operation of the mechanisms of imposture based on the concealment/revelation dichotomy, and thus determine the character's narrative journey. Im-

posture in The War Is Over has multiple dimensions, because just as the real author is reconstructed in each of his texts, the film's protagonist (Diego Mora) acquires overlapping identities that are constantly rewritten in a process involving other characters in the construction/reconstruction of the imposture. Given the characteristics of Semprún's poetics, this process is inevitably related to levels of enunciation such as the real author, the implied author and the narrator, who has Semprún's own voice in the original version of the film in French, as Jaime Céspedes (2013) has astutely observed, thereby inserting the metaphorical presence of the author into the story, in a tension between fiction and reality which, beyond the discursive form adopted, is characteristic of his work.

To this end, a specific analytical model has been designed that combines premises of narratology, particularly some analytical concepts prosed by Aumont and Marie (1993) and Casetti and Di Chio (1996), with elements drawn from pragmatics and dramatology. This approach has been used to construct a model (Image 1) that makes no claims to being analytically exhaustive, but that aims to identify the factors involved in the construction of the imposture process. A limited number of elements are considered in the interests of ensuring the operability of the model.

Perspectiva teórica	Conceptualización	Niveles de análisis	Categorías de análisis
Narratología	Narrativa Audiovisual	Construcción dramática	Personaje (Patente/Ausente/Latente) Nombre/heterónimo Objetivo/Estrategia/Motivaciones Competencia/Performance Relevancia/Focalización
Pragmática del lenguaje	Retórica del proceso lingüístico	Acto locutivo Acto ilocutivo Acto perlocutivo	Literalidad Intencionalidad Efecto Ocultación Voz narrativa Diálogo/Monólogo

Image I. Model for analysing imposture

The development of this model is based on the understanding that the construction of identity (or false identity in this case) is essentially linguistic because, as Emilio Lledó (2011) argues, language is what we use to convey what we are, what defines us as individuals in relation to others. It thus considers the theoretical contributions of J. L. Austin (2004) regarding the dimensions of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) and, in the interests of tailoring the analysis specifically to audiovisual texts, the theories of Gustavo Montes (2009) regarding the use of silence in film dialogue. It also examines aspects related to the degrees of character representation using the dramatological analysis model developed by García Barrientos (1991; 2001), with a focus on the relationship between the patent character (the various disguises) and the latent character (Diego Mora, but also the overlapping disguises).

# THE DEIXIS OF IMPOSTURE: THE NARRATOR

We hear the narrator's voice-over at the beginning of The War Is Over while we are shown different images of the French-Spanish border: "Once more you look at the Biriatou hill [...] You cross the border once more in the shimmering morning light. [...] You will cross once more" (02:21 min.). The narrator uses the locutionary dimension of language, as the content of his monologue is aimed at situating the implied reader (spectator) in a particular setting. A direct reference is made here to the motif of the journey. The journey is being made now, but it has been made before and seems to be a recurring experience, as reflected in the anaphoric use of "once more", foreshadowing a possibility that will ultimately be confirmed with another journey.

The narrator's use of the singular second person creates a certain ambiguity. Who is telling the story? Is it an external narrator addressing the character, or the character addressing himself in

the second person? The second-person narration informs, contextualises, and summarises the past, while hinting at what will happen later and triggering uncertainty in relation to the clandestine activity: "Nobody must go there. Especially not Juan. He'd fall into the trap" (16:17 min.); "signals indicated danger" (20:59 min.); "the small world we inhabit has become disturbed, full of traps" (21:07 min.); "he almost resents you, as if you were the messenger of this unpredictable, opaque reality" (24:08 min.). The words "trap", "danger", "disturbed" and "unpredictable" point to the possibility of exposing a character identified as an impostor by virtue of the passport he carries with a fake photograph, which, in an attempted challenge of the imposture, is inspected by the French police before they interrogate its holder.

The passport and other objects later provide the opportunity for the narrator to use the first person. In terms of the imposture, this is highly revealing. The protagonist is now in his private home and his true identity has been revealed to the spectator. His partner, Marianne, speaks his name while embracing him, exposing who he really is. Once alone, he begins a process of routinely cataloguing objects, separating his real life from his fictitious one. He lays the Spanish money to one side, writes down his expenses, works to remove the passport photo and then carefully cuts open a toothpaste tube with a message concealed inside it. He continues with these procedures in a silence broken only by the voice of the narrator, who speaks in the first person, identifying himself with the protagonist by means of brief locutionary comments. When the work is

WHO IS TELLING THE STORY?
IS IT AN EXTERNAL NARRATOR
ADDRESSING THE CHARACTER,
OR THE CHARACTER ADDRESSING
HIMSELF IN THE SECOND PERSON?

done, he says to himself: "For patience and irony are the main virtues of the Bolshevik" (57:35 min.). This is the only illocutionary use of language, an ironic remark that reveals that the impostor's life, apart from the danger and risk it entails, has a tedious, bureaucratic component.

The use of the first person is thus reserved for moments when the character is shown in his true identity: Diego Mora. The second person is used for sequences involving the impostor, i.e., Carlos, Diego's activist identity, and as the action unfolds he will also become René Sallanches, Domingo and Gabriel Chauvin, reflecting the multiplicitous nature of his impostures (Image 2). By this point, the initial ambiguity is resolved: the voice-over belongs to a narrator/character who addresses himself in the second person. In reality, he is addressing his impostor self, as his narration accompanies the images of the fictitious selves he must assume. In both cases, the narrator identifies himself, however, with the character. According to Genette's terminology (1989), narrator and character would have the same degree of knowledge about the facts (N=C). This should mean that in the moments when the narrator describes future events that the character could not logically know about because he has not yet experienced them, this would result in what Genette (1989) calls paralepsis, i.e., where the narrator provides the reader with more information than the type of focalisation should allow. However, no such transgression occurs, as the narrator expresses these events as expectations that may or may not be realised.

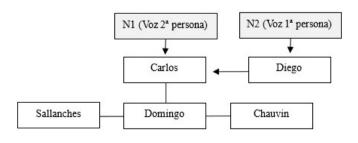


Image 2. Deixis of imposture

The alternation between first and second person reveals the narrator as split in two and assigns him a deictic role. It exposes the imposture and sets out specific instructions for interpreting the story, signalling it as a fictional object, a simulacrum of the real author's life, and using the level of enunciation to transgress the canonical rules of the spy thriller genre to which the film belongs only in appearance. Moreover, this split is doubly expressed, as the narrator's voice is Semprún's own in the original French version and a dub actor's voice different from the character's in the Spanish version.

The War Is Over ends with images of the burial of a comrade of the protagonist, alternating with shots of his return to the border again in a car, in symmetry with the images at the beginning of the story. The narrator brings the story to a close in this silent sequence, confirming the recurrence of the anaphora at the start:

You think there'll be no strike in Madrid on the 30th of April, but you're hooked on the fraternity of long battles [...]. You'll meet Juan, you'll go with him to Madrid. Once again, you'll knock on doors. Strangers will open them, and you'll say, whoever they are, that the sun rises over Benidorm. With this password, they'll let you in and you'll be together [...] as if it were your first journey, as if the struggle were beginning today (1:54:40 min.).

Once again, the character leaves his true identity behind and begins another process of concealment, with another fake passport given to him by a comrade, with his photo replacing the photo of another, with another name... Again, an impostor. Again, on the road.

### **OVERLAPPING IMPOSTORS**

The beginning of the story reveals the nameless protagonist to be an impostor through a dialogue between two characters on their way to the border in a car. We receive little information about him, other than the fact he is Spanish. He is no-

body because only by being nobody can he become somebody else. At this point, that somebody is René Sallanches, whose identity, documented in the passport that the protagonist hands over to the police (05:32 min.), he has usurped. Sallanches, a French diplomat collaborating with the anti-Franco movement, is a character who will not appear in the story, except in remarks by other characters and in the photograph that one the protagonist's comrades will put back in the passport. The impostor's skill in deception and disguise is reflected in a dialogue with the driver: "You don't sound anything like you're Spanish" (05:32 min.). In his police interrogation he displays his mastery of a language that is not his own, while vesting his false identity with credibility, recounting specific details of Sallanches's life, evading the police officer's attempts to catch him out, answering all his questions with aplomb, and even deftly handling the trap set for him: a phone call made to his supposed daughter (06:36 min.). He has never seen Sallanches or his daughter, he will inform us later when he reveals the strategy for his clandestine entry into France to his driver's wife (10:08 min.): "So the passport's fake, but the phone number is real," she surmises. "No, it's all real. The passport, René Sallanches, his daughter, the phone number, everything. It's just my identity that is fake," he reveals. The illocutionary dimension is present in the police interrogation. The intention is to turn the lie into a locutionary act. In the second conversation, however, the locutionary dimension emerges to explain the deception, not only to his interlocutor, but also to the spectator in the dual addressee function—character and implied reader-that characterises the construction of cinematic dialogue.

The impostor is qualified to perform his act, to be nobody, and therefore to be many. He is also Carlos, a latent character, as is Diego Mora, his true identity, when he takes the train and wanders around the city in search of information about a comrade in danger. Sallanches and Carlos

# THE IMPOSTOR IS QUALIFIED TO PERFORM HIS ACT, TO BE NOBODY, AND THEREFORE TO BE MANY.

share the same suit, the same briefcase that the impostor carries about with him, as the disguise is not physical but linguistic, constructed out of the manipulation of words and silences. In a dialogue with his comrades as they install a false bottom in a car, the locutionary dimension prevails: their plans are revealed to spectator, as the imposture is known to them all (28:05 min.). Carlos's name, which appears to be his real one here, conceals the second latent character of Diego Mora, which will be unknown to the spectator until his lover, Marianne, reveals his true identity.

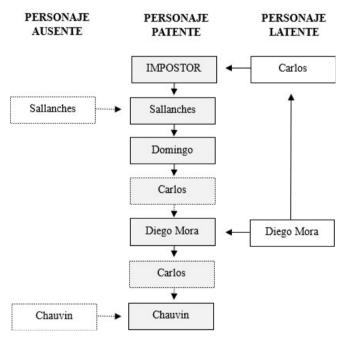


Image 3. Overlapping impostors

In his encounter with Nadine (Sallanches's daughter), Carlos will once again become some-body else: Domingo, a third false identity that will later be replaced by Gabriel Chauvin, the fourth and final imposture (Image 3). At first, Domin-

go has no name either. In the Sallanches' family apartment, a dialogue of seduction takes place, alternating between silences and gazes with an illocutionary use of language rife with implicit allusions on the part of both characters. "And was I the affectionate father?" he asks. "When my father is affectionate," she replies, "he never calls me 'my darling'. He calls me 'Nana'" (33:13 min.). Then, after explaining that he must return to give her the passport, with her father's photo restored to it in case the police demand it, she looks at the picture. "You could be my father," she says. "Yes, Nana", he replies (35:18 min.). They kiss and then go into the bedroom to make love. For Nana, the impostor is still nameless. Only when they say goodbye does she ask him what his real name is, to which Carlos or Diego replies: "When I'm called by my real name, I jump" (38:16 min.); this is in fact probably Diego, the latent character unknown to the spectator. As if caving into a weakness, when Nana presses him for an answer he chooses to lie once again and responds with another false name: "Domingo." The impostor is doomed to wear his disguise forever in order to ensure his survival (physical, but in this case also personal), as he has kept his name as an activist a secret. The next day, when he must go to a clandestine meeting with the members of the party committee, he is Carlos again. He tries to convince them to postpone the general strike until the question of the whereabouts of his missing comrades is cleared up (01:12:19 min.). And then he is Domingo once again when he meets with Nadine again, this time in a café because he has discovered that the police are watching the Sallanches' home (01:24:05 min.). Then he is Carlos again when he meets Nadine's friends, young revolutionaries who are plotting to sabotage the Spanish tourism industry, with whom he uses the same arguments that his comrades gave Carlos to convince them of the need for the general strike to bring down the dictatorship—although to them he is Domingo, Nadine's Spanish activist friend (01:45:41 min.).

Domingo and Nadine's farewell at the entrance to a Metro station marks the beginning of a new journey. He says nothing in response to her questions: "You'll call me tomorrow?", "You're going again?", "You'll call me when you get back?", "You're coming back?" (01:51:52 min.). Without replying, Domingo turns and descends the steps into the station. A new journey entails a new secret, and a new imposture. And that means a new passport providing another identity, Gabriel Chauvin, an absent character whom we learn nothing about apart from his name.

# THE SELF-REFERENTIAL IDENTITY OF THE IMPOSTOR

Carlos walks alone along the banks of the Seine at night (39:43 min.). The scene then cuts to a POV shot taking us inside the character's mind: the image of a mature but still beautiful woman, in a close-up showing her face, neck and hair. He desires her. This is not the first time she has appeared in the story, as her face was also mixed in with shots of Nadine in her sexual encounter with the impostor (35:20 min.). The woman is Marianne, Diego Mora's partner, whose identity has been withheld from the spectator until she utters his name in their apartment and thus identifies them both. The subjective shots, which constitute primary internal ocularisation in the terminology of Gaudreault and Jost (1995), expose the inner tension provoked by the multiple impostures the protagonist must engage in. Only now are we made aware that the impostor we have known as Carlos, who first posed as René Sallanches and then as Domingo, is in reality

THE SUBJECTIVE SHOTS EXPOSE THE INNER TENSION PROVOKED BY THE MULTIPLE IMPOSTURES THE PROTAGONIST MUST ENGAGE IN.

someone else altogether. In the subsequent sequences we will witness a blunder by Diego that threatens to expose his secret to his partner's guests, since it contradicts the version that shewho is complicit in the deception—has given them to explain his absence. Here, the imposture is inverted: while before, Carlos had to keep Diego's identity concealed behind his impostor's disguise, now Diego must hide his identity as an impostor. His skill at the former has been made clear, but his efforts at the latter break down and endanger the secret. The illocutionary dimension that has governed his activity is replaced by the locutionary truth when, pressured by Marianne's guests to offer his opinion on the situation in Spain, Diego bursts out:

[Spain] is the lyrical clear conscience of the left, a myth for veterans. But 14 million tourists spend their holidays in Spain. A tourist's dream, or the legend of the Civil War. All that mixed with Lorca's plays. I'm fed up with them. [...]. I wasn't at Teruel. I wasn't at the Battle of the Ebro. And the ones doing things for Spain, important things, weren't there either. They're twenty years old. The past doesn't motivate them; the future does. Spain isn't the dream of '36, it's the reality of '65, even if that seems disconcerting. Thirty years have passed, and veterans bore me. I'm sorry, I... None of this is very clear. (46:14 min.)

The apology at the end of his tirade highlights the protagonist's inability to go on speaking without revealing his secret. Carlos has been depicted as an active character who performs his linguistic acts with the utmost professionalism. Conversely, Diego behaves as a passive character who cracks under interrogation, who acts only on the defensive, when he is under suspicion: "They'll think I'm a liar. Never mind," (48:46 min.), he tells Marianne when she reveals his blunder. She is shocked by his reaction. "If you lied, I lied," she replies. His false identity as Carlos also affects his wife, since she is an accomplice in a deception that makes her uneasy. In a desperate attempt to establish

something real, she says to him: "I want to have your child. This is not a life." Diego responds with a question that in reality he is asking himself: "What is a life, then?" When his party comrades condemn him to perform a "Stalinist self-criticism" for failing to support their chosen strategy, the future that Diego envisions for himself is presented to us in a series of subjective shots (01:19:49 min.). He sees himself sitting in his office at a typewriter writing the first pages of a novel, chatting in a café with Nadine, looking through a photo album with Marianne... the stereotypical life of a bourgeois intellectual, as he conceives it. The life he could have had if he had not chosen the path of the impostor; the life his comrades assign him after they expel him from the front lines. However, this will not be his fate, as he is ultimately called back into action to replace a comrade who has died in an accident. "They better find someone else," he complains to Marianne, when she passes the message onto him (01:32:29 min.). Marianne, who suffers the consequences of the actions of her husband's other self, has been transformed into an influential character, according to the terminology proposed by Casetti and Di Chio (1996), a character who triggers Diego's actions, and who will play an active, autonomous role in the end of the story. She is given a mission of her own: to warn Carlos, who is on his way to Spain, of the trap laid for him by the Spanish police. Doubting her competency, the comrade who drops her off at the airport makes her repeat the instructions and code phrase (01:58.15 min.). She repeats them diligently and smiles. She knows she's ready. She wraps a scarf around her head. The camera shows a close-up of her determined face. Now she is an impostor too.

In *The War Is Over*, the implied author constructs a narrative focalised through Diego Mora, and through the voice-over; both are doubles of Semprún himself, who tells his own story blended with false information and imagined situations. In this way, Semprún disguises himself as the nar-

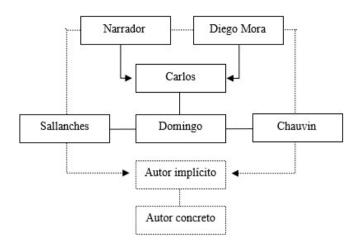


Image 4. The identity of the impostor

rator, as Diego Mora, as Carlos, as Sallanches, as Domingo and as Chauvin (Image 4) to construct a plausible narrative the same way that the impostor Carlos does, through language. "Writing is a kind of 'impersonation', a form of identity theft: to write is to impersonate somebody else," suggests the author Justo Navarro (2007:19). In the Otherness that is fiction, the real author explains himself in order to find himself, to discover himself, to identify himself.

One of the film's last sequences finally closes the circle. Referring to Carlos, a police inspector remarks: "There are underground guys like that, who become ministers one fine day" (01:57:51 min.). In Adieu, Vive clarté, Semprún himself recalls a moment looking out over a garden filled with hydrangeas when his mother, Susana Maura, told him that one day he would be "a writer or President of the Republic"3 (1998: 275). He never became President of the Republic, but he did become a writer and also served as a government minister in Spain from 1988 to 1991. Just as his mother correctly predicted his future as a writer, this fictional character in The War Is Over suggests that Carlos, Semprún's alter ego, would become a minister, effectively telling the real author's future.

### **CONCLUSIONS: THE TRUTH OF IMPOSTURE**

The War Is Over is articulated around actions related to the motif of the impostor, underpinned by its relationship with other classic motifs: disguise, deception and the journey. The disguise, signalled by the fake identities that the protagonist is forced to assume in the course of his clandestine activity, is essentially linguistic, effected by the protagonist's manipulation of language in his conversations with other characters, while the deception involves the use of the techniques, strategies and tools of imposture that facilitate the concealment of his mission. The protagonist's use of language prioritises the illocutionary dimension with those who seek to expose the truth and the locutionary dimension with collaborators or accomplices in the lie. In the latter case, the double direction typical of cinematic dialogue comes into play, as the information exchanged is also intended for the spectator.

The revelation of the imposture has multiple, overlapping dimensions. The character assumes a series of fake roles that are all intertwined: an impostor who impersonates a second impostor who in turn impersonates a third. The narrative first introduces us to a process of identity concealment, immersing us in the uncertainty that governs the narrative arc through intrigue and anticipation, and then, once the protagonist's true personality has finally been revealed, through suspense. The attitude of the impostor is a moral attitude, as he uses disguise and deception in pursuit of a higher purpose, even when his own opinion of the battle strategy puts him at odds with his comrades. The protagonist sacrifices his own individual interests in the name of the mission's objective: freedom, which can only be achieved by bringing down the dictatorship. This sets this story apart from traditional spy thrillers, in which characters adopt the role of impostor in the interest of their own or their family's survival. Even in a film closer to the approach of The War Is Over like The Last

Metro (Le dernier métro, François Truffaut, 1980), the differences are notable. While in the first film, the objective is moral, in the second it is personal: Diego Mora, who dreams of being a writer, gives up everything for a greater cause; Lucas Steiner, a stage director of Jewish origin, puts his life at risk to continue his artistic career in secret during the Nazi occupation. While Diego is driven by an unavoidable historical destiny, like the hero of a Greek tragedy, Lucas is driven by an individual creative impulse.

The alternation of the narrative voice between first and second person immerses us in the character's identity crisis. The narrator performs a deictic role that signals the imposture, setting out specific instructions for understanding the story and expanding its possible interpretations, while reflecting the self-referential approach that characterises Jorge Semprún's entire oeuvre. In this way, it exposes the text as a construct and connects it to the real author, transcending the codes of meaning associated with the genre at the levels of both content and discourse. The internal focalisation, and particularly the relationship between the different levels of enunciation and the characters, exposes the writing process as a process of imposture carried out by the real author. It is a creative imposture, characteristic of the writer, who to tell a story is forced to assume the identity of his characters vicariously in order to build a possible world, distinct from the real one, that uses fiction to draw out the truth of reality.

### **NOTES**

- 1 Spanish original: "¿Para qué inventar cuando has tenido una vida tan novelesca, en la cual hay materia narrativa infinita?" Translation ours.
- 2 French original: "une vie dispersée à cause de l'exil est une vie dont la seule identité permanente est la mémoire." Translation ours.
- 3 French original: "Écrivain ou président de la République." Translation ours.

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# THE PATH OF THE IMPOSTOR: MOTIFS AND SELF-REFERENCE IN THE WAR IS OVER (LA GUERRE EST FINIE, ALAIN RESNAIS, 1966)

#### Abstract

The aim of this analysis is to identify the operation of imposture in The War Is Over (La guerre est finie, Alain Resnais, 1966), the first film scripted by the Spanish writer Jorge Semprún, whose centenary was celebrated in 2023. Through the specific design of an analytical model that combines premises of narratology with pragmatics and dramatology, the motifs of the impostor, disguise and deception are analysed through the characters' actions and dialogues. The findings suggest that linguistic manipulation and the use of the strategies and tools of imposture are key elements of a constant process of rewriting that involves the construction/reconstruction of identity. The protagonist's use of language prioritises the illocutionary dimension with those who seek to expose the truth, and the locutionary dimension with collaborators or accomplices in the lie. In the latter case, the double direction typical of cinematic dialogue comes into play, as the information exchanged is also intended for the spectator. The narrative voice performs a deictic role that exposes the simulacrum, while reflecting the self-referential approach characteristic of Jorge Semprún's work.

### Key words

Jorge Semprún; self-referentiality; impostor; narration; characters; dialogue.

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# EL CAMINO DEL IMPOSTOR. MOTIVO Y AUTORREFERENCIALIDAD EN LA GUERRA HA TERMINADO (LA GUERRE EST FINIE, ALAIN RESNAIS, 1966)

### Resumen

Este análisis pretende determinar el funcionamiento de la impostura en la película La guerre est finie (Alain Resnais, 1966), primer guion cinematográfico de Jorge Semprún, escritor cuyo centenario se celebró en 2023. Mediante el diseño específico de un modelo de análisis que vincula presupuestos narratológicos con la pragmática del lenguaje y la dramatología, se analizan los motivos del impostor, el disfraz y el engaño a través de las acciones y diálogos de los personajes. Los resultados señalan que la manipulación lingüística y la utilización de estrategias y objetos de impostura son elementos claves de un proceso continuo de reescritura que implica la construcción/reconstrucción de la identidad. En la verbalidad de los personajes se privilegia la dimensión ilocutiva cuando los interlocutores actúan en favor del desvelamiento; en cambio, la dimensión locutiva aparece cuando son colaboradores o cómplices, activándose en este caso la doble direccionalidad del diálogo cinematográfico, ya que la información facilitada va dirigida también al espectador. La voz narrativa cumple una función deíctica, que subraya el simulacro, situando el relato en la autorreferencialidad característica de la obra de Jorge Semprún.

### Palabras clave

Jorge Semprún; autorreferencialidad; impostura; narración; personajes; diálogo.

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# MEMORY AND ATONEMENT: FORM, TIME AND VOICE IN FILMING OTHELLO (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

ÁLVARO GIMÉNEZ SARMIENTO

### THE MAKING OF A MAKING-OF

In July 1974, the German network ARD (German Public Broadcasting Organisation) commissioned Orson Welles to make an introduction for one of his most emblematic films. Othello (1951). Thanks to their generous financial offer, Welles accepted the commission and shot a presentation of around twenty minutes. However, dissatisfied with the result, he decided not to hand the footage over to ARD and instead convinced the producers Klaus and Jürgen Hellwing to finance a longer documentary production similar to F for Fake (1973), which he had made a few years earlier (Berthomé and Thomas, 2007). In addition to the twenty-minute presentation he had already made and various excerpts from the original film, Welles recorded a conversation in Paris with the actors Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, and a talk he gave in Cinema 1 of the Orson Welles Cinema Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts, following

a screening of the original *Othello* (Kelly, 2017). He also filmed some comments to camera and a dialogue between Othello and Iago performed by the director himself (Graver and Rausch, 2011).

Despite the simplicity of the project, it took four years to complete this 83-minute film (Berthomé and Thomas. 2007). It was first screened at the Berlin Film Festival in June 1978, under the title Filming Othello (1978). A month later, it was broadcast on ARD in West Germany. However, it would not be shown in the United States until June 1979, when it was screened at Joseph Papp's Public Theater in New York, along with the original 1951 film. It had a three-week run in cinemas but received very little media attention. Unfortunately, it would not be shown again in the United States until 1987, when the famous Film Forum in Greenwich Village screened it without the original film. This was when it received its first critical reactions, such as a New York Times review by Vincent Canby, who asserted that it "is so good it

makes one long for more [...] one walks out of the theater eager to see *Othello* again" (1987: 24).

The general disinterest in Filming Othello among critics at the time of its release would be transferred in subsequent years to the academic community, where it has received minimal attention. Although it has been the subject of a few studies, such as the articles by Sebastian Lefait (2015) and Antonio Costa (2004), the value of this film, especially in terms of its quality as an essay and its treatment of time, has clearly been underestimated. To fill the research gap, this article presents a study of Filming Othello from various perspectives, beginning with a consideration of the film's temporal structure; this is followed by an analysis of the editing, which is essential to understand the fusion of past and present that underpins the whole film. Questions of mode, voice and desire are also analysed, drawing on the ideas of Nichols (1997), Carl Plantinga (1997) and Michael Renov (2004). And finally, a reflection is offered on the transition from the movement-image to the time-image, as these concepts are defined by Deleuze (1986, 2001), in order to draw some conclusions about the nature of this documentary as an essay film. In this way, Filming Othello is identified as a key piece in the filmography of one of the most iconic and imposing figures in film history.

### THE TEMPORAL AXIS

Filming Othello establishes a fluid dialogue between past and present through the series of anecdotes it threads together about the 1951 film's pre-production, filming and post-production processes. The reconfiguration enacted by Welles's ubiquitous voice-over accompanying the images shown of the original film gives rise to a constant flow between time-frames. His commentary gives the old footage two temporal dimensions: on the one hand, the time when Othello was filmed; and on the other, the time during the editing of Fil-

ming Othello, when the new soundtrack modifies the original film. Past and present are fused together to configure a retrospective that is updated through a new writing process. As will be discussed below, there is even an evocation of the future at the end of the film, when Welles appeals to the spectator to reassess his work. He thus not only regenerates old material but also invites the spectator to subject it to new readings and reinterpretations. At that moment, a sombre but vigorous Welles wishes "with all [his] heart" that his Othello might be viewed as a project for the future rather than as a relic anchored in the past. As Alberto Giordano suggests, it is a "past that comes to sustain a representation of the present in response to a call from the future" (2006: 172).

This idea of connectedness between timeframes is also evident when Welles talks about his time in Dublin or the pre-production work for his planned adaptation of Cyrano de Bergerac in Rome, and when he refers to Cannes and the film shoots for The Lady from Shanghai (1947) and Macbeth (1948). It is a constant interchange in which Welles positions himself as the sole driving force behind the narrative, as a totemic auteur who controls the time shifts in his cinematic elegy. The encounter between past and present vests the discourse with an autobiographical dimension, in which the director himself organises the material and investigates its place in film history (Piedras, 2014). In contrast with other productions he made for television, in Filming Othello the main object of study is Welles himself. Subject and object are combined to construct an investigative, self-referential narrative whose conclusions are drawn from an analysis that is chiefly introspec-

In this regard, it is worth considering the perspective of Paul Ricoeur (1990: 159), who defines self-representation in terms of the projection of the subject. Ricoeur argues that the subject is "split" into two parts: *identity*, which implies the permanence of the subject's psychological and

physical qualities; and *ipseity*, whereby the subject does not have a persistent image but constructs one during his own discursive act (Piedras, 2014). In *Filming Othello*, creator and object of study are fused through a retrospective, prospective and projective linguistic act, in a metacinematic exercise executed through one of the processes that Welles accorded particular importance: the editing process.

### THE MOVIOLA REVEALED

The editing in Filming Othello is structured around a sort of interplay between speeches to camera and excerpts from the original film, with the exception of the Paris and Cambridge sequences. This dialectical exchange is more intense in the first part of the film, when the main themes of the documentary are presented. After the conversation with Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, Welles returns to this dialogue between past and present, continuing with it up to the one-hour point in the film, when the "Welles of the past" and the "Welles of the present" intersect after his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago (Image 1). After this, the director shows the talk he gave in Cambridge and ends

with the aforementioned appeal to the spectator. It is a composition of various edits that function in a self-contained, somewhat impermeable way, constructing a fragmentary film with a slow pacing at a rate of only 0.4 shots per minute.

Welles's speeches to camera are edited using two cameras filming him simultaneously. This technique is used twice, so the pacing is not substantially faster, at 0.9 shots per minute in these sequences. In fact, Welles always favours the camera that provides a frontal view, making very limited use of the second angle, which generally shifts between a wide shot and a medium shot (Image 2). These are brief views from the outside where the camera ceases to be the spectator (axis of action) and instead becomes a distanced observer. These shots serve in a way as calls to attention, as linguistic strategies that Welles uses to emphasise the metatextual nature of the text. Welles not only engages in a dialogue with spectators but also exposes them to a simulation of observation in order to trigger awareness of the cinematic device.

In this sense, Filming Othello is also an exercise of self-recognition based on the 1951 film, whose viewing through the Moviola modifies its nature, vesting it with a new dimension. On the one





Image I. Consecutive frames after the dialogue between Iago and Othello performed by Orson Welles in Filming Othello. Source: Filmmuseum Munich (Criterion Collection)

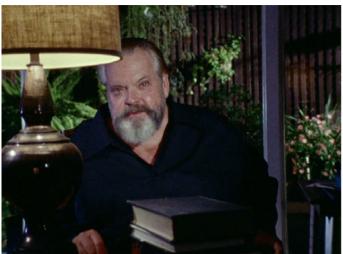




Image 2. Example of the two-camera setup in Filming Othello. Source: Filmmuseum Munich (Criterion Collection)

hand, Welles removes the original audio and adds his voice-over, while on the other, he articulates a new composition by means of two strategies. The first involves changing the order of the excerpts in accordance with his voice-over directions, so that the structure of the scenes is based not on the logic of the plot but on the logic of his explanation. When Welles talks about architecture, the visuals show images of the castle. When he comments on questions of composition, he presents us with images of elaborate, complex frames. There are no double meanings here, but merely visualisations of the themes he discusses.

The second strategy involves altering the internal editing of the sequences from the original Othello. The cuts he introduces compress the film, generating a tighter pacing geared towards his explanatory objective. The editing thus results in deletions of shots, reductions of shot duration, alterations to the order of shots and changes of scale that direct our attention to specific elements of the frame. Welles takes his original material and creates a new composition that extends to every dimension of the shot. The Moviola reinterprets the original material, giving it a metatextual function that generates new aesthetic-narrative articulations.

An example of this approach can be found in the sequence of Desdemona's murder (Image

3), where Welles reduces the duration of shots and changes their order to produce new match cuts. These new cuts give a new meaning to the scene itself, as Othello takes his wife by surprise and murders her with none of the hesitation of the original. Another striking case is during the funeral procession. This sequence, located at the beginning of the film with no voice-over, constitutes a reframing with exclusively aesthetic-narrative aims, a strategy that is only repeated once, when Welles looks at his "past self" at the end of his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago.



Image 3. Comparison between the sequence of Desdemona's murder in Othello in 1951 (below) and in Filming Othello in 1978 (above). The black areas indicate the footage cut from the 1978 version. Source: prepared by author using Adobe Premiere software.

As can be seen in Image 4, the funeral sequence in the 1951 film runs for three minutes and forty-seven seconds, while in *Filming Othello* it is reduced to one minute and thirty-six seconds, i.e., 57% shorter. The elimination of whole shots occurs mainly in the final part, while the shortening

is executed to a greater extent at the beginning, especially in the wide shots. There is also a change to the order of shot number 30 in the original *Othello*, which in *Filming Othello* is brought forward to shot 22. This sequence is therefore the best confirmation of the process of constant rewriting that Welles argues for at the end of the film. As if it were a metaphor for this process, Welles creates a new structure that reinforces the overarching idea of the film: reading as a form of writing, as a generator of new filmic material.

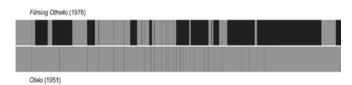


Image 4. Comparison between the funeral sequence in the 1951 film (below) and in Filming Othello in 1978 (above). The black areas indicate the footage cut from the 1978 version. Source: prepared by author using Adobe Premiere software

Similarly, the fact that the funeral sequence is the only one that is reinterpreted without a didactic objective is highly revealing. Death, a ubiquitous theme in Welles' filmography, appears here as a reality that battles against its opponent, i.e., against this assertion of "the need for Othello to be remade over and over" (Lefait, 2015: 73). In this new film, Welles stands in opposition to a stage of life he feels is almost upon him, and he does so through the modification of old material. Editing is presented as a ritual that invokes the timeless nature of art, that imperishable dimension that endures through reading after reading. Filming Othello is not just a revision of a past work, but also a metaphor for the immortality it aspires to. Welles approaches Shakespeare to suggest that his Othello should also be watched again and reinterpreted. Editing (the Moviola) is revealed to be the most important tool for constructing this final discourse with which Welles aspires to perpetuate his art.

Indeed, editing was his great Achilles' heel. Welles lost control over the editing process of The Magnificent Ambersons (1942), Mr. Arkadin (1955) and Touch of Evil (1958), and he continued it to the point of exhaustion when he made Othello, Chimes at Midnight (1965), F for Fake (1973) and Filming Othello. He also never finished editing most of his television projects, which earned him the fame of a cursed director incapable of completing his films. For Welles, the cutting room was a place of both pleasure and pain, a space where he came up with many of his greatest contributions to the cinematic art, but also where he earned his bad reputation in the film industry. In this sense, the Moviola becomes not only a tool for transcendence but also an instrument of the redemption he hopes to attain in these last years of his life.



Image 5. Orson Welles sitting at his Moviola in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

### THE ACOUSMATIC BEING

The sound in *Filming Othello* builds on the approach established with the editing. Welles's voice presides over all the footage, except for the funeral procession sequence and the detail shots of the Moviola immediately after it. His voice alternates between visualised sound (synchronised with Welles's image) and acousmatic<sup>1</sup> sound (a

voice-over accompanying the footage of the 1951 film). Welles modifies the original film by replacing the soundtrack with his "vampirising voice", which is just as prominent and defined as when he is shown onscreen. However, despite the importance of this acousmatic voice, its use is very limited. Welles is off-camera only 14% of the time, leaving 1 hour, 10 minutes and 46 seconds of purely synchronous sound and vision. As a result, despite its transformative capacity, Welles's voice does not possess many of the powers normally attributed to the acousmatic voice, such as omnividence, omniscience or omnipotence.

On the other hand, the elimination of the original film's soundtrack, in addition to making room for the voice-over, results in a silent projection through which "voiceless bodies" wander in a "silence imposed on the filmgoer" (Chion, 1999: 95, 100). There is no voice coming from the past; words are spoken only in the present, in clear preparation for the new reading that spectators must engage in after the screening. Welles strips the original of its soundtrack with the intention of giving his work new life, allowing it to grow through new revisions. He is not willing to show whole parts of his original film; instead, he cuts the audio to facilitate a new viewing that can project his work into immortality. In this way, Filming Othello is designed as a struggle against the finite, against death, against that funeral procession at the start the film where, on this one occasion, Welles does respect the original soundtrack.

# FILMING OTHELLO IS DESIGNED AS A STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FINITE, AGAINST DEATH

### MODE, VOICE AND DESIRE

Filming Othello is presented as a reflexive piece that often reaches the level of a performative display. Welles makes constant reference to the process of construction of the cinematic discourse of both the 1951 film and the documentary itself. As Nichols suggests, the reflexive mode speaks to us "less about the historical world itself [...] than about the process of representation" (1992: 56). The constant presence of metatextual elements (Moviola, film reel canisters, etc., representing 23.8% of the total) creates an ideal space for this metalinguistic reflection, which is staged through an encounter between filmmaker and spectator during the monologues. The aforementioned two-camera setup allows Welles to be observed "from outside", disrupting the camera-director axis and giving the spectator an intensified awareness of the filmmaking act, which in turn is conducive to reflection.

Indeed, Welles makes the most of long shots that enhance this sense of awareness, as when an image lingers onscreen, it ultimately directs the spectator's attention to itself and the impact it has on what it shows (Nichols, 1997). Once this awareness has been achieved, the director introduces epistemological doubt through the intervention of the Moviola, that apparatus that can modify the representation of the past. It is a revelation of the creation device, giving us a hyper-situated knowledge that allows us to question the nature of the cinematic work. Welles sows the seeds of an uncertainty that gives rise to a new interpretation of the text, and thus to a projection into the future. Reflection is defined as an essential stage for spectators to redefine their own role, as they become creators of texts on which to build a supposed perpetuity.

This reflexivity also gives rise to a performative mode that lends more weight to subjective elements. Welles is not interested in seeking an empirical explanation for his representation; instead,

he appeals to the emotions and to the affective dimension of the story. His reflection draws on personal experiences that are transformed into discourse through their recording on celluloid. There is no scientific refutation here because it would be impossible, as knowledge comes from one source only: from a director thinking aloud about his own craft. Welles shares the experience of creating a film with the aim of getting the spectator to understand it more viscerally than intellectually (Nichols, 1997). His intention is not to make the discourse convincing, but to elicit an emotion that makes it possible to convey this experience as vividly as possible. Filming Othello is not about an historical event, but about a memory that is given shape by a voice committed to emotion and affect.

In its dimension as a metadocumentary, Filming Othello also expresses a poetic voice (Plantinga, 2000). Welles talks openly about the process of creating both the 1951 film and Filming Othello itself. The construction of cinematic discourse is one of the main themes and it is enacted through the editing, although there is also an explicit reflection on the filming of both productions. Filming Othello exposes its own nature through a self-referentiality that facilitates the exploration of issues such as a film's representativeness, the value of the filming process and the serendipitous nature of all artistic creation. It is a verbal reflexivity that is enhanced by the quotes of André Bazin and Jack J. Jorgens read by Welles during the first half of the film. Filming Othello could thus be classified as a film that analyses or interrogates (Renov, 2004), since Welles takes an object of study (his own film) and subjects it to an exhaustive reflexive process (Lloga Sanz, 2020).

In a certain sense, Welles tries to understand the secret behind the enduring nature of his film (and thus of Shakespeare's work). His whole process of self-discovery involves an exploration of the essence of art, of that element of art that can raise a work to a higher category. Welles scrutinises not only his film but himself as a creator, as a storyteller, as a finite being who longs for immortality. The self-conscious nature of the discourse also serves as a tool for analysing his place in the filmmaking apparatus. There is a constant emphasis on delimiting the authorial act, on identifying where his role ends and that of other external agents begins. There are thus constant references to Shakespeare, to the fortuitous circumstances of the filming and to the participation of other actors as producers, cinematographers or performers.

And it is here that the essence of the film resides. Beyond all the vicissitudes he suffered while making his film, Welles is portrayed as the grand auteur, the driving force behind an artistic act who blasts away any barrier placed between him and his work. Despite its depiction of a tempestuous filming process, Filming Othello remains an ode to his creative power. Welles prioritises storytelling as a semantic mechanism, as a device for positioning the artist and his creation. What seems to have a playful intention is revealed to be one of the film's most effective strategies: nothing can negate his role as an auteur and, by extension, his chance to endure in the memory of future generations. Indeed, the very act of writing this article represents a new confirmation of Welles's discourse: these very words contribute to the perpetuation of his image, as it breathes new life into a film that has undoubtedly acquired the status of a work of art.

### THE CRYSTAL IMAGE

Taking up Deleuze's taxonomy, the movement-image appears in *Filming Othello* in all three of its categories: perception-image, action-image, and affection-image. It is a perception-image<sup>2</sup> because it subtracts and eliminates parts of a total perception, of "acentred and deframed zones" (Deleuze, 2001: 64). Within this category we also find of its two subcategories: the objective and the subjective. It is objective when we see Welles beside his Moviola, watching the images on the screen,

and subjective when we witness what Welles is observing, i.e., excerpts from the original *Othello*, his meeting with Liammóir and Edwards, and his talk in Cambridge. The subjective-objective split turns on the axis of the Moviola, an apparatus used to shift cinematic awareness between these two points of reference. But Welles, as a "qualified" subject, watches a reality on the monitor that is mediated by another camera and by another Moviola, introducing a new layer of perception fused to the previous one. The Moviola acts as an instrument that multiplies both subjectivity and objectivity, since both concepts are also present in the 1951 film (Image 6).

This relationship is not evident in all the excerpts taken from the 1951 film, but only in the second half of *Filming Othello*, just after the footage of Welles's conversation in Paris with Liammóir and Edwards (Image 7). From this moment, Welles is always shown in front of the Moviola, reviewing footage and creating a new dynamic







Image 6. Consecutive shots of Orson Welles watching excerpts from Othello (1951) on the Moviola in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)



Image 7. Shot and reverse shot of Orson Welles' conversation with Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

associated with the perception-image. Welles establishes a perceptual dimension where the Moviola, an instrument "imbued with memory" (Ortega, 2008: 75), becomes a temporal window on two pasts: Paris and Cambridge. The perception-image therefore not only defines an axis of action through the camera setup, but also establishes a temporal axis that gives rise to a mechanistic image. Welles operates the controls of the Moviola, pausing and playing the footage in a kind of Kino-Eye technique that ties in with some of the concepts postulated by Dziga Vertov (2011).

Indeed, these images produced by the "machine" acquire a new texture with their vibration, flickering, and a grainer appearance than the original image, indexing this footage as the source of the "clinamen of Epicurean materialism", which reaches the "genetic element" that "makes perception change" (Deleuze, 2001: 83). The image passes to the frame and the frame passes to the image, affording the spectator a capacity of supraperception. Welles is no longer showing the filming apparatus as he did in many of his other documentaries, but the product of that apparatus presented in a syntactically constructed mechanical instrument. This is what Deleuze describes as the "particle of matter", a state where the editing infiltrates the essence of the image and projects it onto the screen. It is thus a material composition that Welles uses to underscore the mechanistic construction of the discourse, the constant rein-









Image 8. Four frames from Welles's performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

terpretation of old material with the aim of projecting it beyond that present.

The action-image<sup>3</sup> is also present, as Welles sets up a chronological action in synchrony with cinematic time. As noted above, there are jumps in time and space, but they all take the house in which the action takes place as their point of reference. There are no strategies that stretch out or compress time, so the action-image coincides with the perception-image, in the sense that the former refers to time and the latter to space, and the two manifest simultaneously as what Deleuze calls a "large form". This correlation is intrinsic to the construction of the film and acts as a strategy of immediacy to accommodate the spectator, who witnesses a confession that is offered in accordance with the conventions of realism. However. the static appearance of Welles, who changes his position only three times in the whole documentary, undermines the idea of a "cinema of behaviour", reflecting instead a more complex behaviourism where "what must appear on the outside is what happens inside the character" (Deleuze, 2001: 158). In this way, Welles clearly distinguishes this "confession", for example, from his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago (Image 8), which swings from expository realism to theatrical hysteria, very effectively highlighting this change to the sensory-motor schema.

Emerging at the halfway point between perception and action is the predominant category of

the affection-image, <sup>4</sup> generated through a process of facialisation, i.e., the isolation of Welles's image by framing. In the absence of any stimuli around him, spectators focus their gaze on Welles's face, establishing an empathetic and emotional relationship with him. This occurs not only in the close-ups, which account for 15% of the footage, but also in the short medium close-ups (25.8%) and medium shots (13.6%). These three types of shots account for 55.1% of the film, in which Welles communicates both what he thinks (reflecting face) and what he feels (intensive face). And this facialisation<sup>5</sup> also extends to the conversation in Paris and the talk in Cambridge, where even the wide shots of Wells are facialised through their presentation of his body in isolation from the set (Image 9). As Deleuze suggests, this type of shot is "sometimes outline, sometimes feature; sometimes a single face and sometimes several; sometimes successively, sometimes simultaneously" (2001: 96), but in all cases it has the ability to extract the image from its spatio-temporal coordinates and elicit an affective response. The image becomes a subject and, as such, determines the narration.

Facialisation is also projected onto the footage taken from the 1951 film, evidencing that Wellesian fondness for the close-up. There is even a kind of dialogue between Welles's face in 1951 and his face in 1978, both with their intensive and reflective dimensions, combining these





Image 9. Shot and reverse shot of the post-screening talk in Cinema 1 of the Orson Welles Cinema Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

two opposing incarnations: the young and the old, the creator and the revisionist, the lively and the elegiac. It is a dialogue that even hints at confrontation. The two faces seem to look at each other across time in a simultaneous denial and confirmation, repelling and attracting one another, immersed in a silence in which emotion gives way to reflection. Past and present are brought together through a simple editing cut, revealing a necessary atonement, an encounter with his "past self" that can (and must) point the way to the future. It is a "looking forward" based on reparation for the past, on a reconciliation needed to pave his way towards immortality.

The excerpts from the 1951 film can also be characterised as memory-images. This category of image is positioned between perception and action, adding a new level of subjectivity to the film. Bergson suggests that such images are composed of memory, of which "childhood, adolescence, maturity and old age" are all integral parts (1998: 312). However, during his performance of the monologue-dialogue between Othello and Iago, when Welles sees his "past self", the editing gives the image the quality of a crystal-image.6 It is not a crystal-image in which the actual (present) image and the virtual (past) coexist, but in which they are patched together by the Moviola. This instrument is thus revealed to be a tool not only of time

but also of transcendence, generating a "pure memory" based on the sublimation of this editing process. A blending begins to consolidate itself from the very first scenes of the film. The spectator accommodates this dynamic, thereby blurring the line between present and past, so that when we see the younger Welles's face (the last image shown from the original *Othello*), we place it in the category of the actual.

The successive appearances throughout the film of the intensive (thinking) face and the reflecting (emotional) face also expose the gap between the two time-frames of now and then. While the elder Welles favours reflection, the younger Welles exhibits a physical expressiveness that seems to project itself beyond the frame. Even so, the elder Welles strips away some of this "explosiveness" by eliminating the soundtrack and replacing it with his own voice, in an operation made complete by his usurpation of his younger self in the dialogue between Othello and Iago. This is the only moment in which we hear any of Shakespeare's text, and it is also the only moment in which the elder Welles's face shifts from intensive to reflecting, bringing about a collision of past and present that culminates with Othello's silenced, voiceless face, definitively replaced by the demiurgic being seated at the Moviola, in what is an unequivocal symbol of its transformative power.

This coexistence of memory-images and crystal-images confirms this to be a film in which the movement-image is transfigured into a time-image. However, this occurs not by breaking the causal chain, but by means of a crisis of temporality that compels us to reinterpret a past now lost. The result is a "palimpsest of memory", epitomised in the moment when the two incarnations of Welles meet (Image 10). In a way, Welles's character exists in three time-frames: as a septuagenarian talking to the camera; as the star of the original film released in 1951, and finally, as the star of the Othello reinterpreted on the Moviola. The last of these three time-frames is a present deferred, immediately prior to the oral presentation, and serving as the foundation for the act of self-reflection that ultimately bring past and present together. At that moment, when a haggard-looking Welles sees his past reflection, the time-frames converge to give the whole film the quality of an elegy. It is a revealing crystal-moment, when a director







Image 10. Three frames showing the time order of the depiction of Welles in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

weighs up his past, perhaps as a way of preparing for the end of his life.

### **ESSAY AND PERPETUITY**

Filming Othello is often described as an essay film (Rosenbaum, 2007), although the characteristics that justify this classification have yet to be clearly specified. Based on the theoretical framework adopted here, this analysis of the film reveals a few of the characteristic features of the documentary essay proposed by García-Martínez (2006). First of all, Filming Othello is clearly asystemic in its placement of personal opinion above any other consideration. Its epistemic foundation gives rise to a vague and uncertain narrative with no apparent order (Corrigan, 2011). "I've tried to say too much; I may have said too little," Welles apologises at the end of the film. Despite citing other sources on which to shore up its discourse, the thesis the film proposes is almost unresolvable. How can we define what art is? And above all, which works become worthy of the label of art and manage to perpetuate themselves over time? Welles has his opinion, but he playfully hides it by inserting a systemic doubt into the whole. "I don't know your opinion," he says at one point, "I won't tell you mine." He even expresses doubt about the approach he has taken when he remarks: "maybe I should have read from the record some of the things that critics have said against Othello, [...] but after all, this was supposed to be my voice on the subject [...]."

This excruciating subjectivity reflects the second feature pointed out by García-Martínez: the importance of the self. *Filming Othello* is constructed as a monologue that delves into the director's own memory (Balló, 2012; Berthet, 2011). The act of remembering the production of the original film is revealed to be something dynamic and constantly changing, interpreted from and altered by the present, calling its original function into question (González, 2006; Weinrichter, 2007). Welles constructs a self-referential structure in which he

is filmed offering this very portrait, reflecting on his work and drawing a series of open conclusions about the nature of art and about himself (Rascaroli, 2008).

The emphasis on the process is the third feature that García-Martínez attributes to the essay film, and as has been shown above, this is also present in Filming Othello. Welles exposes the machinery of both the 1951 and the 1978 films. The Moviola is not just an element used in the past; it is also revealed to be a catalyst for the construction of the present. This metatextual reflection occurs at the intersection of "form and content", revealing cinema not only as a medium but also as an object of study. This is what Cruz Carvajal refers to when she speaks of self-referential cinema, where both the filmmaker and the creation process are explored as intrinsic parts of the story (2019: 86). Welles objectifies the creation of his film in order to explain where the shots came from and what their original function was.

This metacinematic enactment not only renders the editing visible, but also gives it a central role in the film. The Moviola brings together all the materials that comprise the film: the footage from the 1951 production, Welles's monologues, photographs, the conversations with the performers, the talk at the screening, etc. The cut is not hidden; on the contrary, it is given epistemic properties. The cinematic syntax is foregrounded and dramatises the thinking process, the return to the past through the machinery of a hegemonic Moviola (Català, 2014). This is the recurring Godardian technique of "edit as you think", although here it could be reinterpreted as "edit as you remember", given that to make an essay film it is necessary to manipulate the image and create a distance that allows us to observe it as something new (Weinrichter, 2007). And this is what Welles does with the Moviola, a tool that not only serves for viewing film, but also for modifying pre-existing footage and breathing new life into it.

There is thus no separation between the writing self and the written self, as their positions are diluted in a subjectivity that determines their approach to the object of study (Blümlinger, 2007). This is what is referred to as "ironic practice", which involves taking a distance from an object and then engaging in a combinatorial exercise with it (Miranda, 2007). Welles not only refers to his 1951 film, but he distances himself from it to reinterpret it and inscribe his "present self" into his "past self". One of his aims is to establish himself as the ultimate enunciator, the creative force behind both films and the primordial reason for their existence. In fact, he adopts a biased pedagogical attitude, offering explanations of the pre-production, filming and post-production processes that seem to have one objective: to personify the director as the totemic author, the ultimate creator of a work that must endure over time. This idea is reinforced by his constant presence in the film, his many gazes directly to camera and his appeals to the spectator. Welles involves us and turns us into participants in a "simulated conversation". He even grants us the gift of ubiquity by shifting to the second camera set up at a distance, exposing the cinematic artifice that contributes to the transformation of the conversation into a veritable confession.

In short, the rhetorical form translates into an author-narrator endowed with absolute control. The supposed conversation is in fact a monologue interrupted by only two moments—the Paris conversation and the Cambridge talk—that serve as a basis for new perspectives and reflections of their own. The director's control even results in a modification of the material, as if the gaze in the present could serve as an atonement for mistakes committed in the past. "There are too many regrets," he remarks at the end of the film, "too many things I wish I could have done over again. If it wasn't a memory, if it was a project for the future, talking about *Othello* would have been nothing but delight." This capacity for reinterpre-

tation thus fulfils two functions: as a tool for reconciling with the past; and as a declaration of the perpetual reinterpretation to which film texts are subjected. Welles makes a profound statement, given that, as noted above, it was always difficult for him to finish his films. This "memory" is nothing more than the confirmation of his inability to bring his projects to a conclusion, to think of them always as material projected into the future through their constant modification.

Filming Othello thus stands as a declaration of love and a confession. Welles expresses his adoration for editing, but he also reveals that it has been the cause of most of the evils that have befallen him in the film industry. The Moviola is a source of beauty, but also of chaos and frustration. Welles therefore atones for these sins by yielding the role of witness to the spectator, who must reinterpret the text on each viewing and give it a new meaning. In the last film of his career, in his twilight years and aware that he could not change, Welles cedes the editing task to the spectator, to take his place when he is gone. In this way, his work, and by extension he himself, will be able to attain that longed-for immortality.

### **NOTES**

- 1 Chion defines acousmatic sound as "sound that one hears without seeing their originating cause" (1994: 71). This idea, theorised by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer, is used by Chion to distinguish between the visualised zone (onscreen sound) and the acousmatic zone (offscreen sound). Chion thus differentiates the acousmatic from sound where the source appears in the image and maintains a synchronous relationship with it.
- 2 Deleuze refers to the perception-image as an image reflected by "living matter" (1991: 95). This image may be objective or subjective. The subjective image would be perceived by a character who is looking at something within

- the narrative of the film, while the objective would involve seeing that character and what the character observes at the same time.
- 3 The action-image refers to the movements, transformations and activities of figures in a given spatio-temporal context. These are the transformations that occur in the frame that Deleuze (2001) identifies with movement. While perception organises space, action describes time.
- 4 The affection-image presents the movement-image as a quality or capability, so that it is not yet an observable action. It is an image that shows the expression of a possibility of action, of a subjectivity that may or may not be transformed into movement. Subjects actually have qualities that are not transformed into movements but that do convey possibilities of action (Castañeda, 2013: 6). What is perceived is therefore not the action of a given subject, but an intermediate space that remains for the potential expression of an act. Deleuze argues that this quality is expressed in the face, in the close-up.
- 5 Deleuze suggests that it is "the negation of perspective and of depth which assimilates the medium shot to a close-up" (2001: 108).
- 6 This represents the ultimate expression of the time-image, occurring when the memory-image and the actual image fuse together. The two images are crystallized and indiscernible. The actual and the virtual occur simultaneously (Deleuze, 1986: 69).

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# MEMORY AND ATONEMENT: FORM, TIME AND VOICE IN FILMING OTHELLO (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

#### Abstract

Filming Othello is undoubtedly the least-known feature film in Orson Welles's filmography. In addition to the minimal critical attention it received upon its release, it has been largely ignored by the academic community, which has focused its interest on such iconic works as Citizen Kane (1941), Touch of Evil (1958), and the documentary F for Fake (1973). Despite this neglect, the value of Filming Othello is unquestionable. The aim of this article is to analyse this film from various perspectives. First of all, the film's treatment of time is analysed and placed in relation to documentary theory. This is followed by an interrogation of its nature as an essay film, identifying its most relevant features to assess a classification that until now has not been challenged. Specific concepts are also explored, such as the transition from movement-image to time-image, and the film's mode, voice and desire is analysed. In this way, this study examines one of the key contributions to the history of 1970s documentary.

### Key words

Welles; Television; Narrative; Essay Film; Othello

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# MEMORIA Y EXPIACIÓN. FORMA, TIEMPO Y VOZ EN FILMING OTHELLO (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

#### Resumen

Filming Othello es sin lugar a duda el largometraje menos conocido dentro de la filmografía de Orson Welles. A la escasa repercusión crítica que suscitó en su estreno, se le suma un cierto olvido por parte de la comunidad científica, que está fuertemente influenciada por obras tan icónicas como Ciudadano Kane (Citizen Kane, 1941), Sed de mal (Touch of Evil. 1958) o el también documental Fraude (F for Fake. 1973). Sin embargo, el valor de este film es incuestionable. Por ello, en este artículo pretendemos abordar su análisis desde diferentes perspectivas. En primer lugar, se analiza el tratamiento temporal de la película y se sitúa dentro de la teoría documental. En segundo lugar, cuestionamos su naturaleza ensayística mediante la identificación de sus características más relevantes, estableciendo así una taxonomía que, hasta el momento, no ha sido cuestionada. Además, exploramos también conceptos específicos, como la transición de la imagen-movimiento a la imagen-tiempo, y analizamos el modo, la voz y el deseo contenidos en la obra. Todo ello para dimensionar una de las aportaciones fundamentales a la historia del documental de los años 70.

#### Palabras clave

Welles; televisión; narrativa, ensayo; Otelo

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# NOTES ON Z (COSTA-GAVRAS, 1969): JORGE SEMPRÚN AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT IN FICTION FILM<sup>1</sup>

JORDI REVERT GOMIS

Give me a city or a river, with a few libraries, with museums and cafés, of course, and with town squares where I can read in the sun, and I will be at home, *Heimlich*. In other words, in Europe. A Europe without borders, which extends across much of the world.

(SEMPRÚN, 2006: 218)

Five axioms to define Europe: the coffee house; the landscape on a traversable and human scale; these streets and plazas named after the statesmen, scientists, artists, writers of the past; our twofold descent from Athens and Jerusalem; and lastly, that apprehension of a closing chapter, of that famous Hegelian sunset, which shadowed the idea and substance of Europe even in their noon hours.

(STEINER, 2007: 56)

# INTRODUCTION: JORGE SEMPRÚN AND THE MEMORY OF EUROPE

The last section of L'homme européen, a book that documents a conversation or perhaps a written correspondence about Europe between Jorge Semprún and Dominique de Villepin, expresses the bitterness of both authors over the rejection of the European Constitution by the French and the Dutch in 2005. Almost two decades since the emergence of that obstacle to the construction of a European federal project, interpreted by both as an opportunity to further consolidate the future of the Union, the shadows looming over the continent have grown even longer. Events of the magnitude of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, along with the economic uncertainty they have provoked, have relegated the debate over European unity to the background in the midst of discussions revolving around defence and economic policies, in

terms that had until recently seemed buried in the distant past of the Cold War's more tumultuous moments. In this context, close examination of European identity has given way to a forced reorganisation in which concerns over cultural vicissitudes in international dialogues have been swept aside in order to attend to a series of crises that in the space of a few years have placed the EU model in jeopardy. It thus seems a fitting moment to return to Semprún and Steiner and the common elements underpinning their reflections on the idea of Europe, the underlying cultural cohesion that persists despite the scourges threatening the continent's essential, heterogeneous unity. For Steiner, coffee houses and town squares are meeting points, to which Semprún adds museums and libraries, places where Europe's heritage and knowledge converge to point out a direction for the future, a cohesive spirit that stretches across times and names:

For me, since adolescence Europe has above all been the privileged homeland of literature, of reading, in its many languages, in its spiritual coherence. A cultural memory and also an outlook on life. It was at once Gide and Kafka, Thomas Mann and André Malraux, Cervantes and Dostoevsky. Not forgetting Marlowe or George Bernard Shaw, of course. (Semprún, 2006: 214-215)

For Semprún, as for Villepin, the original impulse towards a European community dates back to May 1935 and a lecture given by Husserl in Vienna on philosophy and the crisis of European humanity.<sup>2</sup> It was there that it was first verbalised, and in the Buchenwald concentration camp that it began to take shape: there in the camp, from another inmate he heard Husserl's words for the first time, around the same time that he was reading William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! There, in the very clutches of death, Semprún first began conceiving a notion of the proto-European (for it would not be until the 1980s that he would construct an openly pro-European political and cultural/spiritual discourse, drawing on the impact in

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France of certain dissenting voices from the East, such as Milan Kundera and György Konrád). The notion would survive the concentration camps, but it would remain submerged in silence for many years in a reflex response to the unspeakable. In his book Literature or Life, Semprún explains the dichotomy he was faced with, and his decision to choose "a long cure of aphasia, of voluntary amnesia in order to survive" (Semprún, 1998: 196), referring to the long hiatus between the end of the Second World War and the publication of his first book, The Long Voyage, in 1963. The healing process of this voluntary silence gave him the time he needed to regain his memory and make the journey back in that freight train to the German countryside, to the pain and agony of those days that blurred into night, to the fluid time of death's antechamber. Strictly speaking, writing was not the watershed that marked the end of this therapeutic silence, but an act that arose out of a need to reconstruct the emotional topography of Buchenwald, until then repressed, in order to complete the long period of healing. As Rodríguez Varela suggests, the trigger can be found in a text by Manuel Azaustre, a former communist militant who felt himself incapable of conveying the essence of his experience at Mauthausen (Rodríguez Varela, 2018: 89). Buchenwald would thus give rise to writing because memory cannot escape the storytelling impulse, like the memories inscribed in Abraham Bomba's repeated act of cutting hair in SHOAH (Claude Lanzmann, 1986), a mechanical gesture that underscores his inexpressible story

until the distress that the narration subjects him to is revealed on his face. As Lanzmann recognized in his documentary, images are not enough to capture the emotional weight of the testimony:

Even though they showed the naked obscenity, the physical deterioration, the grim destruction of death, the images, in fact, were silent [...] above all because they said nothing precise about the reality they showed, because they delivered only confused scraps of meaning. One would have had to work on the body of the film, on its very cinematic material [...]. What was really needed was commentary on the images, to decipher them, to situate them not only in a historical context but within a continuity of emotions. And in order to remain as close as possible to the actual experience, this commentary would have had to be spoken by the survivors themselves. (Semprún, 1998: 200-201).

The purpose of this article is to explore the markers of Semprunian discourse in the writer's work on the screenplay for the film Z (Costa-Gavras, 1969), with a focus on his political commitment and on how these markers connect with the rest of his work, as well as with the pro-European stance that he would begin to consolidate in the 1980s. To this end, it presents a comparative analysis that considers the relationship between this film and some of Semprún's literary work, particularly those texts that best represent his discursive evolution and personal history, from his experience at the Buchenwald concentration camp in Literature or Life to the construction of a European ideal in The European Man. In order to draw some useful conclusions from this dialogue, this study adopts an intertextual perspective that will facilitate the identification of the particular qualities of Jorge Semprún's militancy through the diversity of an oeuvre that encompasses multiple media forms over various decades.

# FROM THE LONG VOYAGE TO COSTA-GAVRAS'S MILITANT CINEMA

The publication of The Long Voyage in 1963 placed Semprún on the French literary map, sparking interest in him as an author that would bring him into intellectual circles that included Alain Resnais and Yves Montand. It was with these two that he would embark on his first cinematic adventure, writing the screenplay to the film The War Is Over (La guerre est finie, Resnais, 1966). According to Ricardo Jimeno, the script for this film contains a three-level structure whose origins can be identified in The Long Voyage and which would continue to appear in his subsequent work as a screenwriter: on the first level is Semprún the creator, the second is occupied by Semprún the militant, and on the third is a book or film character who often constitutes an alter-ego combining the first two (Jimeno, 2017: 64). This structure effectively reflects a faith in artifice and the mechanics of fiction as the ideal tools for expressing the experience of inexpressible, as the author himself would acknowledge: "The only ones who will manage to reach this substance, this transparent density, will be those able to shape their evidence into an artistic object, into a space of creation. Or of re-creation. Only the artifice of a masterly narrative will prove capable of conveying some of the truth of such testimony" (Semprún, 1998: 13). Through this apparatus described by Jimeno and channelled through the alter-ego character of Diego Mora (Yves Montand), The War Is Over is effectively a reworking of Semprún's experiences as a militant for the Spanish underground during

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the Franco regime. The film also reflects the disenchantment with communism that led Semprún to abandon the official Spanish communist party line dictated by Santiago Carrillo and Dolores Uribarri ("La Pasionaria")— and consequently end up expelled from the party.

A year later, in the autumn of 1967, Semprún began working with Costa-Gavras on the screenplay for Z, an adaptation of Vassilis Vassilikos's novel that itself was based on the assassination of the Greek politician Grigoris Lambrakis by vigilante groups in May 1963. The script was written out of militant necessity, as just a few months earlier Greece had been taken over by a military junta following a coup d'état on 21 April 1967. In response to these events, Costa-Gavras wanted to adapt the source material to make a targeted attack on the new dictatorship, while Semprún was keen to explore the fate of a country that had obvious parallels with his native Spain. Based on the assassination of Lambrakis, Z depicts an unnamed, supposedly democratic country that is nevertheless plagued with corruption and repressed by military and police efforts to eradicate any left-wing opposition. In this context, a member of parliament (Yves Montand) and his supporters organise a peace rally despite the obstacles placed in their way by the authorities. As he leaves the rally, the MP is assassinated in the street in the midst of confrontations between protesters and counter-protesters. After his death, a young examining magistrate (Jean-Louis Trintignant) takes on the case while a photojournalist tries to gather evidence to uncover the truth of this political crime, and together they discover that the culprits are right-wing extremists in collusion with military authorities.

After a swift and efficient scriptwriting process with Semprún, Costa-Gavras found that no European producers were willing to finance their project because it was deemed too political. Despite having the prior support of United Artists, which had distributed the director's previous

film and had acquired the rights to Vassilikos's book, concerns about the film's economic viability expressed by studios such as Gaumont and Les Artistes Associés put the project in jeopardy. In the end, personal contributions by actor and producer Jacques Perrin—who plays a photojournalist in the film-along with other stars, including Montand himself, rescued the film from development hell. The decisive boost came from an unexpected source: amidst the turbulence of the Cannes Film Festival in May 1968, Costa-Gavras and Perrin secured funding from Algeria's National Film Marketing Office, a government agency whose support as a co-producer would result in the film being shot in Algeria—and would give the African nation its first and only Oscar when the picture won the award for Best Foreign Film in 1970. Jimeno describes the precarious conditions under which the film was shot, with a cast of European stars that included Irene Papas, Jean-Louis Trintignant and Montand, all of whom agreed to work for reduced salaries, and with the participation from prison of musician Mikis Theodorakis, who took inspiration from the Lambrakis's story to compose a soundtrack combining traditional songs and original compositions, without having been able to read the script (Jimeno, 2014: 638).

# Z, OR FICTION AS A POLITICAL WEAPON

The opening credits of Z feature a rapid succession of close-ups on military insignia with the names of the cast superimposed, all to the sound of Theodorakis's frenetic score. Immediately after the film title "Z" appears on the screen, we find ourselves in a room in which a group of senior military officials are listening without much interest to an explanation of mildew prevention methods. The speaker concludes by equating this fungus with an *ideological mildew* that is devastating the population. He then introduces the Chief of Military Police, who stands up to takes his place at the front of the room. At this mo-

ment, the frame freezes and the following caption appears on screen: "Toute ressemblance avec des évènements réels, des personnes mortes ou vivantes n'est pas le fait du hasard. Elle est VOLON-TAIRE" ["Any similarity to real events or persons, dead or living, is not coincidental. It is INTEN-TIONAL"]. This declaration introducing the story is "signed" in all capital letters by Jorge Semprún and Costa-Gavras, who thus endorse the militant message that underpins the film. With the pacing of a news report and emphatic editing, from the outset Z depicts a very specific story—the political circumstances in Greece prior to the coup d'état that brought the Regime of the Colonels to power—as a universal tale. Despite being clearly based on the assassination of Lambrakis, the film evades any geographical references or names of those involved, suggesting that this story could easily be repeated and, in fact, is being repeated in other places with other protagonists. In this way, Semprún is able to refer to personal experiences that are filtered into twists and turns of the story, (re)writing his own identity into one of the film's characters. The first level of the three-level scheme established by Jimeno Aranda for Semprún's writing (Jimeno Aranda, 2017) fits thematically here with the aforementioned parallels between Spain and Greece, although on this point it is worth stressing the universality that defines the articulation of the film's anti-fascist discourse, a conciliatory and combative discourse that is also an embryonic version of the pro-European sentiment that would emerge in Semprún's work in the 1980s. The second level is reflected in the authorial imprint identifiable in the technical style, with constant spatio-temporal ruptures creating a fragmentation advocated in titles such as Literature or Life and which here finds a certain correlation with the lively editing of Françoise Bonnot, for which she won the Oscar in that category.

As a fragmenting device, the editing here serves to structure the film, without undermining the fervour of the events, into two basic acts:

the first covers the lead-up to the rally organised by Z (Montand) and the official attempts to boycott it until attacks by paramilitary groups and their followers ultimately result in the politician's assassination; and the second act presents the investigation conducted by the relentless examining magistrate (Trintignant), which threatens to topple the military leadership complicit in the crime. The inexorable succession of events in Z, depicted with blunt immediacy, involves a rupture that is more spatial than temporal or memory-related, although Jimeno identifies the use of memory in the brief flashback in which Z remembers when his wife discovered him with his lover. Nevertheless, the constant fragmentation, which on other occasions is more closely associated with memory, is still clearly one of Semprún's most effective weapons for breaking the boundaries of representation and vindicating art as a means of combat and criticism, as Mirjam Leuzinger astutely observes:

Artistic memory is not limited to an aesthetic discourse, as might be hastily assumed; on the contrary [...] it is a hybrid discursive moment that is at once aesthetic and ethical, at once fictitious and referential; it is, in short, a heterogeneous discourse that appeals to the transcendence of art not only for the conception of the literary text, but also for the formation of free and critical human beings in the face of the many trials to which the brutality of the past century has subjected them. (Leuzinger, 2016: 22)

In relation to the third of Jimeno's three levels, the author cites Bucarelli to point out how Semprún finds a kind of fictional alter-ego in the character of Manuel (played by Charles Denner), who accompanies the Greek politician and is responsible for the university political organisations. Manuel has Jewish roots and is the only one of the politician's followers who maintains a stance distinct from the political strategy of the Pacifist Committee (Bucarelli, 2011: 56). Here, the flashes of literal representation of Semprún's experi-

ences are relegated to the background, appearing weaker than those identifiable in other fiction films such as The Confession (L'aveu. Costa-Gavras. 1970) or Roads to the South (Les routes du sud, Joseph Losey, 1978), in which Montand's protagonist bears some unmistakeable traits of the author. However, Z could be understood as a kind of polyhedron or prism whose multiple sides reflect the different aspects of Semprún's character: the idealised but imperfect hero (the golden aura surrounding Z is somewhat tainted by his marital indiscretions); the loyal, passionate militant (embodied in Manuel); the persecuted witness of history (the character played by Perrin); and the tireless pursuer of justice (unequivocally represented by Trintignant's examining magistrate). These different faces all draw somewhat laterally from his reinvention of himself and of his memories, which constitute such a key feature of his work (consider, for example, his story about killing a German soldier, the circumstances of which he consciously revised and updated in Literature or Life). All seem to be marked by the same motif: the individual who struggles in different ways against the abuses of an oppressive state determined to crush him for his rebellion. Yet it is also an individual who is never alone in his mission—even when he is isolated and repressed—and who recognises that he forms part of a struggle that transcends him. It is significant that the narrative of Z is founded on two very deliberately anonymous points of reference: Z himself, and the Examining Magistrate—a fictional alter-ego of Christos Sartzetakis, the jurist who between 1985 and 1990 would serve as president of Greece-are the two pillars around which this statement of protest is constructed, turning it into a kind of diptych. When the first is murdered, the second steps into the ring to take his place and push the military authorities against the ropes, although his attack is based not on ideology but on the strict impartiality attributed to the judiciary. Adolfo Millán Aguilar locates these two resistance figures on the third level of a structure that also includes the Greek government in the context of the fledgling, conservative-controlled democracy that emerged out of the civil war, and the battle waged against it by a leftist, reformist opposition (Millán Aguilar, 2022: 273). Although Millán Aguilar's study is limited to describing these figures as actants of the narrative, his three-level structure is worth drawing on to highlight the importance of these heroes as catalysts for change in the course of history. Leaders come and go, but the causes they lead survive.

### Z, OR FICTION AS A DOCUMENT

The conclusion to Z serves as a troubling counterpoint. The apparent victory over systemic injustice represented by the magistrate's various accusations and arrests is quickly turned on its head by a news report announcing the coup d'état by the Colonels, which is in turn followed by a description of the fate of the story's protagonists, all of whom are victims of the coup. According to Txetxu Aguado, the film thus points out that the safeguards of liberal democratic society are not a guarantee against fraudulent political tactics aimed at suppressing opposition.3 There is no room for optimism: the voice-over that concludes the film lists everything the new dictatorship has banned, a long list that includes freedom of the press, learning Russian or Bulgarian, Tolstoy, Sophocles, the Beatles, long hair, miniskirts and, finally, the letter "Z", which fills the frame, which, as the voice-over explains, means "he is alive" in ancient Greek. In this way, the character played by Montand-whose image appears behind the "Z", beside a cartoon portrait of his face—is identified as the representation of an eternal ideal. The film ends here and the final credits roll. Despite the news of the coup, Costa-Gavras's reporter-style tone remains impervious to despair, eschewing any dramatic emphasis or suggestion of failure, and ensuring that the final words appearing over Theodorakis's music attest to the contin-

ued existence of a combative spirit that survives totalitarianism and its various reincarnations. Z thus effectively functions as a Semprunian political manifesto and as a quasi-journalistic document of a key period in Greek history. Its evasion of any melodramatic twists is indicative of the creators' intentions, far removed from the epic and/or frustrated tones of historical fiction while still maintaining an energy generated by Bonnot's editing and Semprún and Costa-Gavras's screenplay. These characteristics, which give the film its powerful quality, contribute to the placement of an almost exclusive focus on the characters' political frictions with the system, thereby infusing it with a spirit that could legitimately be classified as the epitome of the style of political cinema that

for years was associated with the name of Costa-Gavras. It is of course a classification which, as Pinel astutely points out, raises serious questions about its nature, as "it is also worth asking whether it [political cin-

# Z EFFECTIVELY FUNCTIONS AS A SEMPRUNIAN POLITICAL MANIFESTO AND AS A QUASI-JOURNALISTIC DOCUMENT OF A KEY PERIOD IN GREEK HISTORY

ema] is a genre in the strict sense of the word or a recurring theme that particularly inspired the productions of the 1960s and 1970s" (Pinel, 2009: 241). The journalist and screenwriter Manuel Hidalgo argues that "political cinema in the Semprún/Gavras mould has become a part of history. There was nothing like it before and it has had a huge influence on filmmaking since. French, Italian, Latin American political cinema..." (Alemany, 2011). Indeed, the Greek filmmaker's style could be postulated as filmmaking essentially associated with its main theme, an approach just as evident, it must be remembered, in the decisions and turns of any artistic text. Godard's films of the late 1960s were certainly political, as were the films of Italian neo-realism and of the Russian Revolution, and also in their own way—perhaps less explicitly but undoubtedly just as marked by ideology—the

big Hollywood productions. It is undeniable that the thematic focus of Costa-Gavras's films had a decisive impact on the emergence of a label that is worth questioning given its suggestion that ideology can be confined to one supposed genre, overlooking the possibility that any work of fiction of any kind may have political implications.

The effect of thematic amplification resulting from the stylistic choices made by Semprún and Costa-Gavras in the writing and production process plays a role in this, as the fact that Z smooths out any emotional roughness of its characters and lays the facts bare without resorting to superficial spectacle imbues the film with a candid honesty that the spectator may construe as the kind of objectivity associated with journalistic

discourse. This connects to a debate over forms of representation and their relationship to the historical world that far exceeds the limits of this article, and which was already a concern in photography before the

birth of cinema, and in primitive cinema before the birth of the documentary. In this respect, it is useless to speculate on the real value of Z as a document testifying to a specific episode in history, as the film makes no attempt to create a documentary effect—to use the terminology of Zumalde and Zunzunegui (Zumalde and Zunzunegui, 2014)-that would place it in close relation with the reality to which it refers (the episode of the assassination of Lambrakis, the subsequent investigation, and finally, the coup d'état). Instead, it adopts an approach that uses the anonymity of names and places to avoid specification and endow the discourse with a universal quality. The text can thus communicate to and mobilise its audience much more effectively than could a politicised documentary through its enunciation. It is thus worth reiterating Català and Cerdán's max-

im that "it is not in the medium that the guarantee of truth must reside, but in the filmmaker" (Català and Cerdán, 2008: 17). Semprún, who years later would experiment with documentary forms in Les deux mémoires (Jorge Semprún, 1974), stressed the value of artifice in Literature or Life, expressing his belief in a dialogue—an unreliable dialogue, as he himself warns, without this mattering in the least—among concentration camp returnees as to how their story should be told, in which one of them asserts: "Telling a story well, that means: so as to be understood. You can't manage it without a bit of artifice. Enough artifice to make it art!" (Semprún, 1998: 123).

# CONCLUSION: Z AND SEMPRUNIAN MEMORY

In his article "Travelling arrière et circulaire": Jorge Semprun's Script Writing", Marcus Coelen analyses Semprun's assertion of the need to turn testimony into an artistic object in the following terms:

This sentence expresses an idea underlying all of Semprún's writing: the opposition of an artifice (of literary nature) to a truth (of historical essence)—in which the former serves as privileged vehicle or even sole form of manifestation of the latter—organizes his entire endeavor of inscribing his productions into the texture of historicity. (Coelen, 2016: 115)

Coelen's observation perfectly sums up the Semprunian mechanism as reflected in the stylistic approach taken in Z: the apparent contradiction of conveying truth through artifice, inherited from the false dichotomies that have marked the parallel development of documentary and fiction, is no obstacle to conveying the truth of a testimony or an accurate portrait of an era. On the contrary, this process of creative (re)construction involves an honesty that allows the author to evade the snares of memory, while renaming places and people to render them anonymous to the reader/

spectator, who is given access to an even greater level of intimacy in these reappraised locations and rediscovered characters. This is the intimacy facilitated by fiction, which here vests the narrative with a universal quality without abandoning specific ideas. Z does not limit its denunciation to the coup d'état in Greece; instead, it uses the mechanisms of the thriller to raise the protest to a higher level. The Lambrakis case thus serves as a starting point, while the ultimate object of the protest is the deprivation of freedoms under totalitarianism, and the purpose of its discourse is to call upon spectators of any nationality or situation to keep up the fight against systemic injustice. The Semprunian approach thus involves the delocalisation of the conflict at the heart of the discourse, in a manner similar to the fluid overlapping of memories collected in Literature or Life. The intention behind this is not to camouflage the writer's identity, but rather to construct it on the foundation of freedom offered by fiction, the same freedom that was merely a fantasy in the barracks of the concentration camp. Costa-Gavras's complicity in his partnership with Semprún takes this approach to its ultimate consequences, whereby films such as The Confession, Special Section and Z itself construct a style of cinema that transcends its "political" label to offer a timeless representation for European spectators of issues as palpable today as they were all those years ago. ■

### **NOTES**

- This study has been conducted in the context of the research project "Media Literacy in Public Mass Media: Analysis of Collaboration Strategies and Processes between Media and Educational Institutions in Europe and Spain (AMI-EDUCOM)", code PID2022-13884-I00, under the direction of Javier Marzal Felici (IP1) and Roberto Arnau Roselló (IP2).
- 2 In his article "Las raíces de una Europa en crisis", Sergio Sevilla examines the origins of the idea of Europe in philosophy based on Husserl's notion of a Europe

- founded on the culture of rationalism, with the classical philosophers as its model (Sevilla, 2013).
- 3 "Despite the successful efforts to bring the guilty to justice, the assassins will be released from prison when a coup d'état gives way to the so-called Regime of the Colonels, therefore pointing to how the safeguards of a liberal democratic society are no guarantee against fraudulent political means directed toward the suppression of the opponent" (Aguado, 2014: 188).

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# NOTES ON Z (COSTA-GAVRAS, 1969): JORGE SEMPRÚN AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT IN FICTION FILM

#### Abstract

"Tout ressemblance avec des évènements réels, des personnes mortes ou vivantes n'est pas le fait du hasard. Elle est VOLONTAIRE." This caption, superimposed over a freeze-frame shot of a room full of military officers deciding Greece's fate, is followed by the names of Jorge Semprún and Costa-Gavras, appearing immediately below it like signatures. Thus begins Z, the Greek filmmaker's most accomplished political thriller, and the finest product of the partnership between the two. Semprún's screenplay, adapted from Vassilis Vassilikos's novel based on the judicial investigation into the assassination of the professor and activist Grigoris Lambrakis in 1963, stands as a vibrant distillation of the Spanish screenwriter's political commitment. The textual force of the fictional tale told in Z conveys a truth as unrelenting as the examining magistrate portrayed by Jean-Louis Trintignant. Its denunciation of democratic backsliding in its depiction of events that led to the annihilation of ideological opposition and the establishment of the Regime of the Colonels in Greece is constructed around an assassination that Semprún and Costa-Gavras analyse through the use of multiple points of view, a news reporting style and a reflection on the nature of testimony and its relationship to reality.

### Key words

Jorge Semprún; Cinema; Memory; Costa-Gavras; Z.

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Jordi Revert holds a PhD in Communication and Interculturality from the Universitat de València. Since 2019, he has been a professor in the Audiovisual Communication and Advertising and Public Relations programs at Universitat Jaume I de Castelló. He has published the books Cine y cómic (Cátedra, 2023), En busca de lo real: 50 documentales esenciales (Editorial UOC: 2017) and Paul Verhoeven (Cátedra, 2016) and has also authored numerous chapters in collected works and articles in scholarly journals. His main lines of research are documentary cinema and intermediality between comics and cinema in the digital age. Contact: jrevert@uji.es.

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# APUNTES SOBRE Z (COSTA-GAVRAS, 1969): JORGE SEMPRÚN Y EL COMPROMISO POLÍTICO EN EL CINE DE FICCIÓN

#### Resumen

«Tout ressemblance avec des évènements réels, des personnes mortes ou vivantes n'est pas le fait du hasard. Elle est VOLONTAIRE". Al rótulo, sobreimpresionado sobre la imagen congelada de una sala repleta de militares que acotan el destino de Grecia, le siguen las firmas a pie de Jorge Semprún y Costa-Gavras. Así empieza Z, cima del thriller político marca del director y también de la colaboración entre los signatarios. El guion de Semprún, adaptación de la novela de Vassilis Vassiliskos que recoge los hechos y la investigación fiscal del asesinato en 1963 del profesor y activista Grigoris Lambrakis, se erige como vibrante destilación del compromiso político del español. El relato de Z, desde la ficción, sostiene en su fuerza textual una verdad tan implacable como el juez instructor encarnado por Jean-Louis Trintignant. Su denuncia de una democracia secuestrada y de los hechos que acabaron por reducir a cenizas la oposición ideológica para dar paso a la Dictadura de los Coroneles, se arma en torno a un asesinato-epicentro que Semprún y Costa-Gavras desmenuzan desde la multiplicidad del punto de vista, la voluntad cronista y la reflexión sobre la naturaleza del testimonio y su relación con lo real.

### Palabras clave

Jorge Semprún; cine; memoria; Costa-Gavras; Z.

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