L'ATALANTE
REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CINEMATOGRÁFICOS

ACTRESSES' BODIES *IN TRANSITION*

GESTURES, PERFORMANCES AND FIGURES BETWEEN INHERITED MODELS AND NEW SUBJECTIVITIES

DIALOGUE

FREEING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY. CONVERSATION WITH **ELENA MARTÍN** ABOUT *CREATURA*

(DIS)AGREEMENTS

THE BODY AS AN INTERVAL: ACTING IN EDITING

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BODY AS INTERVAL: THE ACTRESS'S PERFORMANCE IN EDITING

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TRANSFERENCES OF AFFECTS: VIEWING AND CONTEMPLATING THE INTERVAL IN ACTRESSES' BODIES*

GONZALO DE LUCAS
ANNALISA MIRIZIO

1. FROM ONE REPRESENTATION TO ANOTHER: THE INTERVAL AS EDITING AND AS AFFECT TRANSFERENCE

In the panel discussion of women editors included in this issue, Ana Pfaff explains that "editing becomes a way of contemplating the body, the image, the aesthetic experience. Sometimes what guides you are your own physical reactions. Sometimes while I'm editing, I begin to gesticulate or move my face without realising it, as if my body were responding to what it's watching. That is also part of the reading process. That's why it's so important to try to put into words what you feel when you're editing. Although it can be hard, even if you don't have the exact words, the effort to verbalise helps you to understand what you've experienced, to communicate not only with other women, but also with yourself. To say: 'I don't know what has happened to me, but I need to recount it.' And by putting it into words, you begin to understand. [...] In the end, this whole process has to do with how we inhabit the film from within. Editing isn't just organising a story: it's understanding how the bodies that inhabit it feel, how they transform and how they transform us too."

These words contain some of the key ideas underpinning this monograph: to contemplate cinema through the analysis of actresses and editing, what actresses transform in their bodies and how, in the interval, their bodies effectively mirror—or foreshadow or convey—the aesthetic and political transformations of an era, as well as its tumults and upheavals. The aim is thus to begin exploring how the interval can be embodied in the actress's performance, in the changes of image that her body can produce. Hence the interest in learning of the experiences of women editors in the construction of female characters, when they share their observations and reflections on all the materials and potentialities invented, unleashed and elicited by an actress.

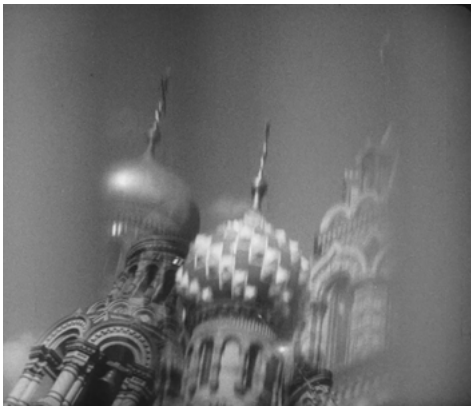
THE INTERVAL, WHICH HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF EXTENSIVE THEORETICAL EXAMINATION, HAS ALSO BEEN CONSIDERED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDITING, THE PRACTICE AND MATERIALS OF FILMMAKING

The interval, which has been the subject of extensive theoretical examination, has also been considered from the perspective of editing, the practice and materials of filmmaking. In *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of Donbas* (Entuziazm: Simfonija Donbassa, 1930), when Dziga Vertov expresses the interval as a juxtaposition between political revolution and aesthetic revolution, he renders it visible as a shift and a clash between images in the form of a tremor and an earthquake (Image 1). In this case, it is the confrontation between the new (energetic) world of the Bolsheviks and the old (hard, fossilised, immobile) world that they are overthrowing. This interstitial form, which contains or expresses both potential and uncertainty, would reappear throughout the 20th century and its political revolutions, such as in the live broadcast of Ceaușescu speaking at a rally from the balcony of the Central Committee building in 1989. Here, when the upheaval begins, the official, tripod-steadied shot begins to tremble: visual noise over the signal, an interruption and a cut to a red screen (Image 2). This moment is analysed by Farocki and Ujica in *Videograms of a Revolution* (Videogramme einer Revolution, Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, 1992), and later in *Schnittstelle* [Interface] (Harun Farocki, 1995).

Is it possible to compare this uncertain tremor—before images of a future as yet unknown—with what certain actresses, often unpredictably, produce in their moments of emotional overload? And what is the relationship between the uncertain tremor of an image and the uncertain trembling of a body? These questions form part of the creative quest of young actresses and filmmakers like Elena Martín, who in the interview included in this issue shares her interest in states of possession, "that energy that seems to come out of nowhere and suddenly pulls you in", where this trembling seems to find a *raison d'être*, such as in fits of hysteria, which justifies its manifestation in a female character, although she is generally punished for it.

Elena offers this response to a question posed about Godard's use of associative montage in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988-1998) to establish a link between Lilian Gish, filmed by Griffith, and Augustine in La Salpêtrière Hospital, photographed by Régnard under Charcot's direction. There is a valuable document in the television program *Cinéma Cinémas: Jean-Luc Godard* (Claude Ven-

Images 1 and 2. *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of Donbas* (Entuziazm: Simfonija Donbassa, Dziga Vértov, 1930) / *Schnittstelle* [Interface] (Harun Farocki, 1995)



Images 3 and 4. ***Cinéma cinémas: Jean-Luc Godard*** **(Claude Ventura, Pierre Lévy, Guy Girard, 1987) /** ***Histoire(s) du Cinéma*** **(Jean-Luc Godard, 1988-1998)**

tura, Pierre Lévy, Guy Girard, 1987) in which we see the filmmaker in his studio while working on *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, showing the reporter a photograph of Augustine taken from the cover of Didi-Huberman's book on Charcot (published in 1982), and another by Lilian Gish (Image 3): "The filmmaker's hands then bring together these two images, these two 'frames', releasing what seems to constitute their dialectical linchpin, which he calls 'transferences in common', a metaphor well known for signifying both progress in urban communications and romantic passion, or even the sexual act itself" (Didi-Huberman, 2017: 45).

But it was not "old Charcot" but Freud, the young master with whom the modern Godard possibly identifies more than with Griffith (Didi-Huberman, 2017: 48), who was the first to speak of the "transference of an affect", or the displacement of an affect from one representation to another in order to name the shift that occurs in dreams and in analysis (and that would later also occur in cinema), driven by the associative power of the unconscious that displaces, expresses and disguises desire.

With his reference to transferences in common, Godard invokes for cinema the same power of figuration possessed by the exchanges and shifts between psychological representations (Didi-Huberman, 2017: 48). This type of juxtaposition—which the filmmaker shows here as a thought that begins with a hand gesture—requires the interval to expose the clashes or transfers of states that occur between bodies, in keeping with the ideological forms and inscriptions of each era.

Godard includes this montage at the end of Chapter 1B of *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (Image 4): "Have you seen anything like that, Miss Lillian?" / "Never, Mr. Griffith." It is significant that in this brief imagined dialogue between the actress and the director over the face of the hysterical woman photographed at the onset of a fit, the shift that connects the two representations is from the hysteric's "desire for knowledge" (repressed and turned into a symptom) to the knowledge of desire, "the erotic enigma" (Didi-Huberman, 2017: 48).

Godard represents this shift from one representation to another as a mystery that filmmaking shares with psychoanalysis. Lacan calls this mystery "the real". And it is in fact the bodies of the hysterical woman and the actress that make it possible—for Charcot first, for Freud and Griffith later—to delve for the first time into this reality of which cinema would also be a "museum" (Aumont, 1999: 31). The interval in cinema, like the transference of an affect, is both a movement and a cut between two representations; something of "the real" is shifting there, a truth that can only emerge at the expense of

or unbeknownst to the representation and yet that is inseparable from it (Kristeva, 1985: 28).

2. LEARNING TO SEE, BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

To achieve his associative montage, Godard undertook a long process of research. In fact, the most profound theorisation of the interval in the context of filmmaking—at the intersection between aesthetics and politics—was carried out by Godard with Anne-Marie Miéville in the mid-1970s, particularly in *Here and Elsewhere* (Ici et ailleurs, 1976), *Six fois deux / Sur et sous la communication* [Six Times Two / Over and Under Communication] (1976), which inspired Deleuze's landmark concept of the "and... and... and" (Deleuze, 1995: 13), and *How's It Going* (Comment ça va, 1976).

These films, which among other things constitute a critical (self-)revision of Godard's Maoist filmmaking techniques and, by extension, his political filmmaking, are conceived as a process of learning or re-evaluation from the ground up. Like people who have to learn to speak or walk again, all three are constructed on the bare minimum foundations of filmmaking: what an image, a shot or a sound is, and how two images or an image and a sound relate.

In *How's It Going*, Godard and Miéville offer a detailed analysis of two photographs and the possible relationship between them: one taken in Portugal during the Carnation Revolution, which shows a civilian confronting a soldier; and the other in France, showing a confrontation between striking workers and the CRS (Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité, the French riot police). The film adopts a pedagogical and essayistic approach, guided by the unusual notion that Godard maintained in those years that what matters is not knowing but seeing, and that filmmakers—beginning with Godard himself—are often unable to see things while they are filming them (Godard and Miéville, 1978).

This idea of the difficulty of seeing is also expressed in gestures associated with the perception and interpretation of images. For example, Anne-Marie Miéville reproaches the journalist she converses with for reducing or misinterpreting rather than exploring the complexity of the multiple signs of an image (like someone producing a poor translation), making only a simple outline of that complexity in a written commentary that follows a horizontal continuity, a mere overview: "When you look at this image of Portugal, for example, you run over it with your eyes. You go up, down, to the sides, skimming over it. In a way, if you had to define what your head does, it would be something like a drawing. But right after that, your hands are no longer drawing anything because they're always going in the same direction."

The journalist thus forgets what he has seen or does not use it to think. The filmmakers then point out that thinking requires us to bring these two pictures together, and that this is precisely what the act—and the work—of editing is: patient, tentative, like the examination of cells or particles in a laboratory. It is a test to see, to perceive in the expressions and faces of the two protesters who, "by daring to rebel, set something complex in motion". And then: "it looked good that hope was still

Image 5. *How's It Going* (Comment ça va, Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1976)

searching for its words [...]; under all the tension, that mouth seemed to be laughing" (Image 5).

This same difficulty arises in the act of viewing and analysing an actress's images, in order to see the complexity that she sets in motion. In the panel discussion, Ana Pfaff observes: "Over time I've sharpened my perception a lot. Now I focus on details that I might not have noticed before: a sparkle in a character's eye, a blink, a slight inclination of the head. We've developed a very keen sensitivity to read the micro-movements of the face. Sometimes I surprise myself by getting obsessed with tiny differences between one shot and another, and I ask myself: 'What is happening to me?' But often that's where the key is, where something changes, even if you don't quite know why."

Cinematic thought arises between images and their differences, out of something that appears before it is named and that conjures up all the mystery, ambiguity and complexity of a figure. This is why the editors who took part in this issue's "(Dis)Agreements" section all agree both on the difficulty of finding the words to name what they see and on the need to do so: "that's why I sometimes talk about magnetism, gravity."

Later in *How's It Going*, Miéville tells the journalist: "You're afraid to see. That guy has a crazy look. If he were a singer at Olympia Hall you would accept that mouth and those gestures...". Between the possible image of a laugh—an elusive smile underpins the construction of Pedro Costa's film about Straub and Huillet's editing work, *Où gît votre sourire enfoui?* [Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie] (2001), on an elusive smile—and the expression of rage and rebellion, between hope and despair, a complex movement develops that is traced by the editing in all directions: observing, studying, reflecting, speculating, associating and imagining.

CINEMATIC THOUGHT ARISES BETWEEN IMAGES AND THEIR DIFFERENCES, OUT OF SOMETHING THAT APPEARS BEFORE IT IS NAMED AND THAT CONJURES UP ALL THE MYSTERY, AMBIGUITY AND COMPLEXITY OF A FIGURE

According to Brecht, the interval is an editing technique which, instead of reproducing the state of things, discovers it through the interruption of continuities. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's interpretation, Didi-Huberman suggests: "This interruption logically consists in creating discontinuities, in 'undoing the articulations' to the extent possible so that the situations can 'critique themselves dialectically', that is, shock against one another. 'Its main goal is to interrupt action—instead of illustrating it or making it go forward. [...] It is the retarding quality of these interruptions [*Unterbrechung*] and the episodic quality of this framing [*Umrahmung*] of action that give epic theatre its power.' Cutting, framing, interrupting, suspending: all these words belong to a vocabulary of editing" (Didi-Huberman, 2008:72).

This gestural complexity characterises all acting work and becomes particularly visible in the cutting room, where every gesture or expression made by an actress or actor is analysed—paused, slowed down, compared—with an almost detectivesque approach.

Immediately after completing this series of works, Godard went back to shooting on 35 mm film with professional actors. The attention he had previously given to the interpretation of protesters' faces and the filming of work—which, he would repeatedly remark, was no longer shown on film or television—shifted now to a reflection on working with actresses, one of the points of interest in his video essays on his creative process: *Scénario du Sauve qui peut (la vie)* [Screenplay for *Every Man for Himself*] (1980), *Scénario du film Passion* [Screenplay for the film *Passion*] (1982) and *Petites notes à propos du film Je vous salue, Marie* [Notes on the film *Hail Mary*] (1983).

One of his least known films from this period, recovered from Swiss television archives in 2020

Images 6 and 7. ***Voyage à travers un film (Sauve qui peut (la vie)*** **[Journey through a Film (Every Man for Himself)] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1981)**

(Witt, 2020), is *Voyage à travers un film* (*Sauve qui peut (La vie)* [Journey through a Film (*Every Many for Himself*)] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1981), which contains an extraordinary conversation between the filmmaker and the actress Isabelle Huppert about the filming of *Every Man for Himself* (Sauve qui peut [La vie], Jean-Luc Godard, 1979). The actress talks about her insecurities, fears and apparent contradictions during filming: "At that time I had no questions to ask you. I had things to say, but I had trouble saying them […]. I'm afraid of not being good-looking […]. I'm afraid of being too attractive." And in the intimacy of this discussion she also shares with Godard how she felt after a couple of actors turned against him: "I rebelled after the film. When I compared my attitude to the attitude of the other actors, I saw that I had been more passive, and at the same time more tolerant. […] I thought I had to learn to rebel more on the film shoots, so that I could find myself again once they were done."

The idea of rebellion, expressed by the protesters in the form of feverish revolution, comes into play here in the form of creative resistance, based on the power relations between director and actress. In the editing, Godard explores Huppert's pensive face with a frame from the film superimposed during their dialogue (Image 6), while reflecting on what he was unable to see during filming—that the indifference of Huppert's character was excessive—and on what he did not manage to film or elicit: laughter and spontaneity from the actress. The filmmaker suggests that this is an absent scene, a kind of lacuna in her performance that he did not manage to see. In order to repair this, in their conversation he tells her a joke about an ant and a cicada, finally making Huppert smile (Image 7): like a painter adding the final brushstroke to a painting, in *Voyage* Godard captures this laughter, this moment of spontaneous vitality, and superimposes it over the finished film (Macheret, 2021: 52).

This quest—or need—for a change of image, for a revelation in the actress's face (of what had been suppressed), is associated with what Miéville and Godard observe in the protesters in *How's It Going*: the expressiveness of the rebellion lies in the potential or energy of an emotional overload, between laughter and rage. These gestures are presented as signs of a political interval visibly manifested in the bodies: the desire for a new way of living and a different way of relating.

The aesthetic and political revolution introduced by Vertov through the interval is now transferred to the way of establishing a dialogue with an actress's body. The conversation between Godard and Hup-

pert proposes an alternative, dissenting relationship—another form of collaboration between actress and filmmaker—that breaks with the traditional hierarchies of the film shoot. From the outset it is Godard who invites the actress to reverse their roles, proposing that she be the one to ask the questions. This was the period when Godard challenged the rigid, homogeneous nature of the shot/reverse-shot technique, because it renders equal what is not equal—the actor and the actress—or renders invisible the one filming in relation to the one filmed.

3. ACTRESSES' BODIES BETWEEN INTERVALS AND NARRATIVES

This film-document by Godard is related to others made around the same time that draw on the debates within feminism to explore the relationship between actresses' artistic and personal experiences, such as *Sois belle et tais-toi* [Be Pretty and Shut Up] (Delphine Seyrig, 1981) and *Evening Performance* (Función de noche, Josefina Molina, 1981). In Molina's film, which was made at the end of Spain's transition to democracy, Lola Herrera's work and experience suggests an embodiment of the interstitial tension between two forms: on the one hand, the form embedded in her body during the Franco regime, represented by Carmen Sotillo de Delibes, the character she has to portray onstage; and on the other, the new form she is trying to produce, create or generate to release or liberate herself from the first form, particularly by confessing her sexual and romantic frustration. *Evening Performance* was inspired by Herrera's fainting spell during a theatrical performance of the play *Cinco horas con Mario* [Five Hours with Mario]. After this crisis, Herrera's confessional experience during the film shoot put her in a feverish state; despite the heat in the dressing room, she felt intensely cold: "I don't know what was happening to me; I don't know what was going on. I still don't know and I never will. Daniel was sweating and wiping off his sweat with a towel, and I was freezing cold; I was wearing a velvet robe, but I was still freezing, freezing, and in the end I had no clear idea of what we had talked about either"[1] (22:33–23:06).

As Fernández-Savater observes: "Power is not a chain of convictions, opinions or affiliations, or even of legitimacies, but something inscribed in our bodies. Counter-cultural rebellion is simply the exercise of shedding this imposed disciplinary body and taking on another one. We therefore need to consider politics in relation to sensibility, to the aesthetic task of changing skins" (Fernández-Savater and Labrador Méndez, 2018: 18).

This aesthetic task marks the *politique d'actrice* and the gesturality of actresses, and establishes the interval or gap to be contemplated through the actress's body, particularly the gap that emerges from the tension between the real body and the imaginary body. This is the interval pondered to the point of obsession, which arises out of social norms, imposed imaginaries and constant comparisons with other women, as Murielle Joudet points out in her study on actresses, *Le Seconde Femme* (2024: 13–14), and as noted in our interview with Elena Martín with reference to acting work that can play around and take risks, pushing the body towards an exacerbated physical alteration, such as a crisis of hysteria, possession, trance or fit of madness.

The tension between the real and the imaginary produces excesses in representation and expressiveness which, despite often being concealed in the editing room, can sometimes be found contained in the interstitial space of the in-between-images. An example of this is the case of Anna Magnani, explored by Margarita Carnicé in her article "The Films of Anna Magnani and Roberto Rossellini: The Politique d'actrice in the Transition to Modernity." Magnani's acting effectuates a convergence of the real body and the political body, to the point that the actress herself has been identified as the embodiment of the *Resistenza*; but with her erotic performances, she also pushes beyond the figurative and narrative conventions of classical cinema, operating as one of the epi-

centres of the aesthetic revolution of modernity. As Carnicé explains, Magnani's disruptive and unconventional female figures impose new ways of capturing the body on camera, while in the editing room they force the invention of unexpected articulations of the shot/reverse-shot and even give rise to changes to the established formula for a genre: "the progressive disappearance of the romantic exchange [in Magnani's films] may reflect the difficulty male partners have in maintaining the reverse shot to Magnani's increasingly imposing heroines," argues Carnicé, "to the point that the leading man ends up being replaced by a child in the so-called maternal melodramas."

This tension between the real body and the disciplinary body also produces shifts inherent in the signification process of the images. In a conversation with Harun Farocki about Godard's *Number Two* (Numéro deux, 1975), Kaja Silverman suggests that the repeated explicit exposure of genitals in the film is never merely pornographic, as it is also political, because: "[i]n *Number Two*, the body always expresses itself 'hysterically', that is, as a signifier displaced from psychological, social and economic relations" (Farocki and Silverman, 2016: 213).

As Freud pointed out in relation to hysteria, and as also expressed in Godard's film, the signifying-body (both male and female) renders visible that which cannot be articulated in verbal language or in the narrative.

As noted above, Godard establishes a productive association between the image of the hysterical woman and the image of the actress. Silverman's interpretation now further develops the analogy, as her reference to the mode of expression characteristic of the hysteric (communicating through displaced signs) offers a different perspective on the presence of the nude female body, which is now viewed not as a site where the symptom is shown, but as the symptom itself of a tension that is, moreover, aesthetic and formal. Interpreting the nude as a signifier that points to an uncertain space outside the frame, aesthetically destabilising the representation, facilitates conjecture about a rarely mentioned proximity between the experimental form of Godard's film and apparently more classical aesthetics that characterise certain films made during the Spanish transition to democracy that showed completely nude female bodies for the first time.

It is not uncommon for actresses to assimilate conflicting political, theoretical, aesthetic and social tensions into their bodies (Dyer, 2001). However, it is less common for them to be recognised for their meaningful impact on formal elements. Indeed, in Godard's film, the nude body of Sandrine Battistella (the lead actress) shifts into a form that itself is already radically experimental, because in that form the ordinary is rendered semantically dense through an aesthetic that stresses relation and simultaneity by duplicating the image or splitting the screen in two (Farocki and Silverman, 2016: 206–207). Conversely, in the cases analysed by Codesido-Linares, Fuentefría and García in their article "Liberating and Reclaiming the Body in Films of the Spanish Transition: Amparo Soler Leal's Nude Rebellions, 1975 to 1979", it is the actress's nude body—in this case, the body of Soler Leal, a mature actress with an established career—that can be interpreted as the signifying-body that plays a destabilising role in films with a visual rhetoric offering very few shocking elements.

In this way, not only does the actress take the socio-political tension of the democratic transition upon herself by making her performance the site of a shift from Francoist family values in *La gran familia* [The Great Family] (Fernando Palacios, 1962) to a new female-feminist consciousness in *Let's Go, Barbara!* (¡Vámonos, Bárbara!, Cecilia Bartolomé, 1978), but she also turns the exposure of her own body into a kind of vindication of change and a break with cultural tradition, as posited by the authors of the article. And as Silverman suggests with reference to Battistella's naked body, she also acts as a signifier that actively promotes new formal possibilities and as a catalyst for new

perceptions/interpretations of the image that render it more semantically unstable.

This contribution of the nude body to destabilising classical rhetoric and promoting new forms is even more pronounced in the case of Lina Romay in the films of Jess Franco, where, as Mendibíl Blanco observes in "Lina Romay and the Explicit Body between *Plaisir à trois* and *Gemidos de placer*", the filmmaker uses a long take or a sequence shot to reinforce the exposure of the actress's body, giving rise to a convergence of action and visual articulation that positions the body itself as the focus of the enunciation to the point that, as Blanco argues: "Lina Romay not only inhabits the images, but also structures them through her physicality, becoming a kind of interface for the combination of visual, temporal and narrative elements."

Similarly, an actress's eroticism could contribute to the construction of a new cinematic language capable of upholding the new demands for liberation, as is explored by Sergi Sánchez and María Adell in their article "The Becoming-Animal of Ana Belén, an Actress in Transition". The two authors analyse the films *El amor del capitán Brando* [The Love of Captain Brando] (Jaime de Armiñán, 1974), *The Request* (La petición, Pilar Miró, 1976) and *The Creature* (La criatura, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977) to reveal how Ana Belén acts through her body to open up figurative spaces where animal and human become indiscernible, in a *becoming* that has no rules and that moves unhesitatingly from the spoken word to the dog's bark. Once again, the actress's body is exposed here not to arouse the spectator's erotic desire but to fuse the animal imitation with uncertainty: Sánchez and Adell draw here on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "involution", that is, a form of evolution [of cinema] between heterogeneous terms (a real body and a visual representation).

There were also cases where actresses allowed themselves to be inhabited by a (sometimes impossible) polyphony of contradictory voices in order to represent the unrepresentable aspects both of history and of its promises. As Josep Lambies and Albert Elduque argue in "History Turned Inside Out: Tensions between Body and Voice in the Female Characters of Spanish Cinema at the End of Spain's Transition to Democracy", this was the case for Assumpta Serna in *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), Lola Herrera in *Evening Performance* and Esperanza Roy in *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982). In all three cases, the aesthetic approach of the actresses does not destroy the representation but introduces an ambiguity (narrative, in this case) that shifts the conclusion of the story to a space outside the frame where history can be "turned inside out", as Lambies and Elduque suggest.

This monograph concludes with a study by Laia Puig-Fontrodona and Núria Bou, titled "Resisting Institutional Motherhood: Najwa Nimri in Spanish Television Fiction Series", which focuses on the figurative transformations of motherhood effectuated by the actress in her work. By accentuating the internal tensions of a notoriously ambiguous female archetype (Jung), Najwa Nimri pushes beyond the limits of traditional expressive gestures (such as the mother's smile), using the resources of serial verisimilitude to destabilise the representation of motherhood. Her transformation of inherited maternal gestures has a twofold effect on an entire, supposedly age-old genealogy, which wavers while at the same time being enriched by new forms arising not from traditional narratives but from women's real experiences. These are, once again, forms located in liminal zones, between real lived experience and the mise-en-scène, whose creation by the actress again confirms that for women, acting can also be a site for investigation and political projection.

4. CONCLUSION

That to be a woman is "to be an actress", as Susan Sontag suggested (2024: 25), is an idea that many women have since repeated. As early as 1929, before Freud's two major works on female sexuality (dating

from 1931 and 1932), the psychoanalyst Joan Rivière observed that womanliness could be assumed and worn as a mask (1986: 38) and rejected the notion of any difference between a supposedly "genuine" womanliness and the masquerade. Lacan took up this concept in "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), radicalising it to the point of suggesting that what hides the woman is not the masquerade but the Woman herself, the masquerade being the very definition of womanliness (Mitchell, 1976: 43).

However, it is precisely through this masquerade that women have sought—and continue to seek—a form of access to subjectivity. This is what Marguerite Duras referred to when, in an interview with Elia Kazan in December 1980, she expressed a particular interest in *Wanda* (Loden, 1970), the only film made by Barbara Loden. As Duras points out, this film not only displays an "immediate and definitive" correspondence between the actress and the character, but Loden is "even more real in the movie than in life", and this, she adds, is "completely miraculous" (Duras, 1980: 151).

This same "miracle" is what interests Carla Simón, who recalls it in a letter to Loden, pointing out that in *Wanda* an actress finds herself "through film" (Simón, 2025: 71). It is also what the editors Julia Juániz, Ana Pfaff and Ariadna Ribes all pursue in their work. All three are on the same quest "for a potential truth that only the film contains", as Diana Toucedo suggests, in the knowledge that this truth is inseparable from the movement and the editing cuts that define the bodies and gestures in and through the representation.

NOTES

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TRANSFERENCES OF AFFECTS: VIEWING AND CONTEMPLATING THE INTERVAL IN ACTRESSES' BODIES

Abstract

This article posits a reconsideration of cinema from the perspective of actresses and editing, of what actresses transform in their bodies and how they reflect the aesthetic and political transformations of an era, with its tumults and upheavals. It thus explores how the interval is embodied in the actress's work, generating changes of image, and highlights the role of women editors, who construct female characters to analyse the multiple possibilities that actresses invent and deploy in their performances. Associative montage is thus proposed as a way of learning to see and as a dialectical and political gesture that explores the tension between the real body and the imaginary body of the actress, conditioned by social and political norms. Actresses such as Lola Herrera, Amparo Soler Leal, Sandrine Battistella and Lina Romay turn their bodies into sites of resistance, liberation and aesthetic experimentation. In this way, their performances articulate socio-political conflicts and personal desires, manifesting affective excesses and gestures that verbal language cannot fully express, transforming them into a political and aesthetic site for resignifying womanhood and representation.

Key words

Actresses; Interval; Associative Montage; Real and Imaginary Body; Spanish Cinema; Feminist thinking.

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TRANSPORTES DE AFECTOS: VER Y PENSAR EL INTERVALO EN EL CUERPO DE LAS ACTRICES

Resumen

El texto propone repensar el cine desde la perspectiva de las actrices y el montaje, desde lo que las actrices transforman en sus cuerpos y cómo reflejan las transformaciones estéticas y políticas de una época, como sus temblores y desbordes. Así, se investiga cómo el intervalo se encarna en el trabajo actoral, generando cambios de imagen, y se valora el papel de las montadoras, quienes al construir personajes femeninos, analizan las múltiples posibilidades que las actrices inventan y despliegan en sus actuaciones. El montaje asociativo se plantea de esta forma como un aprendizaje para ver y un gesto dialéctico y político que explora la tensión entre el cuerpo real y el cuerpo imaginario de las actrices, condicionado por normas sociales y políticas. Actrices como Lola Herrera, Amparo Soler Leal, Sandrine Battistella o Lina Romay convierten sus cuerpos en espacios de resistencia, liberación y experimentación estética. Así, la actuación femenina articula conflictos sociopolíticos y deseos personales, manifestando desbordes afectivos y gestos que el lenguaje verbal no alcanza, transformándose en un terreno político y estético para resignificar la feminidad y la representación.

Palabras clave

Actrices; Intervalo; Montaje asociativo; Cuerpo real e imaginario; Cine español; Pensamiento feminista.

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NOTEBOOK

ACTRESSES' BODIES *IN TRANSITION*: GESTURES, PERFORMANCES AND FIGURES BETWEEN INHERITED MODELS AND NEW SUBJECTIVITIES

THE FILMS OF ANNA MAGNANI AND ROBERTO ROSSELLINI: THE *POLITIQUE D'ACTRICE* IN THE TRANSITION TO MODERNITY*

MARGARIDA CARNICÉ

INTRODUCTION

This essay analyses the films made by the actress Anna Magnani with director Roberto Rossellini from 1945 to 1950, when post-war European cinema was in the process of its transition to modernity. With reference to the three films they made together, *Rome, Open City* (Roma città aperta, Roberto Rossellini, 1945), *The Human Voice* (La voce umana, 1948) and *The Miracle* (Il miracolo, 1948), as well as criticism from the period and biographical sources, the study focuses on the impact of Magnani's performances, and particularly on the potential of her *politique d'actrice* (Moullet, 1993) to serve as a foundation for some of the innovations associated with modern cinema. Through an examination of Magnani's work from the perspective of star studies, the aim of this article is to highlight the importance of actresses to the development of the main aesthetic and dramatic transformations to the cinema of their time, as well as their role as creators of an artistic approach that transcends the films identified with it, and that can be understood as a corpus with a significance of its own.

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI'S "MAGNANI FILMS"

Scholars of modern cinema have often considered the potential for stylistic innovation offered by actor direction (Bergala, 1994, 2005; Font, 2001; Bou, 1999, 2015; De Lucas, 2008). However, the importance of the acting approach (or what Luc Moullet calls the *politique des acteurs*) as a foundation for innovation has rarely been taken into account in the analysis of the relationship between directing and acting. Star studies offers a pathway for examining the evolution of cinema based on the specific impact of actors and actresses (Dyer, 2001; Dagrada, 2005; Pitassio, 2003; Jandelli, 2007; Pravadelli, 2015). It can thus shed light on the nature of actresses as subjects of representation and creators of their own dramatic and figu-

rative approach, and on their contribution to the debate over the status of the star within the industry, especially in a period like the one discussed here, in which worn-out classical formulas in cinema were giving way to a discourse of reflection not only on cinematic narrative mechanisms, but also on the star system and the *ontology of the star* (Jandelli, 2007).

For all these reasons, Anna Magnani's oeuvre provides a useful opportunity to observe the transformation of cinematic aesthetics from the perspective of the *politique des acteurs* (Moullet, 1993; Brenez, 2013; Carnicé, 2015). Traditionally associated with the creation of paradigmatic elements of neorealism, her on-screen presence engaged with the main visual movements of her time. Beginning on the stage in the inter-war years, she began her film career in the realist movements of the postwar period (*Rome, Open City*) and consolidated her star status in Italian commercial cinema in the 1940s and 1950s in films such as *Peddlin' in Society*, (Abbasso la ricchezza!, Gennaro Righelli, 1946), *Angelina* (L'onorevole Angelina, Luigi Zampa, 1946) and *Bellissima* (Luchino Visconti, 1952). After conquering Hollywood, where she became the first Italian woman to win an Oscar (*The Rose Tattoo*, Daniel Mann, 1955), she began building a mature, self-reflexive corpus that bore witness to her own particular *politique d'actrice*, in films such as *We, the Women* (Siamo donne, Luchino Visconti, 1953) and *The Golden Coach* (Le carrosse d'or, Jean Renoir, 1953). As a result, she took part in the construction of key elements of the cinema of her time: not only the creation and international expansion of Italian neorealism, but also the development of the modern female character, in both auteur cinema and mainstream genre films (Carnicé, 2021). Her status as a creator is reflected in the self-reflexive dimension of her later films, such as *Mamma Roma* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962) and *Roma* (Federico Fellini, 1973), and specifically in performances that bear the self-referential features associated with certain discourses of late classical cinema.

IN GENERAL, MAGNANI'S APPROACH CAN BE SUMMED UP IN A MANIFESTO ON CHARACTER CREATION AT A TIME WHEN THE QUALITIES OF MODERN FEMININITY WERE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EUROPEAN REALIST MOVEMENTS OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD

In general, Magnani's approach can be summed up in a manifesto on character creation at a time when the qualities of modern femininity were pushing the boundaries of the European realist movements of the post-war period (Siehlohr, 2000; Jandelli, 2007; Pravadelli, 2015). Her popular heroines offered new possibilities of representation that challenged classical melodrama and the direction of filmmakers who, in the transition of the 1940s and 1950s, sought to break with the conventions of the classical melodramatic narrative inherited from Hollywood, often with stories that ascribed special importance to the exploration of the female character's emotions (Font, 2001; Dagrada, 2005; Jandelli, 2007; De Lucas, 2008). One such filmmaker was Rossellini, whose work in the period from 1945 to 1950 evolved from *Rome, Open City* to *Stromboli*, described as founding works of neorealism and modern cinema, respectively (Bergala, 1984). In this period, he filmed *Love* (L'amore, 1948), a piece that experimented with the actress's work, which he dedicated precisely "to the art of Anna Magnani" (Rossellini, 1948). Combining two medium-length films, *Love* offers a view of the actress's pioneering performance as a system of cinematic construction, an approach that would later characterise the work not only of Rossellini, but also of several other auteurs of modern European cinema, particularly in the sub-genre referred to as "couple films" (Font, 2001). Perhaps because its

unconventional format limited its success, *Love* is accorded minimal importance in key studies of Rossellini (Bergala, 1984; Brunette, 1996; Gallagher, 1998), who would not begin highlighting the role of the actress in his work until Ingrid Bergman's appearance in *Stromboli* (Stromboli, terra di Dio, 1950), which is considered a landmark film in the development of modern cinema. In this context, Magnani and Rossellini's films together are often cited for their adherence to the aesthetic manifesto of neorealism, or even as anecdotal to the couple's romance, but rarely as representative of the aesthetic transition between postwar realism and the films of European auteur cinema that they influenced. Yet *Love* exhibits certain stylistic features and aesthetic and discursive approaches that are essential for understanding the evolution of Rossellini's films towards modernity, inviting us to reconsider the significance of his films with Magnani as representative of this paradigm shift.

THE *POLITIQUE D'ACTRICE* AS A STAGING DEVICE

Magnani's performances in Rossellini's films foreshadow a key element of the politique d'actrice in the mise-en-scène, whose influence would continue in the subsequent work of both creators and which at the same time foreshadowed the centrality that actors would acquire in modern cinema, particularly in the sub-genre of the "couple film" (Font, 2001). The term *politique d'actrice* used here refers to the performer's agency in the construction of the film narrative, based on stylistic and discursive features that are repeated and recognised as a sign of authorship or as a personal signature (Carnicé, 2015). In other words, the *politique des acteurs* (Moullet, 1993) or *politica delle star* (Jandelli, 2007) vindicates the autonomy of actors from the authorship of their directors, in a manner similar to the way that the *politique des auteurs* (Bazin *et al.*, 1972) identifies a genuine, autonomous signature of the classical director within the limits of the Hollywood studio system and the norms of genre narratives. Nicole Brenez (2013) identifies four essential influences of agency in "actor poetics": on the historical context, on the other elements of the cinematic device, on the expressive and rhetorical challenges posed in the films, and on the anthropological challenges of their time.

The challenging approaches proposed by Anna Magnani in Rossellini's mise-en-scène are an extension of what the actress had already become identified with in other cinematic contexts, including neorealism. Her creations for the "Magnani films" share these common features of the figurative, rhetorical and discursive repertoire of their author: characters whose nature and development is explained more by her presence and her gestures than by the script or other elements of the mise-en-scène; the narrative autonomy of her performance and a tendency to eliminate responses and reverse shots, especially in romantic or melodramatic narratives; the construction of a female subjectivity that pushes at the boundaries of classical melodrama and embraces new ways of being captured on film; and, finally, the recurring idea of gestation, pregnancy and motherhood as character motifs and as metaphors for power, continuity and resilience. It is the transformative and discursive capacity of this approach and her ability to convey a strategy that is not only aesthetic and figurative but also discursive that allows the characterisation of Anna Magnani's authorial traits as a *politique d'actrice* (Carnicé, 2015).

Love, which in a way is a film that moves beyond neorealism, can be read as a manifesto on Magnani's versatility outside the neorealist canon. In figurative terms, it is one of the actress's most ambitious works. In the first part, The Human Voice, she plays an anonymous woman having her last phone conversation with her lover, who has decided to leave her. Her performance challenges the conventions of melodrama as she must contend with the absence of the affective

HUMAN VOICE WAS FILMED AT ALMOST EXACTLY THE SAME TIME THAT *ROME, OPEN CITY* WAS EARNING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION BOTH FOR ITALIAN NEOREALISM AND FOR THE DIRECTOR AND ACTRESS AS ITS CHIEF CREATORS

reverse shot that is key to the construction of the classical romantic dialogue (Bou, 2002). In the second episode, The Miracle, she plays Nannina, a simple goatherd girl who, after being sexually assaulted by a wandering traveller, comes to believe the fantasy that she is pregnant with a divine being. This character embodies a radical transformation through her representation of pregnancy and childbirth as transcendent experiences, and it reflects the shift in Rossellini's filmmaking from neorealist ensemble pieces towards the individual existentialism found in his subsequent film, Stromboli. In both sections of Love, Magnani's body is central to a minimalist mise-en-scène and serves as the focal point of a camera that seems to be seeking new forms of narrative construction by scrutinising the character.

Human Voice was filmed at almost exactly the same time that *Rome, Open City* was earning international recognition both for Italian neorealism and for the director and actress as its chief creators. While the simultaneous occurrence of two such disparate styles did not contradict the historical perception of Rossellini as a founder of modern cinema (Bergala, 1984), it does pose an obstacle to a critical reading of Magnani, whose influence on the creation of the various aesthetic currents of her time has been constantly evaded by critics. As early as the 1980s, reconsiderations of her legacy by authors such as Matilde Hochkofler (1984) and Patrizia Pistagnesi (1988) were revealing an authoritative signature and creative potential obscured by the various myths constructed by the critics and press of her time (Cantatore and Falzone, eds., 2001), which would ultimately converge into the unruly and lonely image critiqued in 1950 by Indro Montanelli in La Magnani, one of the hagiographies published at the time that condense the actress's marginal role in the cultural industry of her era.

Even by the time of her international breakthrough, Magnani had already introduced an uncomfortable hint of impurity as one of the few professional actresses in neorealism, a movement that supposedly eschewed artifice. Her ability to mimic the norms of Italian post-war drama dazzled and bewildered critics. The first acknowledgement of this disruptive quality can be found in James Agee's review for The Nation after the première of *Rome, Open City* at Cannes in 1946. Fascinated by the acting, Agee highlights the presence of "a magnificent woman named Anna Magnani", avoiding the use of the word "actress" and indirectly excusing himself for it: "She conveys the impression that everything was done too quickly and with a sincerity too fierce to get stuck in mere artificiality or meditation" (Agee, 1946, 1). This type of reaction is probably the source of the legend of Magnani as a non-professional actress, resulting in the historical invisibility of her legacy. And yet it was this very meditation of artifice denied by the critics of the era that defined the stylistic approach proposed by Rossellini for Magnani in Love: "*A Human Voice* offered me the chance to use the microscopic camera. The phenomenon to be examined was Anna Magnani" (Rossellini, 1995: 66).

THE MAGNANI-ROSSELLINI COLLABORATION AS A *FUSIONAL* MODEL

The collaboration between Magnani and Rossellini occurred at a time when both the director and the actress were moving away from a collective form of filmmaking towards an individual approach. In Magnani's case, this translated into

an emancipation from the realism of her post-war heroines to more mannerist, reflexive and self-referential characters, like those she would portray in the 1950s with filmmakers such as Luchino Visconti (*Bellissima*; *We, the Women*), Jean Renoir (*The Golden Coach*) or during her Hollywood period. For Rossellini, his well-known transition from neorealist to modern cinema can be summed up in what differentiates the films known as the "War Trilogy" (Rome, Open City, Paisan [Paisà, 1946] and Germany, Year Zero [Germania anno zero, 1948]) and the so-called "Solitude Trilogy" (Stromboli, Europe '51 [Europa 51, 1952] and Journey to Italy [Viaggio in Italia, 1954]). Although some authors (Bergala, 1984; Brunette, 1985, 1996) have pointed out the role of romantic conflict and the treatment of emotions in a supposed "Love Trilogy" (the two parts of *Love* and Stromboli) or the importance of Ingrid Bergman in the so-called "Bergman films", such categories have more to do with the biographical circumstances that connected the director romantically to his misnamed "muses" than with the importance of the actresses as autonomous creators or discursive agents. Significantly, although some of these authors do recognise Anna Magnani's "bravura" (Brunette, 1985: 44), the literature on Rossellini does not assign the "Magnani films" a place of importance as a subcategory of analysis. However, in *Love* Magnani introduces the idea of the star system as the axis of formal innovation, in what could be considered the first example of the European "couple film".

AN *ETHICAL* EROTICS OF FILMING

The couple film was a cinematic trend of the post-classical era that foreshadowed the rise of romantic conflict as a thematic motif, the star system as a phenomenon for observation and an interest in the female character—specifically, in her suffering—as a dramatic motif (Bergala, 1984; Font, 2001; De Lucas, 2008). The Godard-Karina, Antonioni-Vitti and Bergman-Ullman partnerships in European cinema and the Cassavettes-Rowland pairing in the United States offered a cinematic approach to romantic conflict through the use of gestures by iconic actresses who were often playing versions of themselves. These films were effectively the work of partnerships, with the filmmakers' camera capturing the everyday gestures or biographical expressions of the female protagonists, exploring the limits of realism and tackling what Bergala argues was the fundamental question of modern cinema: "Can truth manifest itself in a film?" (Bergala, 1984: 1). According to Domènec Font (2001), the male-female dialectic is key to the synthesis of a poetics that reflects on the evolution of the couple's romantic relationship, projecting the director's gaze onto the mystery embodied by the actress in her otherness as a woman. Antonioni (1990) refers to the actresses in these films as "Trojan horses": attractive figures possessing an inner quality that is mysterious and essential to the filmmakers' aesthetic quest yet threatening to their mise-en-scène. With her authentic presence, the actress energises the image, challenging the monolithic conception of authorship posited by the *politique d'auteur* (Bazin *et al.*, 1972) and leaving open the question of her real participation in the film.

THE COUPLE FILM WAS A CINEMATIC TREND OF THE POST-CLASSICAL ERA THAT FORESHADOWED THE RISE OF ROMANTIC CONFLICT AS A THEMATIC MOTIF, THE STAR SYSTEM AS A PHENOMENON FOR OBSERVATION AND AN INTEREST IN THE FEMALE CHARACTER —SPECIFICALLY, IN HER SUFFERING— AS A DRAMATIC MOTIF

This fetishistic yet cautious gaze on the actress's power posited by Antonioni contradicts

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT ROSSELLINI AND MAGNANI HAD EMERGED FROM THE FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF NEOREALISM, INVOLVING A STANCE THAT IS MORAL OR *ETHICAL* FIRST AND *AESTHETIC* SECOND

the idea of her autonomy, as it suggests a directorial style characterised by an invasive and threatening use of filming devices. The desire to draw out of the figure "the more or less controlled declaration of her truth" (Font, 2001: 3) often involves the symbolic violence of a directorial style that resembles a ritual of extraction, an exercise of forcible midwifery in which the director asserts his authority, using the medium in an intimidating way. Terms such as "torture device" or "theatre of cruelty" (Bergala, 1984) are common in theoretical interpretations of these films, many of which associate the control of the performance with a form of possession on the part of the directors, as unquestionable auteurs of the works they direct. In this sense, Bergala compares Rossellini's camera on Ingrid Bergman with forceps, suggesting a form of extraction with an unequivocally obstetric resonance that contrasts with the metaphor of the microscope used by Rossellini to describe his approach to Magnani (2005: 64). As a neutral instrument, the microscope suggests a desire for scientific, almost anthropological observation, which neither forces nor invades the body in its desire to reveal (not to possess) its mystery.

It is important to note that Rossellini and Magnani had emerged from the foundational experience of neorealism, involving a stance that is moral or *ethical* first and *aesthetic* second (Rossellini, 2006). Their approach is therefore based on a humanist understanding of cinema that seems to have no room for power or domination. As Patrizia Pistagnesi (1988: 9) points out, in one of the most comprehensive retrospectives on the actress:

> The films that come to life out of the clash between Magnani's personality and Rossellini's poetics are charged with meaning. Not even in his widely praised films with Ingrid Bergman is there such equality of mettle between the actress and the film camera, nor is there a comparable feeling of interaction with the set [...]. While Magnani represented herself, Ingrid Bergman represents something else, something she cannot know, and that belongs only to Rossellini.

The Rossellini-Magnani *fusional* model also exhibits a formal equality, so that the duel between the two creators is carried out on an equal footing. This *fusional* model also responds to other studies positing the direction of actresses as central to innovation, such as the model proposed by Alain Bergala in his essay "Une érotique du filmage" (1994), based on the filmography of Jean Renoir. According to Bergala, *A Day in the Country* (Une partie de Campagne, Jean Renoir, 1946) contains one of the first signs of a break with classical transparency in Sylvia Bataille's tearful gaze at the camera at the end of a scene in which her partner has forced her to kiss him. After analysing the rehearsals, Bergala shows that this expression was the result of Renoir's tireless direction with the aim of exhausting Bataille in order to obtain an authentic reaction—in this case, a reproving look at the director for his relentlessness.[1] The author stresses that the revelation of an extra-diegetic look between director and actress is key to understanding how it pushes the limits of the traditional narrative, as it acts as a destabilising element in the depiction of desire in the image. In this case, the director's presence interrupts the classical erotic relationship that is so essential to the architecture of the shot-reverse shot or the exchanges of looks between the characters of melodramatic fiction (Bou, 2002). By focusing his research on the direction of actors, one of the most fertile fields for innovation in modern cinema (Bergala, 2005), the author supports the hypothesis of the

actress's role as the potential epicentre of a crisis in the classical image.

In light of this *erotics of filming* theory, it is significant that Magnani's films with Rossellini take the negotiation with the rhetoric of the shot-reverse shot, the progressive dissolution of the affective correspondence and the disappearance of the male partner to their ultimate consequences. In narrative terms, *The Human Voice* is a melodrama with no reverse shots. It is a medium-length film based on sequence shots, many of which are close-ups, focusing on the single motif of a suffering woman having her last phone conversation with a lover who is leaving her. It is thus a deconstruction of the genre of melodrama determined by the elimination of the male counterpart as a result of the autonomy of the female image, which takes the position of subject of the story. The success of this approach lies in the capacity of the actress's body to absorb this aesthetic shift of the quintessential classical plotline: the story of heterosexual love, which represented the ideal of the Hollywood canon in that decade (Bou, 2002). This question runs throughout Anna Magnani's filmography, in which the expansion of the desire of her unconventional female characters cannot easily be inscribed in the codes of melodrama (Carnicé, 2015; 2021; 2023). Indeed, the progressive disappearance of the romantic exchange may reflect the difficulty male partners have in maintaining the reverse shot to Magnani's increasingly imposing heroines, to the point that the leading man ends up being replaced by a child in the so-called maternal melodramas (Morreale, 2011).

This expansive condition was already present in the couple's first film, *Rome, Open City*, especially in the famous scene of Pina's death, which also bears signs of a melodramatic discourse in crisis. In a scene that has come to be cited as a metonym for Italian neorealism, the pregnant *popolana* runs after the Nazi truck taking her beloved away on the very morning of their wedding and is shot down by a hail of bullets. In Magnani's desperate move to be united with her partner and in the voices of the two lovers each calling out to the other, the phantasmal presence of the rhetoric of the shot-reverse shot somehow evokes the visual conception of the entire "couple film" genre that would follow it. Scholarly literature on neorealism interprets the effect of this scene as a symbol of the resistance of post-war cinema to the old cinematographic conventions inherited from the Hollywood tradition and from the Italian films of the Fascist *ventennio*. It is interesting to note the intuition of attributing the photogenic nature of this episode to the actress's gesture, in a scene whose improvised nature made it quite different from its original description in the script (Roncoroni, 2006). This is how Magnani herself recounted the filming, confirming the importance of her gesture to the construction process (Hochkofler, 2013: 72-73):

SCHOLARLY LITERATURE ON NEOREALISM INTERPRETS THE EFFECT OF THIS SCENE AS A SYMBOL OF THE RESISTANCE OF POST-WAR CINEMA TO THE OLD CINEMATOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS INHERITED FROM THE HOLLYWOOD TRADITION AND FROM THE ITALIAN FILMS OF THE FASCIST *VENTENNIO*

> For the death scene I didn't do any rehearsals. With Rossellini, being the great director he was, you didn't rehearse. He knew that by preparing the setting for me, I would work. During the action of the raid, when I came out through the gate, I suddenly returned to the time when the boys on the streets of Rome were taken away. Because it was people, ordinary people, who were lined up against the walls. The Germans were real Germans taken from a concentration camp. Suddenly, I wasn't myself anymore. I was the character. Yes, Rossellini had prepared the set in a really amazing way. The women went pale when they heard the Nazis tal-

> king to each other. This filled me with an anxiety that I then brought to the screen.

On repeated occasions, Rossellini spoke of his desire to pay a professional tribute to the woman he considered one of the best actresses of his time (Rossellini, 2006a: 52). In this sense, the "Magnani films" also bear witness to the extent to which her performance constitutes the figurative transgression implicit in neorealism not only as a filmmaking approach that broke with the past, but also as a foundation for the modern cinema of the future.

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE STAR

Despite its transcendent nature as an aesthetic that embraces the non-professional gestures of actors, it would be naïve to imagine that an aesthetic shift as important as the one that occurred in post-war European cinema could dispense with the actor's body as a site of inscription. Georges Sadoul recognises this in his history of cinema: "With *Rome, Open City*, Anna Magnani introduces a new kind of *tragédienne*" (1961: 330). Magnani's *politique d'actrice* redefines the star system and the classical image of the woman in cinema. Its merit lies in revealing and capturing the photogenicity of the human condition without embellishments, in the marginality of an unglamorous virtuosity and a femininity always in crisis and always capable of being heroic. In *The Human Voice*, Magnani turns the figure of the rejected and devastated woman into an epic image. In *The Miracle*, she achieves the same by portraying a victim of violence marginalised by her society. Her performances vindicate the importance of anonymous women, rendered invisible by the social barriers imposed by the patriarchy, who as they carry on in their daily struggle become important bodies, inviting us to reinterpret the tradition of female heroism.

Magnani's style connects with modern dramatic art by confronting the spectator with images that do not facilitate identification but do guarantee an experience. Her performance encompasses unstable identities, defined by the emotional mobility created by an identity in progress, without a clear destination. Faced with the impossibility of immersing themselves in the transparency of the story, viewers are invited to acknowledge the process of construction of the subject, turning the viewing experience into a lasting memory. In this sense, Magnani's performance in all her films is a sensory experience that transcends the story, acting in the "subterranean movements between the states of the character and those of the spectator" (Bergala, 1984: 3). In this demonstration of Magnani's power, the critics saw an imposition of her personality as a star, a reaction that might reflect their bewilderment at the audacity of an actress too close to anonymity and the ensemble role that characterised neorealism. However, Brunette (1996: 90) identifies the transgressive dimension of the film in the actress's self-conscious gesture:

> *The Human Voice* thus establishes an ontological identity between the actress and the character she plays, intermittently collapsing the two categories while deconstructing its own superficial realism through the pre-existing reality of Magnani herself.

This self-conscious dimension is another unequivocal characteristic of modern cinema and also a common feature in Magnani's work, as her personality is repeatedly evident in her figurative approach. All of her oeuvre, especially her films after her work with Rossellini, and the films she made in the 1950s with Visconti and Renoir, is imbued with a star discourse. Her mature period, witnessed by filmmakers such as Pasolini (*Mamma Roma*, 1963) and Fellini (*Fellini-Roma*, 1973), would serve as a kind of a tribute to an actress who always portrays herself.

Magnani's metanarrative dimension begins to take shape in her work with Rossellini, through performances that reflect a virtuosity that

overwhelms the director's authorship (Pistagnesi, 1988), but also the biographical intrusions that ended up constructing a parallel story in the media of the time. The Magnani-Rossellini partnership would end in 1950 with the sensational episode known as the "War of the Volcanoes" (Anile and Giannice, 2010), involving an invasion by the nascent tabloid press into Magnani's control over her own image, with inevitable effects on her later career. A key element of this often romanticised story is the telegram that arrived in Italy from Hollywood in 1949, in which Ingrid Bergman placed herself at Rossellini's disposal to work with him on a film.[3] In this story, the media attributed to Magnani the role of discordant third wheel, or more specifically, the jilted lover of whom many imagined they saw a foreshadowing in the character she had played in *The Human Voice*, and who would end up taking revenge on Rossellini by making *Volcano* (Vulcano, William Dieterle, 1950) as a rival film to *Stromboli*. From this point on, Magnani's public image would be affected by media intrusions into her private life, and thus her actress and character identities would begin to fracture with the impact that her decision to star in Volcano had on her image.

While this was unfolding in the public sphere, the type of performances we find in this first stage of her career as a mature actress are notable for a tone that reflects on the phenomenon of stardom, the factors that give rise to it and its contradictions. The actress's recurring character and the profusion of roles with a self-referential or biographical resonance collectively reflect a stage characterised by the transparency of the *politique d'actrice* as a mechanism. The meditation on the art of acting and the elements that make up the actor's identity would be recurring ideas in her Italian and international films of this period. The progressive change to her identity as an actress in films such as Volcano, Bellissima, The Golden Coach, We, the Women and *The Rose Tattoo* is significant in the context of a decade that was so decisive for the history of the star system. International projects such as the Actors Studio in New York City and the emergence of new generational models of actors in Europe and the United States drove a discursive trend related to the on-screen body that Cristina Jandelli (2007) maps out with her concept of the *ontology of the star*. In the context of the aesthetic transition from classical to modern cinema, the emergence of new media and changes to the forms of consumption also affected the conception of the star system and the treatment of film stars.

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS SUCH AS THE ACTORS STUDIO IN NEW YORK CITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW GENERATIONAL MODELS OF ACTORS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES DROVE A DISCURSIVE TREND RELATED TO THE ON-SCREEN BODY THAT CRISTINA JANDELLI MAPS OUT WITH HER CONCEPT OF THE *ONTOLOGY OF THE STAR*

The interest in the biographical intrusions of directors and actresses in couple films would continue to be symptomatic of this context. In this sense, the "War of the Volcanoes" constituted an extreme expression of a narrative trend in the historiography of criticism that often reads this evolution of modern cinema through love stories unfolding behind the camera, and tends to prioritise the actress as a focus of speculation by default. Although the competition between the two rival teams was essentially expressed in their respective production strategies,[4] the controversy would focus on the romantic conflict of the Rossellini-Magnani-Bergman triangle, and would be personified in particular in the Italian actress (Sorgi, 2010). Volcano had been a film conceived to compete commercially with

Stromboli, and Magnani's decision to star in it was interpreted as a personal act of revenge. The depiction of Volcano in the headlines of the period reflects a personification of the conflict in the character of an actress who had been humiliated by the fact of being replaced in Rossellini's life and work (Genovese, 2010). The tabloids constructed a communication strategy that personified a conflict with economic and cultural dimensions in Magnani's jealousy, since the "War of the Volcanoes" involved not only the two rival films, but also Italian and international cultural identities due to the involvement of Ingrid Bergman and the Hollywood production system. In a way, it foreshadowed the opening up of a film industry still in the process of reconstruction to international co-productions in the decade that followed. The legacy of Volcano can also be identified in Magnani's Hollywood period, and in a star image constructed on the essentialism of female passions, fearsome in their strength and as unpredictable as the fury of a volcano, which would leave its mark on future Italian female stars in Hollywood (Carnicé, 2021; Vaccarella and Vaccarella, 2003).

MOTHERHOOD AND RESILIENCE: THE PREGNANCY MOTIF AS A METAPHOR FOR CONTINUITY

Other biographical perspectives of this period, far removed from the sensationalism of the tabloids, shed light on aspects that are crucial for understanding modern cinema and the new aesthetic direction taken in the films of Magnani and Rossellini. It is interesting to note that the couple's last film together foreshadowed the basic drama of *Stromboli*: the lonely struggle of a woman trying to escape social exclusion and motivated by the hope offered by a pregnancy. Like two embryos conceived in the same womb, *The Miracle* and the film it was partnered with share this curious twin drama.

WHEN THEIR ARTISTIC AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BEGAN, ROSSELLINI AND MAGNANI WERE BOTH MOURNING THE LOSS OF A CHILD. ROSSELLINI HAD TRAGICALLY LOST HIS ELDEST SON, WHILE MAGNANI, WHO WAS A SINGLE MOTHER, HAD BEEN SEPARATED AGAINST HER WILL FROM HER ONLY SON DUE TO AN ILLNESS THAT COULD NOT BE TREATED IN ITALY

When their artistic and personal relationship began, Rossellini and Magnani were both mourning the loss of a child. Rossellini had tragically lost his eldest son, while Magnani, who was a single mother, had been separated against her will from her only son due to an illness that could not be treated in Italy (De Marchis, 1996: 60). The circumstance of shared grief is significant, both because of the profound mark left by the death of Rossellini's son on his work (Rossellini and Roncoroni, ed., 1987: 104), and because of the key role that motherhood (both literal and symbolic) would play in Anna Magnani's films and star image (Hochkofler, 2013; Carnicé, 2021). When filming for *The Human Voice* began in 1946, Rossellini had just finished Germany Year Zero, a film dedicated to Romano, his late son, and often considered the work that marked the end of neorealism with its heartbreaking image of a child suicide, symbolising the existential abyss and despair of the post-war period (Deleuze, 1985). The connection between these two films, which deal with love and death as simultaneous and opposing phenomena (and which, it is interesting to note, Rossellini explicitly dedicates to his loved ones, in this case Romano and Anna, respectively), is analysed by Rosa Delor in her article "La muerte del hijo" [The Death of the Son] (2010) in a meticulous biographical study that is rare in the literature on

MOTHERHOOD, IN ITS PHYSICAL AND SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS, MARKS ANNA MAGNANI'S ENTIRE FILMOGRAPHY, AND HER FILM STAR HAGIOGRAPHY

Rossellini. Delor concludes that Rossellini's identity as a parent is reflected in his obsession with the figure of motherhood as a source of creativity. This obsession was alluded to by Isabella Rossellini when she described her father's regret at not having been able to get pregnant and give birth to his own children (Rossellini, 2006: 29-30). Delor interprets this obsession as an essential component in *Love*, in which the filmmaker expresses his need to immerse himself in femininity as a regenerative *topos*:

> In the films he made from 1947 to 1954, Rossellini projects himself onto his lead actress, who becomes a mirror in which he obsessively analyses his own feminine side, his frustrated desire to be a mother, because in the woman—she who at all times loves and penetrates—he pursues that part of the knowledge of the other that has been denied to him as a man: the inner, physiological, instinctive knowledge, which only the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding can give (2010: 109).

Motherhood, in its physical and symbolic dimensions, marks Anna Magnani's entire filmography, and her film star hagiography. It is probably not accidental that Rossellini's films with Magnani, from *Rome, Open City* to *The Miracle*, constitute a corpus marked by themes of passion and the desire for union, ideas that are also expressed at a formal level. Along with the reflexive use of the reverse shot and the rhetoric of correspondence, they contain the recurring themes of pregnancy and birth as metaphors for life, continuity and resilience. Delor argues that *The Human Voice* constitutes a cathartic realisation of the capacity to express pain after the extreme experience of Germany, Year Zero, and as a film that initiated a cinema of the feminine and of the *grembo* (womb). Magnani would return to these questions over the course of her career in Italy, and in Hollywood her torrid Mediterranean heroines would be constructed on notions of fertility, sexual desire and reproductive ability (Carnicé, 2021).

Delor's work constitutes an interesting contribution to the literature on Rossellini, eschewing orthodox approaches to embrace a perspective as familiar and undisputed as the procreative mystique surrounding Rossellini as a historical figure (Delor, 2010: 102). The creative *telos* that permeates his work, with its recognised humanist dimension, has made Rossellini an intellectual icon often metaphorically associated with fatherhood: the father of neorealism, the father of modern cinema, and the father of those filmmakers who would become his disciples, who reproduced his aesthetic and narrative formulas and who expressed their sense of orphanhood upon his death, exchanging telegrams of condolence with his biological children. "Now we are alone in the forest" wrote Godard in one such telegram to his family (Rossellini, 2006b: 141). Rossellini's own words might serve best to conclude the idea discussed here, with the vindication of his creative signature: "I refuse to accomplish any creative act. The only creation possible is to build a child" (Rossellini, 1995: 234). Magnani herself reiterates this symbolic dimension of the mother in one of her later roles, as the protagonist in *Mamma Roma*, an *ad hoc* character who inevitably reveals her unequivocal star presence by combining the features of the three most common macrofigures in her filmography: the mother, the sex worker, and the actress.

It is interesting to note that by rejecting the conventions of classical representation, the Magnani-Rossellini *fusional* model allowed Magnani to explore the expressive possibilities of the fe-

male body. While in *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini's camera had extracted from her presence a political gesture of resistance through the combative (and pregnant) character of Pina, in this model it seems to take an inverse approach, drawing on mystical iconography to convey the debt that cultural codes owe to the most essential and instinctive of human gestures. *The Miracle* offers a conclusive view of womanhood as a source of revelation and of the capacity of the *politique d'actrice* to respond to this aesthetic quest. From both a figurative and symbolic perspective, it reveals the significance of the figure of motherhood, which Rossellini would use as a transitional key in his "Bergman films" and Magnani would adopt as a recurring theme and focus throughout her career (Grignaffini, 2002; Hochkofler, 2013; Carnicé, 2021).

In contrast to Renoir's methodical direction of Sylvia Bataille, or the violent forceps suggested by Bergala to describe Rossellini's on-screen relationship with Bergman, it could be argued that the director who observes the actress's process of artistic creation in the "Magnani films" does so with the active and clinical fascination of an attendant at a childbirth. What Rossellini seems to explore in Magnani as a performative phenomenon is a study of human behaviours in terms of the capacity to create presence and life that the bodies of the actress and the woman both possess. There is a sense of reciprocity in the fact that the journey of the pregnant woman as a neorealist *topos* should conclude with images that inscribe Rossellini's work with the symbol of an ending in the form of a birth. According to Adriano Aprà, this symbol would prove decisive for the conclusion of the era of Italian postwar cinema (Brunette,1996: 96). The creators of *Rome, Open City* thus ended their cinematic journey together with an image that vindicates their ethical, humanist (or however we may want to define the film corpus they constructed), *fusional* model as an act of resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

Anna Magnani and Roberto Rossellini made very few statements about their relationship, but those they made were very clear. Magnani asserted: "I believed in Rossellini. They may have been the most important years of my life. I thought there would be no limits to what we could do together or be together" (Lerner, 1988: 37). Rossellini, meanwhile, defined Magnani as "a very important person in my life. Important as a woman and extremely important as an actress. Then there was all her humanity, her availability, her enthusiasm, her fears... She really was an extraordinary, rare human being. I don't know who could not love her" (Vermorcken, 1979). If the birth of modern cinema is understood through the work of filmmakers who found discursive material in their lives and bodies of fiction in their romantic partners, we can conclude that Anna Magnani and Roberto Rossellini brought together the essential features that critics would attribute to the aesthetic paradigm shift of the period: the director's gaze as a substitute for the gaze of the male partner (Bergala, 1994), the loss of correspondence as a transgression of classical poetics (Bou, 2002), the trigger for an alternative construction of the female subject (Pravadelli, 2015), and the imposition of this new image as the epicentre of modern cinema (Font, 2001). If modern stardom is interpreted in terms of its discursive and self-referential capacity, what Magnani brings to Rossellini's work is essential for understanding the shift towards modernity not only in direction but also in acting. Significantly, her "Rossellini films" marked the beginning of a self-conscious stage in which the filmmakers who emulated her style would do so with the aim of portraying the performative gestures of the actress.

In this context, the *politique d'actrice*, understood as the capacity of the performance to articulate the mise-en-scène, offers an alternative perspective on the role that film history has assigned

to actresses. Recognising their active role in the construction of cinema and reconsidering their dimension as architects and creators rather than merely passive textual elements or directors' muses is crucial to understand the evolution of cinema away from figurative models and to approach the work of film actresses as creative subjects. With their undisputed impact on each other's work in the context of the cinema of their time, and on the figurative and anthropological conventions of the post-war period, the films made by Magnani and Rossellini bear witness to a fruitful and fascinating creative actor-director relationship, while also offering a key for the interpretation of other possible directions for film historiography, in this case from the perspective of the *politique d'actrice*.

NOTES

1 The questions of direction raised by Bergala serve as the basis for *La direction d'acteurs par Jean Renoir* (1969), a short documentary directed by the actress Gisèle Braunberger, who submits herself to Renoir's on-screen direction and to this type of strategy of exhausting the gesture.

2 This argument was put forward during the famous encounter between Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini in the 1950s, documented by André Bazin: "I had an interesting experience with *A Human Voice*. I wanted to establish the film's capacity to penetrate to the very roots of a character." And again: "[A]n experience that has been useful for me because then I was able to make and treat the characters in a certain way, because I had taken this experience, this search, to the extreme" (Rossellini, 2006a: 145-165).

3 "Dear Mr. Rossellini, I saw your films *Roma, Open City* and *Paisan*, and enjoyed them very much. If you need a Swedish actress who speaks English very well, has not forgotten her German, is barely comprehensible in French and who can only say '*Ti amo*' in Italian, I am ready to come to Italy to work with you. Ingrid Bergman." (Rossellini, 2006b: 75).

4 Although the historiographical discourse has characterised Volcano as a facsimile of Stromboli, the origin of the film is more complex. It had originally been conceived by Roberto Rossellini, who had been commissioned by Panaria Films to develop it under the provisional title *Stromboli*, and it was to be the director's fourth film starring Anna Magnani. The planned collaboration was thwarted by the director's sudden departure to the United States in response to Ingrid Bergman's famous telegram. Rossellini took the original idea of the project for his new film to be financed by Hollywood magnate Howard Hughes. Faced with this betrayal, Panaria Films, which held the production rights, decided to internationalise its own project and compete with Rossellini, securing David O'Selznick as producer and William Dieterle as director. This was how two rival films with the same premise were born.

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THE FILMS OF ANNA MAGNANI AND ROBERTO ROSSELLINI: THE *POLITIQUE D'ACTRICE* IN THE TRANSITION TO MODERNITY

Abstract

This essay analyses the films made by the actress Anna Magnani with director Roberto Rossellini from 1945 to 1950, when post-war European cinema was in the process of its transition to modernity. With reference to the three films they made together, *Rome, Open City* (Roma città aperta, Roberto Rossellini, 1945), *The Human Voice* (La voce umana, 1948) and *The Miracle* (Il miracolo, 1948), as well as criticism from the period and biographical sources, the study focuses on the impact of Magnani's performances, and particularly on the potential of her *politique d'actrice* (Moullet, 1993) to serve as a foundation for some of the innovations associated with modern cinema. Through an examination of Magnani's work from the perspective of star studies, the aim of this article is to highlight the importance of actresses to the development of the main aesthetic and dramatic transformations to the cinema of their time, as well as their role as creators of an artistic approach that transcends the films they feature in, and that can be understood as a corpus with a significance of its own. The collaboration between Magnani and Rossellini is presented as a model of balanced interaction, in contrast to the power dynamics present in the direction of actresses in the "couple films" of modern cinema. The work of both creators is interpreted as a fusion of styles arising from a desire to experiment with new ways of representing female subjectivity, motherhood, and pain—recurring themes that would shape the evolution of modern cinema and the representation of women.

Key words

Anna Magnani; Roberto Rossellini; *Politique des acteurs*; Couple films; Feminist film theory; Star studies; Modern cinema; Motherhood.

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EL CINE DE ANNA MAGNANI Y ROBERTO ROSSELLINI. LA POLÍTICA DE LA ACTRIZ EN LA TRANSICIÓN A LA MODERNIDAD

Resumen

El presente ensayo trata sobre la colaboración que la actriz Anna Magnani y el director Roberto Rossellini mantuvieron entre 1945 y 1950, años en los que se opera en el seno del cine europeo de posguerra la transición al cine moderno. Tomando como referencia el estudio de las tres películas de la pareja, *Roma ciudad abierta* (*Roma città aperta*, 1945); *La voz humana* (La voce umana, 1948) y *El milagro* (Il miracolo, 1948), la crítica de este periodo y las fuentes biográficas, el análisis se centra en el impacto de la interpretación de Magnani, y en concreto en las posibilidades de su política de actriz como eje vertebrador de algunas de las innovaciones atribuidas al cine moderno. El objetivo es destacar, a partir del caso Magnani y desde la perspectiva de los *star studies*, la importancia de las actrices en la confección de las principales mutaciones estéticas y dramáticas del cine de su tiempo, así como su condición de artífices de una propuesta artística propia que trasciende los límites de las obras que la convocan, y que puede ser comprendida como un corpus de significado autónomo. La colaboración entre Magnani y Rossellini se presenta como un modelo de interacción equilibrada, en contraste con las dinámicas de poder presentes en la dirección de actrices del cine de parejas de la modernidad. La obra de ambos se interpreta como una fusión de estilos, que se encuentra en la voluntad de experimentación con nuevas formas de representar la subjetividad femenina, la maternidad y el dolor, temas recurrentes que marcarían la evolución del cine moderno y la representación de la mujer.

Palabras clave

Anna Magnani; Roberto Rossellini; política de los actores; cine de parejas; teoría fílmica feminista; *star studies*; cine moderno; maternidad.

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LIBERATING AND RECLAIMING THE BODY IN FILMS OF THE SPANISH TRANSITION: AMPARO SOLER LEAL'S NUDE REBELLIONS, 1975 TO 1979*

VÁLERI CODESIDO-LINARES
DAVID FUENTEFRÍA RODRÍGUEZ
FRANCISCO GARCÍA GARCÍA

1. NUDES AGAINST THE WALL AND THE FIRST WINDS OF CHANGE

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Spanish cinema gave shape to an exaggerated femininity in the construction of the image of the legendary Sara Montiel. Bettetini's assertion that "it sometimes seems that the mere presence of the same star in different films can almost establish those films as a genre" (1984: 53) is clearly exemplified in the filmography of the Spanish icon who combined sensuality and tight-fitting dresses, although her characters always maintained moral standards in line with those of the Franco regime (Pérez-Méndez, 2021: 45). By the late 1960s, women's magazines had begun featuring nude or semi-nude bodies for commercial purposes, with depictions that conformed to different codes: hygienic, glamorous or hypersexualised (Payling & Loughram, 2022: 1356). Meanwhile, the number of women at Spanish universities experienced an increase on a par with the growth of the new urban class in the service sector during the country's developmentalist period.

Spain's transition to democracy was marked by the simultaneous promotion of a progressive political culture and an emerging erotic industry, particularly in the first years after Franco's death, from 1975 to 1978 (Labrador, 2020). With its newly acquired freedoms, the film production of the transition was markedly different from that of the final years of the dictatorship, as it focused precisely on questions that Franco's censors had previously repressed. In this context, the nude could be used as either a symbol of liberation or a merely ornamental element, given that a body considered beautiful can be interpreted as strictly decorative (López Betanzos, 2023). And because of the novelty of nudity on Spanish film screens, it was also highly profitable in the years of the so-called *cine del destape* (literally, "uncovered cinema"), which gave rise to a series of films

that "sometimes seemed to be the product of psychotropic effects" and that were characterised by "a focus on the individual that challenged all established norms" (Aguilar, 2012: 12). Directors known for Spanish genres such as *fantaterror* (Jorge Grau, Amando de Ossorio) began embracing the new wave of eroticism, introducing their own *destape* touches into their films, while Jesús Franco came to be associated with the exclusively Spanish "S" rating for adult films. The nude scene, as a vindication of social change, also expressed a special capacity to reconfigure socio-political conceptions by presenting vulnerability as a basis for exchange and staging intimate sites of disruption and de-identification (Eileraas, 2014: 42). In this respect, although one of the motivations behind the *destape* was to embrace social change, the term itself popularly refers to a widespread phenomenon that invaded the press, media, theatre, and especially films, which provided an excuse to show women's naked bodies, as reflected in Seguin Vergara's assertion that "the *destape* was, more than anything else, the unveiling of a part of the body of certain actresses" (2015: 72). This general definition has been endorsed both by scholars who have studied the phenomenon and by the actresses themselves (Ardanaz, 2018: 152). It would therefore be impossible to separate the exposure of the woman's naked body from the sociocultural status of women, given that "we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies; we are constituted as fields of desire and physical vulnerability, at once publicly assertive and vulnerable" (Butler, 2004: 18).

In this way, a large number of established actresses navigated the wave of eroticism and the virtual imperative of nudity during the years of the *destape*. It is worth noting that "S"-rated film stars operated quite diligently as ambassadors of the female cinematic nude in the mass media beyond the big screen. Moments such as Eva Lyberten's interview on the program *Su turno* (RTVE, 1982) or Susana Estrada baring her breasts when accepting the *Pueblo* newspaper prize from Enrique Tierno Galván in 1978 (Sanz, 2013), offer spontaneous examples of the changing times. However, during the *destape* era, a considerable number of consolidated actresses, as well as many of the new generation, also used nudity as an aesthetic-narrative element to reconfigure part of the cinematic discourse around Spain's transition to democracy. This article thus offers an analysis of the cinematic representation of women's bodies during the transition, to which actresses working at the time gave a voice, face and form in the years of the so-called "wave of eroticism". To this end, this study uses a model focusing on a *consolidated actress*, i.e. Amparo Soler Leal (25 August 1933-25 October 2013), employing textual analysis to consider the nudity of the body as a narrative-discursive element.

Soler Leal has been chosen for this study for a number of important reasons. The most obvious is age-related, as Soler Leal was a pioneer of the on-screen nude at a relatively mature age, during an advanced stage in her film career. She therefore used nudity as a discursive tool to explore questions of liberation and social criticism from the perspective of a committed activist. In fact, she made the first full frontal nude appearance in Spanish cinema, at the age of 42, in the film *La adúltera* [The Adulterer] (Roberto Bodegas, 1975), released just one month before the acclaimed *Blood and Passion* (La trastienda, Jorge Grau,

AMPARO SOLER MADE THE FIRST FULL FRONTAL NUDE APPEARANCE IN SPANISH CINEMA, AT THE AGE OF 42, IN THE FILM *LA ADÚLTERA* [THE ADULTERER] (ROBERTO BODEGAS, 1975), RELEASED JUST ONE MONTH BEFORE THE ACCLAIMED *BLOOD AND PASSION* (LA TRASTIENDA, JORGE GRAU, 1976)

1976), the film whose famous nude scene featuring María José Cantudo is often erroneously associated with this milestone. Moreover, Soler Leal also acted in many of the very few films directed by women at this time, including *Let's Go, Barbara* (¡Vámonos, Bárbara!, Cecilia Bartolomé, 1978) and the Pilar Miró films *The Cuenca Crime* (El crimen de Cuenca, 1979) and *Hablamos esta noche* [Let's Talk Tonight] (1982), portraying wives and mothers who clearly subvert some of the repressed roles she had played in the years of the dictatorship. In addition to all these achievements, and in particular to her own groundbreaking nude appearances, are the nude scenes of actresses who were perhaps less well-known during the transition but whose introduction to the big screen was also accompanied in some way by Soler Leal, in the form of daring appearances or prominent roles, in films such as *My Daughter Hildegart* (Mi hija Hildegart, Fernando Fernán-Gómez, 1977) and *Jugando a papás* [Playing Parents] (Joaquín Coll Espona, 1978).

The timeframe from 1975 to 1979 has been chosen due to the change in the cinematic discourse during this time, reflected by a marked increase in explicit sexual and/or violent content (Codesido-Linares, 2022) that reached its peak in these years. In a certain sense, the exposure of the body transcended eroticism to become a form of vindication of cultural transformation after so many years under a sexually repressive dictatorship. As Foucault argues, if sex is repressed (i.e., condemned to prohibition), symbolising it constitutes a deliberate transgression that anticipates the attainment of freedom (1978: 6), and thus the discursive exercise of sexual explicitness was to some extent an inherent feature of the transition. And although interpretations such as Colaizzi's suggest that "the magic of cinema is based on the manipulation of visual pleasure, on the coding of the erotic in the language of the patriarchal order" (2003: 340), the period analysed here may be better explained by Butler's argument that in reality "bodies never quite comply with the norms" that constrain their representation, and "it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself" (2011: 2). In this sense, as a consolidated actress during the transition, Soler Leal's progressive stance represents an illustrative, repeated and effective call-to-arms in the context of societal change.

The next section considers a potentially comprehensive model to classify the various categories of actresses who, according to the research cited above (Codesido-Linares, 2022), populated the cinematic landscape of the period, as a guide for understanding and effectively framing Soler Leal as a consolidated film star at this time.

2. TOWARDS A TAXONOMY OF THE FLESH: TYPES OF ACTRESSES DURING THE *DESTAPE* PERIOD

The approach adopted for this study considers all those actresses who provided the Spanish film scene with its bodies, faces and attitudes during the years of the *destape*, ranging from purely erotic characterisations to representations that vindicated social changes. Based on this approach, the actresses can be categorised as follows:

Consolidated actresses, with established careers including roles in films of significance for their quality, recognition and/or popularity.

Emerging actresses, including:

- Actresses of the new generation: the young faces populating the key films of the period.
- "S"-rated film stars: actresses specialising in exploitation films with sexual and/or violent content.
- Actresses/*vedettes*: actresses who alternated their film roles with revue theatre performances.

In relation to the consolidated actresses in the period studied, it can be generally asserted that "al-

though there was not yet any institutional structure for preparing women for acting careers, it was most common for actresses to begin their training in theatre companies" (Sánchez Rodríguez, 2018: 26); this was true of Aurora Bautista, for example, and of Soler Leal herself, who were among a group of actresses who had established their careers in the 1960s and then found themselves riding the new "wave of eroticism" and the practically normative presence of nude women on screen in the first years of the transition. These actresses appeared in films that included nude scenes, and often bed scenes, at the peak of the *destape* from 1975 to 1978, but subsequently avoided roles with explicitly erotic tones, turning instead to films without such content or even retiring from film acting altogether. On the other hand, very specific instances of nude images would mark important milestones of the *destape* phenomenon: "The case of [Spanish singer and film star] Marisol, who appeared nude in *Interviú* in September 1976, made the whole of Spain (the magazine sold a million copies) aware that a change really was happening" (Bassa & Freixas, 1996: 115). The films of the period would reinforce new directions, from Concha Velasco in *Yo soy Fulana de Tal* [I Am So-and-So] (Pedro Lazaga, 1975) and *Libertad provisional* [Parole] (Roberto Bodegas, 1976), to Rocío Dúrcal's participation in *Me siento extraña* [I Feel Weird] (Enrique Martí Maqueda, 1977), among others that would contribute to consolidating the movement.

The second category covers emerging actresses, who are in turn divided into three main subcategories: the new generation, "S"-rated film stars, and *vedette*-actresses working in both film and revue theatre. Actresses of the new generation first appeared during the period of the transition to democracy and appeared nude on screen in many, or even most, of the roles they played in films that were political, dissident, or at least associated with the so-called *tercera vía* (third way) of films that engaged more subtly with the social changes occurring in the country. These artists gave a new face to a more open national film tradition whose storylines would evolve into the cinema of democratic Spain, in which the female body would to some extent be represented "as an allegory of the body of the nation" (Morcillo Gómez, 2015: 153): desired, discovered and gradually reclaimed. Obvious examples include Ángela Molina in *Black Litter* (Camada negra, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1978) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (Ese oscuro objecto del deseo, Luis Buñuel, 1978), Inma de Santis in *Forbidden Love Game* (Juego de amor prohibido, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1975), Ana Belén in *The Request* (La petición, Pilar Miró, 1976) and *The Creature* (La criatura, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), Fiorella Faltoyano in *Unfinished Business* (Asunto pendiente, José Luis Garci, 1977), and Emma Coen in *Alone in the Dark* (Solos en la madrugada, José Luis Garci, 1978). Beyond the novelty of exposed flesh, the roles they play differ markedly from the characters in films made during the Franco regime's developmentalist period, as they represent the rebellion of the youth of the time and reflect the sociocultural changes taking place, among other aspects.

However, among these emerging actresses, there were a number who began their careers during the transition starring exclusively or mostly in films assigned the Spanish film industry's "S" rating (for adults only). The discourse of this erotic cinema, which tended to revel in female sexuality, served essentially as entertainment, although it is often recognised as having a kind of political patina. For example, Vázquez Montalbán suggests these films explore "the feminisation of the transition process, the metaphorical equation of censorship with a corset which, when torn off, exposes both the physical bodies and the realities of political life" (Marí, 2007: 129). This suggestion has been challenged with various arguments, including debates over whether

> the democratising power of obscene discourse should be understood essentially—in a consumer society—as the possibility of "everyone" (meaning

> adult males, or any male with his female partner) having access to sexual commodities and "perversions" formerly reserved for a male elite who enjoyed them in secret. (Peña Ardid, 2015: 110)

In any case, this debate can benefit from the analysis of specific contexts, such as the ones explored here.

The third subcategory of emerging actresses proposed here is comprised of performers who also worked in revue theatre during the years of the transition. These *vedettes* would play film roles that required more physicality than acting skills, given the importance of the body and face to the *destape* phenomenon. Examples include Bárbara Rey, Esperanza Roy and María José Cantudo. This subcategory could also include other charismatic and physically attractive performers who combined acting with a strong public presence in other fields of the arts and/or the media, such as the film star and TV presenter Ágata Lys or the actress and model Teresa Gimpera.

The categorisation proposed above considers the diversity of the actresses working during the period and the significance of those at the forefront of the *destape*, such as "S"-rated film actresses, although it is important to consider milestones of relevance to consolidated actresses and how they supported the new spirit introduced by the emerging actresses of the new generation. While this "map" offers opportunities for a wide and diverse range of lines of research, this analysis focuses on a selection of key discourses in the filmography of the consolidated actress Amparo Soler Leal, specifically in the films *La adúltera*, *Let's Go, Barbara,* and *The Cuenca Crime*.

3. RECLAIMING THE BODY, THE "HAPPY NUDE", LIBERTARIAN AGITATION

The film medium articulates reality through "the selection and combination of real profilmic objects or events in reality (faces, landscapes, gestures, etc.) in each shot" (De Lauretis, 1984: 41-42). According to Mulvey, however, the self-satisfaction and egotism that have characterised the high point of film history until recent times need to be challenged, making way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude (in this case) of eroticism in cinema. The alternative is "the thrill that comes with leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire" (2006: 344). In this sense, Soler Leal constitutes a perfectly representative example of the Spanish actresses whose popularity in the 1960s led to their being "chosen to travel the world as ambassadors of the ideals of a nation through their image, their attitude, or their professional experience" (Sánchez Rodríguez, 2018: 26), especially after the end of a dictatorship for whose values she had once served as a standard bearer, which unquestionably placed her in an ideal position to encapsulate the evolution of both processes.

Indeed, in 1962 Soler Leal had played Mercedes, the selfless mother of an oversized family in Fernando Palacio's propaganda film *La gran familia* [The Great Family]. In this film, she is depicted "as the absolute queen of the home, where she has authority over all the emotional tasks, while her husband is in charge of the economic affairs" (Sánchez Rodríguez, 2013: 83) in "a succession of little stories about married life" (González Manrique, 2008: 7) that never offer the slightest hint of any realistic problems. Some scholars even argue that "the concept of the traditional woman as a wife and mother, as dictated by the women's branch of the Falange, is illustrated to perfection in the film" (Sánchez Rodríguez, 2013: 83). There are certainly very few references to Mercedes's feelings, except when her youngest child goes missing for a few hours.

During Spain's transition to democracy, however, Soler Leal began a new stage in her career, specialising in strong-willed, obstinate female characters who bore little resemblance to the

depictions of women imposed by the regime. In this new phase, the questioning of the traditional family, the emergence of a sexuality previously silenced by the dictatorship, and an intense dispute over the limits of home and motherhood would result in a 180-degree turn in the construction, development and perception of Soler Leal's filmography. The significance of this new direction—marked, it must be remembered, by the added factor of her maturity—is evident above all in the innovative nature of her characters in intrapersonal terms, and particularly in their relationships with loved ones in the story (almost always husbands and children). For example, while during the Franco regime she had served to personify its rigid values in *La gran familia*, years later she would give the same personification a recalcitrant twist, as an expression of liberation when those same values are torn down.

Having acted in several comedies in the 1960s and 1970s, Soler Leal would begin appearing in more progressive films associated with the aforementioned *tercera vía*, such as *El amor del Captain Brando* [The Love of Captain Brando] (1974) or *¡Jo, papá!* (1975), both directed by Jaime de Armiñán. In each of these two films, "the only character who seems to have evolved is Amparo Soler Leal's, since she begins, in the second film, to change her behaviour in an effort to understand the opportunities offered by the new era" (Asión Suñer, 2019). However, it is worth focusing on the films where this fully liberated discursive "happy nude" motif that characterises her work in this period is more richly expressed. The first of these is *La adúltera*, a Spanish-French co-production directed by the *tercera vía* filmmaker Roberto Bodegas, which was released in the year of Francisco Franco's death. In this case, it is important to note that this was a period when films by women filmmakers were rare, although "the analysis of these films shows that male directors at this time of the transition, although not as forcefully and perhaps more incidentally, also constructed female characters who were liberated and progressive images of Spanish women" (Guarinos, 2015: 13).

Split into short segments introduced by titles to give the impression of a gradual progression, the film follows Magdalena (Soler Leal), a traditional woman of a well-to-do background, who marries an emotionally repressed language teacher, Lucien (Rufus Narcy), whom she meets after an absurdly scatological and allegorically significant episode involving his mother, Simone (Tsilla Chelton). Initially introduced as the romantic hero, Lucien turns out in fact to be a former Nazi collaborator.

In a cold and controlled marriage almost completely bereft of intimacy, Magdalena feels trapped and neglected, thwarted not only in her desire to become a mother (which Lucien regulates according to a strict calendar) but also in her open need for pleasure. With a fashionable nod to the "art and essay film", the marital scuffles and humiliations take place in a bedroom that is completely red, perhaps a Spanish parody of the setting in *Cries and Whispers* (Ingmar Bergman, 1972), which was still a highly influential work at that time. In any case, the film serves to document how, in the era depicted, "housewives, in particular, have a degree of room to move and do not assume their role uncritically; rather, they mould their ideals and their material reality to their daily needs, their dreams and their real lives" (Navarro Martín, 2024: 172). Magdalena soon starts looking for affection and freedom outside the home, while the film deploys

WHILE DURING THE FRANCO REGIME SOLER LEAL HAD SERVED TO PERSONIFY ITS RIGID VALUES IN *LA GRAN FAMILIA,* YEARS LATER SHE WOULD GIVE THE SAME PERSONIFICATION A RECALCITRANT TWIST, AS AN EXPRESSION OF LIBERATION WHEN THOSE SAME VALUES ARE TORN DOWN

Image 1. Still-frame from *La adúltera*

(with varying degrees of effectiveness) a whole range of symbolic allusions to the "happy nude" of the liberated woman. A *pasodoble* plays when the baker (Francisco Cecilio) appears on screen, and a phallic correlation is established (similar to the vulgar prologues typical of "S"-rated films) every time the couple delivers or handles baguettes. On the other hand, in the case of the pharmacist, Belluga (José Luis Coll), Magdalena submits to a torrid aborted romance that includes everything from clumsy expressions of affection evoking the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez to direct tributes to the woman's desired body, before the suitor ends up dying at the decisive moment from a sudden heart attack, dressed only in leopard-skin underwear. Even before his death, with her sexual desire at its peak, Magdalena eats one of the baguettes from the attractive baker with some delicious beluga caviar given to her by the pharmacist as a kind of oral compensation, combined with fantasies, her sex drive still unsatisfied (Image 1)

In the end, what began as a fleeting alleviation of her attraction to the bread delivery man ends with Magdalena taking him as a lover, after he helps her dispose of Belluga's corpse, finally challenging the norms imposed by her husband and mother-in-law. The final scene, which depicts the intimate encounter between Magdalena and the bread delivery man, shows him slowly removing her clothes in the bedroom until she is completely naked, for the first and only time—as a final liberation, as noted above—in the film (Image 2).

The character's maturity offers a different kind of eroticism, not as wild as most contemporaneous examples, yet with considerable power. Her rebellion fulfils the objective of "resignifying female sexuality, because in the context of improper behaviour, women are able to unveil their subjectivity. The woman represented in attitudes contrary to those expected by society tears down the imaginary of the fragile woman" (López Betanzos, 2022: 9). The protagonist's nudity at the end of the film offers an image of vulnerability as well as desirability. As noted above, it is also the first full frontal nude shot in Spanish cinema, which in turn suggests that in the chronology of the *destape* it is not so much the bold explicitness that has gone down in history, but a certain feminine aesthetic that involves a character and body type commonly represented by young women, often with a lack of autonomous power.

4. THE BODY OF THE "NEW REGIME", MOTHERHOOD AS TERRITORY OF REBELLION

The second iconic film featuring the liberated Soler Leal, which shows "her character always ready, restless and willing to take on all kinds of challenges" (Arias González, 2013: 306), in addition to being significant for the way it reclaims the female body to trigger a break with tradition, is *Let's Go, Barbara*. In fact, this film begins with Ana (Soler Leal) making love with a co-worker for whom

Image 2. Still-frame from *La adúltera*

she has no feelings at all. Immediately after this, she decides to break up with her husband on the phone, in a scene broken up by recurring inserted shots of photographs depicting her past life: standard snapshots of marriage and child-rearing very deliberately in black and white. Ana and her pre-teen daughter, Bárbara (Cristina Álvarez), then embark on a trip that turns the film into a kind of road movie, which will serve Bartolomé to articulate its discourse through the various stops on their journey. In this way, the director offers both a positive picture of the future—Bárbara displays a precocious maturity, and Ana speaks and acts with her in a way that openly expresses a "new" approach to motherhood—and a respect for traditional female family ties, embodied, for example, in the character of Aunt Remedios (Josefina Tapias). Despite this solid foundation, however, the filmmaker's desire to push boundaries leads her to include nude scenes not only of the mature woman, but also of teenagers and preteens, with segments suggesting rites of passage such as the scene featuring Bárbara herself naked from the waist up while skinning a rabbit. Nevertheless, the main break with convention related to the unclothed body—and the main manifestation of the "happy nude" motif discussed here—is openly declared at one specific moment: when Ana, dancing with only a pair of Spanish shawls covering her, suffers a shock when she accidentally exposes herself to a group of foreign visitors (Image 3). The scene, presented in a brief but daring medium-long shot, is a clear subversion of the folkloric archetypes embodied by the divas of the dictatorship and a transgressive epitome of the regime's hegemonic "spicy" comedies aimed at promoting tourism. It is also in this embarrassing moment that Ana meets Iván (Iván Tubau), who in the scenes that follow will lead her to confront a whole series of new decisions about how to clothe, display or surrender her body, before she leaves him behind to avoid returning to the old ways that once oppressed her.

In keeping both with the film's opening sequence and with much contemporary feminist cinema, the masculinity portrayed in *Let's Go, Barbara* has no place in the context that is reconfigured, liberated and claimed by Ana's body. For the spectator of the era, the actress's reclaimed body offers a discourse of discovery that is both original and intelligible. For the spectator today, the film retains its satire of the vulnerable femininity of the Franco era and its call for a singular authenticity in a world full of prejudices and expectations.

It is worth noting one final form of rebellion, also related to motherhood, as expressed in the third of the films analysed here, *The Cuenca Crime*, in which Soler Leal plays a desperate rural working-class mother forced to carry all the responsibility for her family when her husband, León (José Manuel Cervino), is arrested and imprisoned. In the scene of the prison visit, León,

Image 3. Still-frame from *Let's Go, Barbara*

Image 4. Still-frame from *The Cuenca Crime*

who has been tortured and deprived of food and water, lunges at her violently and tries to suck some kind of nourishment from her breasts (Image 4), completely dismantling, both figuratively and ideologically, the traditional image of the smiling, carefree mother that she once embodied, in accordance with the old norms of the Franco regime that defined *La gran familia*.

This is the product of Miró's presentation of a vulnerable and violated motherhood and a mother at the head of an impoverished family persecuted by power. Although Chevalier and Gheerbrant identify a return to the primordial condition as one of the various symbolic meanings of female nudity (2007: 412), Soler Leal's body in this film is highlighted for its ability to provide mother's milk, for which her character is assaulted. The encounter with her tortured spouse thus turns into a demand for emotional and physical nourishment, at an extreme moment for a devastated couple no longer able to provide mutual support.

As Gorfinkel suggests, the political economics of cinema may have had an especially powerful influence on its aesthetic aims (2012: 82) in a decade in which mainstream cinema and the exploitation film became intertwined. As a result, explicit sexual and violent content experienced an increase in films made toward the end of the 1970s both in Spain and internationally. In this context, Miró's film would become a milestone in the construction of a raw, rebellious discourse with extraordinary rhetorical force.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The open categorisation proposed here for actresses active during the *destape* era of Spanish cinema serves to organise and classify the general configurations of the phenomenon in relation to the work of the film stars who brought it to life. It should be noted, in any case, that nudity is only truly nudity when it is visible, and its meaning would be defined by its voluntary nature or vulnerability. In this sense, Spain's transition to democracy was an especially sensitive and productive period for the configuration of nudity, especially in the case of women.

CINEMA THUS SERVES AS A PATHWAY TOWARDS RECLAIMING AND VINDICATING THE BODY, PROPOSING A DISCOURSE WHICH, ALTHOUGH MAINLY CRITICAL, IS ALSO CONSTRUCTIVE

In the films of this key period in Spanish cinema, although nudity may be variously classified as functional, spectacular, erotic (inscribed in desire), unwitting self-exposure or victimisation, in *La adúltera* and *Let's Go, Barbara* the body is presented as an essential site to be reclaimed and affirmed. In *The Cuenca Crime,* on the other hand, nudity is associated with need and violation, marking an extremely unique case of the representation of the body while at the same time exposing the context of abuse and humiliation involved in practices of torture.

Moreover, in all of the films analysed here, Amparo Soler Leal's nude scenes constitute a reclaiming of the body based on sensuality and sexuality, as well as in functional and maternal terms. This would ultimately make it possible to expose the limitations imposed by the models of femininity, eroticism and motherhood established under the Franco dictatorship. It is also particularly interesting that in the films analysed the body is not only a product of political constructions but also an agent that generates and transforms the political dimension. Based on this analysis of Amparo Soler Leal's on-screen performances, especially taking into account her status as a consolidated actress, two inferences can be made: (1) her representations of nudity, associated with the eroticism of personal vindication, are symbolically dignified; and (2) a significant theoretical and argumentative evolution characterised the films of the period as a result.

Cinema thus serves as a pathway towards reclaiming and vindicating the body, proposing a discourse which, although mainly critical, is also constructive in the senses described above, given the predominance of an orientation towards the formation of a social concept around the reclaimed female body, which was gradually established during this period. In this context, the consistency of Soler Leal's nude scenes stand out above other more superficial cases (such as the case of María José Cantudo's physicality) for their significance and depth.

Along the same lines, it could be argued that films directed by women reconfigure the representation of nudity, especially in this era, moving away from its traditional erotic instrumentalisation to explore new dimensions of identity, power and vulnerability. In contrast to previous film traditions, where the female nude tended to be inscribed within the parameters of male desire or moral transgression, women directors have proposed storylines in which the body is shown from a female perspective, with a consciousness of nudity as a vindication of social changes or as a reflection of its relationship with pleasure, intimacy and oppression. Films such as *Let's Go, Barbara* present an affirmed and liberated body, while in *The Cuenca Crime*, nudity is associated with need and violence. In this way, women directors have expanded the categorisation of nudity, incorporating perspectives that challenge traditional perceptions while at the same time resignifying them in a narrative of self-knowledge and resistance, in line with parallel discourses like the one articulated in *La adúltera*.

The result, in short, is a liberating cinematic discourse reflecting the Spanish social reality and, in a way, foreshadowing fundamental changes to the vision and understanding of the female body and in the antiquated social and cultural approach to it during the years of the dictatorship. Indeed, as effective instruments of this liberation, cinematic discourses fed into reality and desire, words and deeds, to the point that the nude scenes themselves, embedded in such discourses, constituted events of considerable cultural impact.

NOTES

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LIBERATING AND RECLAIMING THE BODY IN FILMS OF THE SPANISH TRANSITION: AMPARO SOLER LEAL'S NUDE REBELLIONS, 1975 TO 1979

Abstract

Nudity in cinema during the Spanish transition to democracy became a key device for reflections on identity and the female body from diverse perspectives. This article analyses the discursive potential of Amparo Soler Leal's nude scenes in films made from 1975 to 1979, as a tool for reclaiming personal freedom and vindicating sociopolitical change. At the age of 42, Soler Leal made the first full frontal nude appearance in Spanish cinema (a milestone often erroneously attributed to María José Cantudo in *Blood and Passion*) and explored introspective representations and vindications of the body in films such as *La adúltera* and *Let's Go, Barbara* in a context where the body emerged as a vehicle for reflecting on existence and society. This article evaluates her contributions in relation to a prior categorisation of actresses active in the period, highlighting how Soler Leal, as a consolidated actress, served as a precursor and agent of transformation during a time of profound cultural and political change in Spain.

Key words

Spanish transition; Amparo Soler Leal; *Destape*; Nude body; Spanish Cinema.

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LIBERACIÓN Y REAPROPIACIÓN CORPORAL EN EL CINE DE LA TRANSICIÓN: INSURGENCIAS DESNUDAS DE AMPARO SOLER LEAL ENTRE 1975 Y 1979

Resumen

El desnudo en el cine durante la Transición española se convirtió en un medio clave para reflexionar sobre la identidad y el cuerpo femenino desde diversas perspectivas. Esta investigación analiza el potencial discursivo de los desnudos de Amparo Soler Leal, entre 1975 y 1979, como herramienta para la reapropiación de la libertad personal y el cambio sociopolítico. Protagonista, a los 42 años, del primer desnudo integral frontal en el cine español —habitualmente asociado a *La trastienda*—, Soler Leal exploró, en películas como *La adúltera* (Roberto Bodegas, 1975) y *¡Vámonos, Bárbara!* (Cecilia Bartolomé, 1978), representaciones introspectivas y reivindicativas de la corporeidad, dentro de un contexto en el que el cuerpo se inaugura como vehículo para reflexionar sobre la existencia y el entorno social. Este artículo evalúa sus aportaciones en relación con una categorización previa de las actrices del período y evidencia el modo en que Soler Leal, como actriz consagrada, actuó como agente anticipatorio y de transformación, en un momento de profundos cambios culturales y políticos para España.

Palabras clave

Transición española; Amparo Soler Leal; Destape; Cuerpo desnudo; Cine español.

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LINA ROMAY AND THE UNFOLDED BODY BETWEEN *PLAISIR À TROIS* AND *GEMIDOS DE PLACER*

ÁLEX MENDÍBIL

In Spanish fringe cinema and international cult films, Lina Romay stands out as a prominent figure for her long association with the director Jess Franco. Her career, inseparably linked to Franco's filmography, positioned her as a constant and significant presence in his work not only as an actress but also as a co-creator of a cinematic style that operated outside the conventional codes of both mainstream cinema and the B film industry. Her performances in Franco's films are characterised by the exposure of her body and by an attitude that contributed to the creation of a cinematic imaginary defined by formal and thematic transgression and the expression of a personal aesthetic that eschewed the hegemonic models of representation.

Lina Romay (born Rosa María Almirall in 1954 in Barcelona and passing away in 2012 in Málaga) began her acting career in Catalan amateur theatre at a time when Spain was beginning to embrace a modernity that would gradually undermine the Franco dictatorship. It was during this period in the early 1970s that she met Jess Franco, with whom she would share a prolific filmography spanning over a hundred films, as well as a life-long creative and personal partnership. In titles such as *Female Vampire* (La comtesse noire, 1973), Lina cemented her status as one of the faces of the erotic cinema of the era, achieving international prominence and prefiguring Spain's *cine de destape* movement.

Her iconic assertion that "I only wear clothes when the script requires it" (Valencia, 1999, p. 101), frequently recalled in interviews, encapsulates her dedication to acting and her understanding of cinema as a space for freedom. Unlike other figures of the *cine de destape* who cultivated their public image as an extension of their suc-

cess on screen, Lina kept her personal life private, with a discretion that clearly marked a boundary between her acting work and her identity off-camera. This contrast, far from diminishing her impact, reinforced her on-screen appeal, where every gesture seemed to contain an innate and essentially cinematic force. Romay was not merely a muse, as has often been asserted, or an icon at the service of Jess Franco's gaze; she was the central axis of the stories he told and the discourse he constructed.

> Jess Franco's films are sites of female pleasure, offering enjoyment to the female spectator as much as to the male spectator, and the fluidity and oscillations of his narrative opens space for the exploration of the fundamental instability of identifications along lines of gender, sex, and sexual preference. Thus, Jess Franco prefigures contemporary feminist reworking of "the assumption that the sexes are what they seem; that screen males represent the Male and screen females the Female". (Pavlovic, 2003: 119)

It can be argued that Lina Romay embodied the fluidity described by Pavlovic with a singular naturalness and physicality. Her body simultaneously exhibited, narrated and vindicated identities that escaped the most reductive gazes. Her work, marked by irony, ambiguity and an unusual freedom, charted a shift in the female body's relationship with power and desire capable of deconstructing and reinventing both the classical male gaze and the concepts of nudity and nakedness developed by John Berger, who distinguishes between the body displayed in its authenticity and the body transformed into an object by the gaze of the Other: "Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display" (Berger, 1977: 54). Through her body, Lina Romay succeeded in revealing herself, transcending the classical exhibitionism subservient to the fetishistic male gaze to establish herself as the owner and agent of her nakedness, making it an indissoluble part of her performative identity.

BODIES, LONG TAKES AND LAYERS

This article explores how Lina Romay embodies the idea of an "unfolded body", inspired by a concept initially developed by Rebecca Schneider in her analysis of feminist performers. Schneider coined the term "explicit body" to describe the ways these artists use their gestures and bodies to construct a stage presence that accumulates layers of meaning and makes visible historical issues of gender, race, class, age or sexuality. This idea is applied here to examine what Lina Romay represents in Jess Franco's work, given that her presence also marked a decisive shift in his filmography in parallel with transformations taking place in both the cinema of his time and the social and political landscape of the country.

> Interestingly, the words "explicit" and "explicate" stem from the Latin *explicare*, which means "to unfold". Unfolding the body, as if pulling back velvet curtains to expose a stage [...]. Peeling at signification, bringing ghosts to visibility, they are interested to expose not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves. (Schneider, 1997: 14)

For Schneider, "ghosts" are sociocultural elements, bodiless historical signifiers that need to possess a body to become visible so that they can be confronted and questioned. Linda Williams asserts that escapist forms of entertainment seem to distract audiences from these social or political problems, yet to do so effectively, they must bring to the surface those layers charged with the audience's real concerns and experiences. She uses the example of pornographic cinema, which reveals the ghosts of sexual differences more directly than any other form of mass entertainment. Williams refers to this as a utopian function of entertainment that "only plays with those fires that the dominant power structure—capitalism (and patriarchy)—can put out. And so the problems that mass entertainment tends to avoid are usually

LINA ROMAY DOESN'T JUST INHABIT THESE IMAGES; SHE STRUCTURES THEM THROUGH HER PHYSICALITY, BECOMING A KIND OF INTERFACE CONNECTING VISUAL, TEMPORAL AND NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

those most stubborn and fundamental problems of class, sex and race" (Williams, 1989: 155).

This study takes up the idea of the *unfolding* body pointed out by Schneider, rather than the merely *explicit* body, because of its conceptual connection to one of the most characteristic strategies of Jess Franco's cinematic discourse: long takes or sequence shots. Deleuze related the sequence shot technique to the idea of *unfolding* a fabric, "as in a weaving process producing an infinitely long tapestry" (Deleuze, 2001b: 200). The spectator is thus positioned in front of a fabric of relationships upon which a mental image seamlessly unfolds. Deleuze argues that meaning in the narrative stems primarily from the relationships revealed by the camera movements and the characters' movements towards the camera, rather than from their individual actions, perceptions or emotions. The "unfolded body" is therefore discussed here as an expansion of Schneider's "explicit body" to include this technical question of representation, as the bearer of the mental image pointed to by Deleuze.

In contrast to a body that conceals folds and layers beneath its surface, Romay's body is presented as open terrain, a continuous expanse that aims for no inner revelations but instead transforms its exteriority into the axis of action and enunciation. In Franco's films, the use of long takes or sequence shots reinforces this unfolding, avoiding the fetishistic fragmentation of traditional editing and crafting a narrative that flows in correspondence with the body on screen. As a result, Lina Romay doesn't just inhabit these images; she structures them through her physicality, liberated from the male gaze to take possession of both her body and the enunciation. Her body, unfolded in the action and in the framing, thus becomes a canvas where new female subjectivities emerge.

To understand how Jess Franco deploys the sequence shot in alignment with Lina Romay's body, it is useful to consider his work in dialogue with Alfred Hitchock's *Rope* (1948). With this film, Hitchcock sought to achieve the illusion of the temporal continuity of the theatre through shots of long duration, replacing the classical rules of editing with a dynamic reframing that keeps the spectator immersed in a constant flow of tension and action. As Jacques Aumont notes, this camera movement conditions the freedom of choice that Bazin originally attributed to the sequence shot. Aumont observes that this freedom is limited when the sequence shot is in constant motion. The spectator "is taken by the hand, made to see the elements of the action one by one, and in most cases, accompanied by a touch of expressiveness (especially speed)" (Aumont, 2020: 54-55).

An analysis of the first major sequence shot in *Rope* can shed light on what Jess Franco attempts with his uninterrupted takes, which are obviously more precariously executed but filled with equally powerful mental images. In the sequence, two libertine characters with clear Sadean leanings (crime as a libidinal impulse reserved for the privileged) reveal through their gestures and glances invisible and unspeakable relationships that the choreography of the camera brings to the surface. Coursodon (2004) argues that fetishism in *Rope* thus relies not on the figure of Hitchcock's traditional blonde heroine but on the masterful movement of the camera. It is a technical fetishism that becomes the true object of desire. The sequence shot as fetish also generates a tension similar to sexual desire: the concentration and anticipation elicited by long takes produce a prolonged excitation, similar to the way the masochist delays ple-

asure in order to intensify it, as Deleuze explains in his book on Sacher-Masoch (2001a: 74). This reveals how the sequence shot facilitates a fetishism that is no longer merely technical but becomes a form of desire expressed through the control of the camera and the duration of the shot, shaping the spectator's mental image.

This article focuses on *Plaisir à trois* [Pleasure for Three] (1973) and *Gemidos de placer* [Cries of Pleasure] (1982) for their importance in the filmographies of both Lina Romay and Jess Franco and the examples they offer of the use of the sequence shot as a central device in Franco's work. Moreover, the gap of nearly ten years between the two films makes them useful to illustrate Romay's evolution as both an actress and a character over a time when her professional and personal relationship with Franco was being consolidated, while also reflecting the sociopolitical changes that Spain underwent during its transition to democracy. *Plaisir à trois*, rejected by producer José María Forqué for its explicit content and filmed exclusively with foreign financing and participation, demonstrates the reality of a type of cinema that had to operate outside the borders of the Franco regime to explore themes forbidden by the censors. In contrast, *Gemidos de placer*, considered a remake of *Plaisir à trois* ten years later, received an "S" classification,[1] the popular category established after the end of censorship in Spain. This classification not only replaced censorship bans but also effectively promoted films capable of shocking viewers, confronting them with images until then inconceivable on the country's screens. While *Plaisir à trois* reflects a moment of repression and creative exile, *Gemidos de placer* signals the introduction of filmmaking without restrictions, where the sensory and emotional assault on the viewer becomes not merely a means but an end.

Image 1. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)

PLAISIR À TROIS AND THE INITIATION OF LINA ROMAY

Martine de Bressac (Alice Arno) returns to her mansion after spending months in a psychiatric hospital for castrating a lover. She is reunited there with her husband, Charles Bressac (Robert Woods), with whom she shares a morbid fascination with torture and murder, turning their victims' bodies into wax figures and storing them in their basement. The couple soon sets their sights on Cecilia (Tania Busselier), an innocent young woman who is the daughter of a diplomat. As Cecilia is drawn into their erotic games, Martine's plans take an unexpected turn: Charles, in collusion with Cecilia and the servant Adele (Lina Romay), betrays his wife, paralysing her with poison and turning her into another wax figure. The film concludes with Charles, Cecilia and Adele leaving the mansion to begin a new life as a trio.

Plaisir à trois marks Lina Romay's first significant role after brief appearances in other Jess Franco productions. Although she plays only a supporting

role as a mute, intellectually disabled servant, the context of her selection for the part is significant. Jess Franco had recently lost Soledad Miranda, whose tragic death left a void that was hard to fill in his films. Miranda, an emerging star and a regular fixture on the covers of celebrity magazines of the time, achieved iconic status thanks to her performance in *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), one of the director's most celebrated films. Franco needed a replacement capable of taking up that legacy and adapting it to a rapidly evolving cinematic universe.

Image 2. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)

The scene of Lina Romay dancing with a mannequin in *Plaisir à trois* thus stands out as a moment loaded with symbolism [IMAGE 1]. This segment, where Romay's body begins to unfold timidly in an intimate, delirious choreography, intentionally echoes the emblematic scene of Soledad Miranda dancing with a mannequin in *Vampyros Lesbos*. While Miranda's dance represented an affirmation of desire and mystery, Romay's attempt is clumsy and fearful, in keeping with the inexperienced young character she plays. However, it is also a performance layered with connections between the actress's body, her character, and the director's gaze as he has her try out the dance that made her predecessor famous. This ghostly echo, as Schneider might call it, establishes a link between Miranda and Romay and initiates the transition towards a new stage in Franco's filmography, where Lina would define her own identity.

Jess Franco spoke of this connection with Lina Romay: "She's a bit of a reincarnation of Soledad Miranda, and I mean that seriously. A bit of a reincarnation, though not entirely, because she has gradually acquired a completely different personality, becoming independent as an actress" (Aguilar, 1991: 50). In *Plaisir à trois*, Romay's character has the quality of a figure still under construction: a promising young woman invited to a casting call to determine whether she could replace Soledad Miranda. Lina seems to be trying out her power to seduce, lacking the star magnetism that defined Miranda but offering instead a rawer and more vulnerable presence. Her amateur performance still represents that objectified and conventionalised nudity, the costume display described by Berger (1977: 54). This small role of a mute and submissive maid in *Plaisir à trois* is a curious foreshadowing of what some authors call the *vulgarisation* of Jess Franco's filmography, pointing to Lina Romay's body as the direct cause.

In Jess Franco's films, the long camera takes are understood to be primarily a matter of budget, a way to extract an abundance of footage out of a single prepared scene. The same applies to his frequent use of the zoom: "if I use it so much, it's because I can't afford a dolly or don't have time to perfect a camera move. So I zoom like a madman" (Petit, 2015: 212). While they cannot be equated with the stylistic virtuosity evident in *Rope*, Franco's long, imperfect takes function as a mechanism of narrative and visual tension that should be considered in relation to Coursodon's and De-

leuze's notions of suspension and the dilation of time. These devices are thus essential elements of Franco's cinematic discourse. Ultimately, it is language that triggers and drives desire, as Barthes said of Sade: "The only Sadean universe is the universe of discourse" (1997: 48). In *Plaisir à trois*, the suspension of time reflects the dynamics of voyeurism and submission that dominate the plot, where the camera's insistence on not cutting evokes both the object of desire and the agent who delays its gratification.

Lina Romay's role in this sequence depicting the Bressacs' voyeurism is doubly peculiar [IMAGE 2]. On the one hand, she plays the typical Sadean scapegoat (Barthes, 1997: 36), the innocent victim at the service of the libertines. However, Jess Franco positions her as an observer of the sadistic voyeurs watching their victim. Lina is the one who watches the watchers, effectively identifying her with the audience. It is no accident that when the camera moves between Romay and the voyeurs there is always a mirror mediating the scene: first reflecting the voyeurs and later, when the shot is repeated, reflecting Romay unsuccessfully trying to apply lipstick like her mistress [IMAGE 3]. This game of mirrors between narrators and narratees is characteristic of Jess Franco's filmography, serving as a vehicle for humour, irony and even self-criticism in his work, such as when the voyeuristic murderess (Alice Arno) disparages and insults her victim merely for masturbating in the privacy of her bedroom and later whips Romay as a reward for her service. With these absurdities, Franco delights in parodying the double standards of the censors and the repressed, like the character he himself played in *El sádico de Notre Dame* [The Sadist of Notre Dame] (1979).

Barely 18 or 19 years of age when *Plaisir à trois* was filmed, Romay's youth imbues her performance with caricaturesque and exaggerated gestures, her body seeming not so much to act as to expose her inexperience with desire and sexuality. The silence of her character further accentuates this quality, *unfolding* her body as her primary means of expression. Every nervous gesture, every glance, seems to betray an unsettling unawareness of her surroundings, reflecting the vulnerability of a society in transition. "In my first film, *Relax Baby*, as we were saying earlier, I was already naked on the second day of shooting, and I didn't do it before that because I wasn't 18 yet, and in those days it would have been a bit too much" (Valencia, 1999: 101). This unfolded body of the naive young woman and the long camera takes exposing her clumsiness and insecurity resonate with some of the "ghosts" of 1970s Spain, which still clung to the image of the young woman trapped between the weight of traditional morality and the promise of freedom. Romay herself had to marry her then-boyfriend, Ramón Ardid, to be able to travel with him before turning 21, the age of majority at the time (Collins and Greaves, 1996: 37).

But this role was about to change. By the end of *Plaisir à trois*, we find the young servant colluding in the betrayal of her mistress by her husband and his victim. She does not seem to fully comprehend what she has done, but her fascinated gaze at the lifeless body of her oppressor finds an echo by her character's actions in *Gemidos de placer*, which involves a similar betrayal, albeit from a different position as a character and as an actress, and in a completely new sociopolitical environment.

GEMIDOS DE PLACER: LINA ROMAY TAKES CENTRE STAGE

Antonio (Antonio Mayans) invites Julia (Lina Romay) to spend the weekend at his coastal villa. The place is managed by Marta (Elisa Vela), a young woman of African descent, and Fenouil (Juan Soler), a dim-witted servant fond of playing the guitar. Antonio plots with Julia to get rid of his wife, Martina, who has just been discharged from a psychiatric clinic. However, Marta beco-

mes the first victim of the couple's criminal instincts. Eventually, a conspiracy hatched in the clinic between Julia and Martina against Antonio is revealed, culminating in the women strangling him and throwing his lifeless body into the pool.

After a decade of creative exile across France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, Jess Franco and Lina Romay returned to Spain in the late 1970s with the momentum of two artists who had forged a distinctive style entirely on their own terms. Between 1973 and 1982, Franco and Romay had made nearly 50 films, maintaining a frenetic pace that allowed them to develop a unique aesthetic and methodology while surviving in circuits constrained by fast, low-budget production. During this period, Lina transitioned from fledgling actress to the cornerstone of Franco's work, imprinting her presence on a new, more explicit and carnal stage in his filmography. Their return to Spain during the country's transition to democracy marked a turning point for both, as they found in the new cultural openness and the end of censorship a space to continue exploring and pushing boundaries.

"There is no doubt that *Gemidos de placer* would have horrified Spanish and French censors of the 60s-70s. The movie is a testament to the evident societal evolution of morals in early eighties Spain" (Petit, 2015: 326). A decade or more ahead of Spain's *cine de destape*, Jess Franco and Lina Romay were already eschewing the stereotypes and banalities that characterised much Spanish cinema of the time. Their films approached sexual liberation from a perspective free of prejudices, rejecting sexist or patriarchal attitudes. This approach lent their work a maturity that transcended the provocative or purely commercial tendencies that most S-rated films got bogged down in.

Gemidos de placer fits into this period as one of the most unusual productions backed by Golden

Image 3. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)

Image 4. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

Films. This studio, which thrived during the S-film boom, offered Franco complete creative freedom as long as his productions kept within extremely tight budgets and could be distributed immediately. To meet these demands, the director revived old plots, adapting them to a shifting sociopolitical context. The film is loosely based on *Plaisir à trois*, adjusting the story to a more familiar and relatable situation in line with a libertinism that could be described as provincial: a weekend away on the Alicante coast. The aristocrats are replaced with a middle-class couple, and the conflicts between them are now related to issues of migration, misogyny, classism, institutional power and family economics—a perfectly tailored portrait of contemporary society. However, Franco took his mise-en-scène to more radical terrain, inspired by *Rope*, as he tried to shoot the film with the fewest possible sequence shots.

Lina Romay later recalled that *Gemidos* "only has 14 shots, 16 at most. That means we had to rehearse a lot before filming. The action was supposed to take place over 18 hours, and we shot it in just three days" (quoted in Valencia, 1999: 104). Juan Soler, the cinematographer and a regular on Franco's crew at the time, adds that, lacking Hitchcock's production resources, the planning wasn't all that different: "I don't remember it being difficult. After all, we followed a work rhythm and filming method very similar to many other films, despite the longer takes" (Mendíbil, 2018: 478).

In the sequence of *Gemidos de placer* equivalent to the one in *Plaisir à trois* discussed above, Lina Romay, a background figure in the earlier film, now dominates the foreground [IMAGE 4]. Her body unfolds, now the real epicentre of Franco's discourse, openly and unapologetically stripped of the mystery and allure of her predecessor, Soledad Miranda. Lina is Julia, a casual lover who doesn't even bring elegant clothes to attend a dinner. When the servant brings her a Manila shawl with a flamenco look, Julia exclaims: "*Olé!*" [IMAGE 5]. Marta remarks that she looks like a gypsy (Miranda had Romani heritage), to which Julia responds cheekily: "The hard part isn't putting it on, but making sure it doesn't fall off." Marta leaves the scene, and the camera lingers on Julia, who looks to the right just as Antonio enters. The two kiss voraciously in a medium shot that shifts to a wide shot as they sit on a couch. Practically outside the frame, Julia performs fellatio on An-

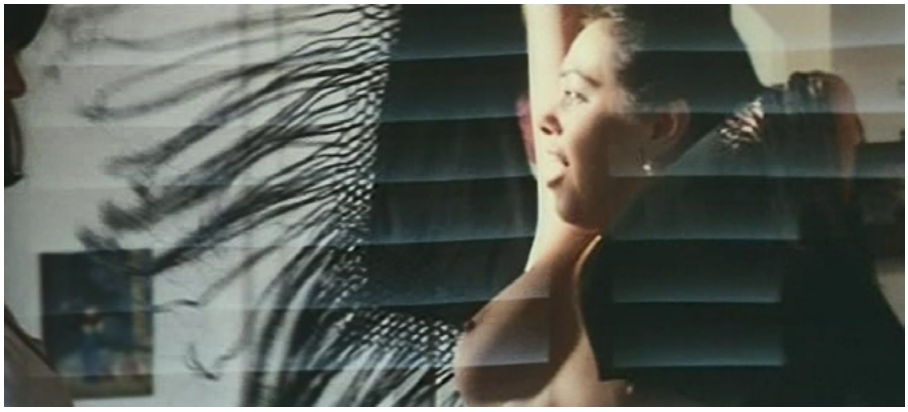

Image 5. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

tonio, and the camera zooms slowly to a close-up on their faces as they begin discussing the murder of his wife. The camera alternates between blurs and zooms that underscore an ecstasy that culminates in multiple orgasms. "You'll be my wife; we'll live in her house in France," Antonio promises her, staring blankly with an expression that combines ambition and delusion. After a short pause, during which Julia looks directly at the camera, Antonio stands up and exits the frame to the right. Julia follows him with her gaze and opens her legs towards the camera [IMAGE 6].

Just as Aumont described, the speed and the camera movements guide the spectator through a six-minute visual frenzy with no cuts, directing our gaze wherever the zoom or focus sharpness takes us. There is no possibility of choice or escape, as Julia's direct address to the camera exposes the spectator-voyeur (or even accomplice). But what distinguishes this sequence shot from the one in *Plaisir* is the transformation of Lina Romay's unfolded body, both as a character and as an actress. From her first appearance in the film, Lina/Julia is an ordinary everyday woman far from any fetishistic or even exotic idealisation.

Although the flash-forward in the prologue echoes Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), with the corpse in the pool and Fenouil's voice-over (dubbed by Franco himself), Lina Romay's arrival breaks away from this cinephilic apparatus, rejecting a whole tradition of femmes fatales and larger-than-life divas. Surrounded by a Berber servant who identifies as a sexual slave and a wife who has been institutionalised for nymphomania, Lina/Julia is a straightforward character, liberated from any male gaze that might transform her into an unattainable object of desire. Marta's joke that Julia "looks like a gypsy" renders visible a normalised aesthetic far from the exotic or even taboo image often associated with Soledad Miranda. Her wardrobe, movements and look all represent a down-to-earth, carnal, tangible presence that unapologetically defies the expectations of a spectator accustomed to cinematic glamour.

> Lina Romay is too brazenly bawdy to be erotic. She is precisely the antithesis of Soledad Miranda, no matter how much Franco insists otherwise. The special eroticism that distinguished and almost distinguished and practically articulated Jess Fran-

Image 6. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

co's filmography thus degenerates into vulgarity. (Aguilar, 2011: 226)

The critic Carlos Aguilar, who worked with Franco in the 1980s, suggests it is fitting to "metaphorise" the tension between eroticism and vulgarity in actresses. He thus distinguishes between a stage in Franco's career with actresses whose voluptuousness produces an "intoxicating charm", including Soledad Miranda (and nearly all the actresses he worked with), and a later, coarser, cruder stage with Lina Romay. Aguilar's reflection on Romay offers a revealing framework for exploring the aesthetic and discursive transformation to Jess Franco's filmmaking, particularly in relation to Linda Williams's ideas about pornographic cinema. Aguilar associates Soledad Miranda's body with a mythical idealisation he compares to "glorious cases" such as Josef von Sternberg/Marlene Dietrich (2011: 169), while Lina Romay's "vulgarity" is located at the opposite extreme. This dichotomy suggests a shift in the representation of the female body, where the change from one actress to the other articulates a shift from iconic fetishism towards a form of corporeality that is fully unfolded, rawer and more explicit, and where the actress herself controls her own body.

For Williams, this shift can be understood as an oscillation between two types of fetishism (1989: 42-43): on one hand, the fetishism Mulvey exposes in Sternberg's work with Dietrich, where the woman becomes an idealised object, an implausible visual icon meant to satisfy the male gaze (Mulvey, 2001: 373); and on the other hand, a more credible fetishism that Williams associates with pornographic cinema and which, far from traditional erotic art, is related to Muybridge's photographic studies of nudes, where the female body is stripped of any glamour that would obscure hidden truths. Williams's dichotomy also ties in with Berger's distinction between nudity and nakedness: while Soledad Miranda embodies the nude, with its aura of mystery and elevated eroticism, Lina Romay seems closer to nakedness,

ROMAY REPRESENTS A DOWN-TO-EARTH, CARNAL, TANGIBLE PRESENCE THAT UNAPOLOGETICALLY DEFIES THE EXPECTATIONS OF A SPECTATOR ACCUSTOMED TO CINEMATIC GLAMOUR

which is stripped of the intoxicating veil that characterises the classical fetish. This paradigm shift was already initiated by other Spanish actresses, beginning with the *cuerpo erótico* or *Mujer-Deseo* identified with Sara Montiel (Carmona, 2022: 230), who was often compared to Dietrich.

> I found all that quite amusing, because before the death of Franco (the Caudillo, of course), I had spent a few years living in France, where the dual versions that couldn't be seen here [in Spain] were released, so I was tired of watching all those naked actresses who then during the transition to democracy would only undress if the script required it. What hypocrites! (Romay, quoted in Valencia, 1999: 102)

Romay's description of this new context suggests an unfolding in two senses, not only in terms of stripping off her clothes but also in the broader sense of stripping away the masks of her peers. Romay's Julia, with her brazenness and lack of refinement, effectively declares the end of an era in which women like her were relegated to the shadows or hidden away, while the women who attracted the spotlight were forced to conform to the dictates of the traditional male gaze, which idealised them as myths rather than portraying them with all their dimensions and contradictions.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of Lina Romay's unfolded body has provided an opportunity to explore the narrative discourse of Jess Franco's filmography, avoiding simplistic judgments shaped either by the feti-

shistic male gaze or by its denial, which, as Linda Williams points out, is not clearly demonstrated in more explicit or pornographic works. In Franco's work, Romay's body is not merely a spectacle or an idealisation but a realistic physical presence laden with meanings addressing basic social concerns related to power, class, sex and race.

The combination of Romay's physical language with Franco's editing techniques, shots of long duration and fluid camera movements enhances the capacity of cinematic language to create mental images that not only question but often contradict recurring tropes in the representation of sex and desire. This dialogue between body and cinematic technique invites us to rethink how film can transform the classical gaze on the woman, even in productions commonly associated with ideas of exploitation and objectification, laying the foundations for exploring the complexity of female subjectivities.

From this perspective, Lina Romay's unfolded body can be considered a turning point in the representation of eroticism in Spanish cinema, open to a critical cultural and political reading. Drawing on Schneider, the explicit body that certain performers unfold is valuable not only for its visibility but also for its ability to question the cultural norms that have historically determined which bodies should be shown and how they should be displayed. In this sense, Romay's unfolding, her ordinary or even vulgar nakedness, does not submit to the commercial codes of porn or erotic cinema, but instead subverts their rules from within. As revealed in the practices of the "post-porn" actress and performer Annie Sprinkle analysed by Schneider, the female body is reclaimed to bring about the collapse of the heteronormative imaginary: the idealised, inaccessible, unreal image of the woman's body as an object of male desire. By unfolding her body with radical honesty and physicality, Lina Romay operates in a similar way: her intention is not to hide her imperfections or conform to canons of glamour or sophistication, but rather to confront the spectator with a physical presence that destabilises the narrative and the mercantilist function of erotic or pornographic cinema.

As Williams (1989: 43) notes in her refutation of Mulvey, women's power is not entirely taken away by the cinematic apparatus. To accept this would be to succumb to what Foucault calls "perverse implantation" (1987: 48), assuming that the gaze upon these bodies is inscribed in the subjects themselves rather than in the discourses of institutionalised power. Ultimately, the transition from Soledad Miranda to Lina Romay represented not just a replacement of one actress with another but also a transformation in how Jess Franco's films depicted the female body: from a mythicised symbol to an enunciative surface.

The concept of Lina Romay's "unfolded body" could therefore be understood as an extension and a critical inflection of the archetypes of the *cuerpo-hogar* (home-body), *cuerpo místico* (mystic body) *cuerpo-espectáculo* (show-body) or *cuerpo erótico* (erotic body) that identified how female desire was inscribed in actresses in Francoist cinema (Bou and Pérez, 2022). In the years of Spain's transition to democracy, Romay introduced a new configuration that transcended the old models through an explicit corporeality that left behind the expressive containment and codes inherited from classical cinema. Romay's body, associated with the sequence shot and the representation of sex without euphemisms, subverts the logic of the archetype itself. Her frontal visibility, her unsublimated physicality and her positioning as a performative subject of desire point to a new era in which the body no longer passively symbolises but instead directly interpellates the spectator and the ideological devices that shape it. ■

NOTES

1 The "S classification" was established by the Spanish Ministry of Culture as a film rating category in 1978, to identify productions containing scenes with explicit sex, full nudity or violence, intended exclusively for adult audiences. Although its original purpose was to restrict access to these films and protect viewer "sensitivity", it became a powerful marketing tool for promoting provocative titles that in many cases offered little more than sensationalist and crude erotica, although there were also some that were boldly experimental. The category was officially discontinued in 1984.

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LINA ROMAY AND THE UNFOLDED BODY BETWEEN *PLAISIR À TROIS* AND *GEMIDOS DE PLACER*

Abstract

This article analyses how the actress Lina Romay intervened in and reconfigured Jess Franco's filmmaking through a physical presence described here as an unfolding or explicit body. Through two films that are highly significant in her career, *Plaisir à trois* (1973) and *Gemidos de placer* (1982), it examines how Romay's body operates as a narrative axis that challenges the conventions of traditional erotic cinema and Spain's *cine de destape* genre. By stripping away idealisations and rejecting the classical fetishistic male gaze, Romay represents a shift in the cinematic representation of desire and sexuality, aligning with the sociopolitical context of Spain's transition to democracy. The analysis explores her gestures, wardrobe and performance in conjunction with the use of sequence shots and moving cameras to amplify the narrative discourse, questioning prejudices and stereotypes about eroticism and the female body. Lina Romay's work with Jess Franco emerges as a form of fringe cinema that destabilises dominant narratives of sex and desire, opening cracks in the political and aesthetic space and allowing the emergence of new female subjectivities.

Key words

Lina Romay; Jess Franco; explicit body; sequence shot; eroticism; pornography; male gaze.

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LINA ROMAY Y EL CUERPO DESPLEGADO ENTRE *PLAISIR À TROIS* Y *GEMIDOS DE PLACER*

Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo la actriz Lina Romay intervino y reconfiguró el cine de Jess Franco con una presencia física que se describe como cuerpo desplegado o explícito. A través de dos películas tan significativas para su carrera como *Plaisir à trois* (1973) y *Gemidos de placer* (1982), se observa cómo el cuerpo de Romay opera como un eje narrativo que desafía las convenciones del cine erótico tradicional y del destape español. Al despojarse de idealizaciones y rechazar la clásica mirada masculina fetichista, Romay supone un cambio en la representación cinematográfica del deseo y la sexualidad que sintoniza con el escenario sociopolítico de la Transición. El análisis aborda su gestualidad, vestuario y actuación en conjunción con el uso de planos secuencia y la cámara en movimiento, para amplificar el discurso narrativo, cuestionando los prejuicios y estereotipos sobre el cuerpo femenino y el erotismo. El trabajo de Lina Romay con Jess Franco se revela como un cine que, desde los márgenes, desestabiliza las narrativas dominantes sobre el sexo y el deseo, abriendo grietas en el espacio político y estético y permitiendo la entrada de nuevas subjetividades femeninas.

Palabras clave

Lina Romay; Jess Franco; cuerpo explícito; plano secuencia; erotismo; pornografía; mirada masculina.

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THE BECOMING-ANIMAL OF ANA BELÉN, AN ACTRESS IN TRANSITION*

SERGI SÁNCHEZ MARTÍ
MARÍA ADELL CARMONA

FROM CHILD PRODIGY TO ICON OF SOCIAL CHANGE

"The bride of Spain" (Zabalbeascoa, 2024), "the smile of the Spanish Communist Party" (Montero, 1977: 4) and "the muse of the transition [to democracy]" (Villena, 2016: 102) are just a few of the epithets that the media have attributed to Ana Belén over the course of an acting and singing career spanning more than fifty years, reflecting the truth that "the social history of a nation can be written in relation to its film stars" (Durgnat, 1967: 137). Compared to other actresses considered representative of the period, such as Carmen Maura, Victoria Abril or Ángela Molina, Belén is an especially paradigmatic case for analysing the important role played by actresses in the construction of a new imaginary to respond to the social and cultural changes in Spain during the post-Franco period. When Isolina Ballesteros suggests that "in the cinema of the transition, the woman was in transition" (Ballesteros, 2001: 15), she seems to be thinking of Ana Belén, who, after the failure of *Zampo y yo* [Zampo and I] (Luis Lucia, 1965), gave up on a career as a supposed child prodigy in the tradition of successful teenage singing stars such as Marisol and Rocío Dúrcal, liberating herself from the production strategies of the Franco regime's film industry and going on to become a symbol of the Spanish transition to democracy, that "space where oblivion was processed, a black hole that drew in and encrypted the refuse of our historical past" (Vilarós, 1998: 48).

One of the reasons why Ana Belén is recognised as the "muse of the transition" was her political commitment, evident in her active membership of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) from 1974 to 1982, and, as her biographer Miguel Ángel Villena explains, her "republican family origins, working class background and anti-Franco cultural milieu" (Villena, 2016: 85). It was precisely this ideological tradition that shaped the culture

ONE OF THE REASONS WHY ANA BELÉN IS RECOGNISED AS THE "MUSE OF THE TRANSITION" WAS HER POLITICAL COMMITMENT, EVIDENT IN HER ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP OF THE SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY (PCE)

of the transition, whose objectives, as Juan Carlos Ibáñez recalls, included turning the younger generations into spokespeople for social change, thereby eroding the old patriarchal family structure "with their new customs, free of taboos and traditions" (2016: 70). When the dictatorship ended, spaces of freedom began opening up in all fields, including cinema, laying the foundations for the construction of a new social imaginary that would emerge, just as the PCE leadership envisioned, out of "the decay of the regime" (Rueda Laffond, 2015: 856).

When the critic Diego Galán asked her about her status as an icon of the transition, Ana Belén answered: "I sort of became the lefty girl, rebellious, uninhibited, sort of what was in style at that time. [That] might have been connected to the image I was projecting, despite myself, because I never intended it; that image has always been there despite my own intentions" (Valero & Galán, 1993). This unawareness, this "despite myself", is incontrovertible evidence of a contradictory image: while in some interviews Belén admitted her shyness, her mortal terror of the dark or her insecure and pessimistic personality (Rodríguez Marchante, 1993), her public image, marked by her militant communism, conveyed determination, assertiveness and modernity. Some media outlets emphasised her sweeter and more maternal side, while others ("Belén may have been the girl that everyone has been quietly and desperately dreaming about these years" [Umbral, 1984: 13]) unabashedly highlighted her status as a sexual icon ("Where does the she-wolf end and the shepherdess begin?" [Gasca, 1992: 2]), a status that she herself has always flatly denied (Moriarty, 1987).

When Isolina Ballesteros wrote about the woman being *in* transition, she did so thinking precisely about the conflicts arising from a negotiation between two contradictory forces shaping women's identity, which also embody two different eras, "at the intersection between what her Francoist education dictates for her and the social role expected of her in the new democratic society, between the promise of emancipation and the difficulty of fulfilling that promise" (Ballesteros 2001: 15). In 1976, the journalist Rosa Montero declared that "today's Anita [Belén] is the advance guard for a country in evolution [...]. She is an actress for the Spain of tomorrow" (Montero, 1976: 17). She thus placed all her hope in Ana Belén, who had been born into a working-class family in the humble Lavapiés neighbourhood of Madrid and had received a traditional religious education, to resolve this negotiation while erasing all traces of women's repression.

AN EMANCIPATION IN THREE MOVEMENTS

The aim of this article is to examine the nature of this process of erasure and emancipation undertaken by Ana Belén, with attention to the *becomings* that characterise her career during Spain's transition to democracy, culminating in the becoming-animal in *The Creature* (La criatura, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), the key film in this analysis. Before identifying the different stages of this process, it is important to define the terms *transition* and *becoming*, as these two concepts are essential to understand the political dimension of Ana Belén's performances in this period.

In this article, Spain's transition to democracy is understood not so much as a historical, linear, evolutionary period, but as an intersection of discontinuities, along the lines of Teresa M. Vilarós's theoretical proposal in her pioneering study of this period in Spanish history, *El mono del des-*

encanto. For Vilarós, the transition is obviously marked by a historical process delimited chronologically by three key events: the death of Francisco Franco and the end of his dictatorship; the move towards democracy; and the integration of Spain into the European market. However, the narrative of the transition is perhaps only truly revealed when this timeline is examined from the margins to expose "unexpected digressions and surprising forms [...] strange cracks and narrative holes" (1998: 44). Vilarós refers to "these displaced points" in the writing of history as ruptures or, citing Michel de Certeau, "lapses in the syntax" that render possible what the French philosopher calls a return of the repressed, or "a return of what, at a given moment, has become unthinkable in order for a new identity to become thinkable" (1988: 4).

These "displaced points" or "lapses in the syntax" described by de Certeau are referred to here as *becomings*, in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari first used this term in *Anti-Oedipus* (2005) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004). This becoming does not entail a transformation, a *turning into*, because that would imply that it is based on a model that it imitates. Instead, "becomings are relations between multiplicities: movements, processes, passages in a smooth space" (Antonelli Marangi, 2024: 155). In this sense, the philosopher Rosi Braidotti identifies Deleuze and Guattari's *becomings*, and especially the becoming-woman, as a very productive conceptual basis for defining her idea of the "nomadic subject": "one needs to emphasize a vision of the thinking, knowing subject, as not-one, but rather as being split over and over again, in a rainbow of yet uncoded and ever so beautiful possibilities" (2011: 150). When a journalist describes Ana Belén as "never one, always several; as herself, who is capable of blurring, growing and being multiple" (Peralta, 1989: 90), she is vindicating her status as this "nomadic subject", the product of the becoming-woman who is capable of undermining patriarchal structures through the practice of a sort of molecular feminism, free from the solidity of a molar politics aimed at systematising her achievements in a stable and homogeneous identity. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "the becoming-woman is only the beginning" (2004: 253): beyond it is the becoming-animal and, a little further still, becoming-imperceptible. These becomings are expressed in Michel de Certeau's "lapses in the syntax", the discontinuities that Vilarós alludes to in her construction of the narrative of the Spanish transition to democracy.

This theoretical framework will be applied to the raw material of certain gestures and attitudes in Ana Belén's performances during the period from 1974, when she starred in *El amor del capitán Brando* [The Love of Captain Brando] (Jaime de Armiñán), to 1977, with her role in *The Creature*, a film largely ignored by the scholarly literature. This study thus proposes to combine Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming with the feminist theories of authors such as Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti in order to explore Ana Belén's *becomings* in three movements.

The analysis begins with a consideration of becomings that failed and floundered, as seeds of a women's liberation that needed to turn its back on the Franco regime's repressive apparatus to confront the nakedness of the female body in Jaime de Armiñán's films and in *La oscura historia de la prima Montse* [The Dark Story of Cousin Montse] (Jordi Cadena, 1977). The study then turns to *The Request* (La petición, Pilar Miró, 1976), exploring how its protagonist's amorality leads Belén to perform the role as a becoming-animal that threatens the patriarchal order. Finally, an analysis of *The Creature* identifies how this becoming-animal is consolidated as the possibility of a multiple, disruptive female subjectivity. The ultimate intention of this article is to demonstrate that Ana Belén is of special interest for her representation of sublimated expression, making her an icon of an eccentric female subjectivity "that occupies multiple positions" and is marked

"by discourses and practices that can be—and are—reciprocally contradictory" (Lauretis, 2000: 137). In short, Belén embodies a rupture, a revolutionary becoming whose micropolitical nature makes it no less significant as a symbolic gesture of feminist dissidence during Spain's transition to democracy.

GIVE ME A BODY! OR THE PRELUDE TO THE BECOMING-ANIMAL

In *El amor del capitán Brando*, Ana Belén plays Aurora, a schoolteacher in a small Castilian town who gets caught up in a bizarre love triangle: she is attracted to Fernando (Fernando Fernán-Gómez), a former local who has recently returned from exile, while Juan (Jaime Gamboa), one of her teenage students, is attracted to her. Belén's fleeting partial nude shot in the film, in which she bares her breasts in front of a mirror, occurs at a key moment in the story, in the bathroom of the hostel room in Segovia that she has ended up sharing with the boy after he gets lost on a school excursion. After watching a horror movie together and confessing to him at dinner that as a child she used to fantasise about Count Dracula sneaking into her bedroom ("that's sick" is Juan's reaction), Aurora slips him some money so that he can pay the bill. When they go up to the room, she insists that he must go to bed because it is late. Aurora's attitude is ambivalent: she speaks to Juan as if he were an adult, fuelling a flirtation that legitimises his patriarchal role in a fictitious couple, but ultimately she will adopt the role of the castrating mother.

After confessing to Juan that she lied twice for him that night ("and I don't like to lie," she tells him), Aurora unbuttons her blouse in front of the mirror (Image 1) and looks briefly at her breasts, before lowering her eyes and covering them up again quickly (Image 2). Jaime de Armiñán uses Belén's image as a liberated, modern independent woman and then challenges it in this brief gesture, lasting barely two seconds; a moment that itself is a breakdown of a becoming, a "lapse in the syntax" that fails to create the new. "The gestus," explains Deleuze, "is the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalisation of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role" (1987: 255). While the gesture disrupts the person within and without, provoking a digression that could result in a becoming, Aurora's becoming ends up being frustrated. A true becoming leaves no room for regret; it is never a return journey. When Juan comes out of the bathroom, Aurora screams and rebukes him aggressively; seconds later she calms down and admits to her feeling of guilt. In *El amor del capitán Brando*, the theatricalisation of the body described by Deleuze has a high symbolic value: when Belén bares and then covers her breasts, she contributes to what Vilarós describes as "the unthinkable repressed" that de-

Images 1 and 2

Image 3

fines the end of the Franco regime, that "monkey on the back" that cultural critics identify as a dark space, "a cleft intersection" (1998: 44) that reveals the continued weight of the past.

This gesture would receive a response in *Emilia, parada y fonda* [Emilia, Food and Shelter] (Angelino Fons, 1976), in which Ana Belén plays one of her favourite characters (Rodríguez Marchante, 1993). Emilia is married to Joaquín (Paco Rabal), a widowed businessman with a son, with whom she shares a monotonous small-town life. She dreams of her first love, Jaime (Juan Diego), who emigrated to France to escape the precariousness of Franco's Spain. At one point in the film, after projecting her romantic fantasies with Jaime onto a film being shown on television, Emilia looks at herself in the mirror and sensually traces the contour of her breasts over her nightgown with her hand (Image 3). The fleeting glance in *El amor del capitán Brando* now becomes a fixed stare of desire. Ana Belén's becoming-animal in *The Request*, and especially in *The Creature*, needs the expression of an awareness of the body that lingers on its own pleasure, even if it is only potential pleasure. "The gestus," writes Deleuze, "is necessarily social and political" (1987: 258). This is how we need to understand the subjection in Emilia's gaze, which contrasts with an expression of repentance, the "return of the repressed" (Certeau, 1988: 4) identified by Certeau, prior to the creation of a new identity in *El amor del capitán Brando*. The dramatic arc of some of the characters played by Ana Belén in this period of her career reconstruct the narrative of female liberation that young women raised in the patriarchy of the Franco regime needed: the housewife who seeks to kindle the desire of her alienated husband in *Vida conyugal sana* [Healthy Married Life] (Roberto Bodegas, 1974); the Spanish Madame Bovary in *Emilia, parada y fonda*; and

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the bourgeois social worker who falls in love with a prisoner in *La oscura historia de la prima Montse*, a film that includes a full nude scene in front of a mirror that seems a sort of extended update to María José Cantudo's pioneering full frontal nude scene in *Blood and Passion* (La trastienda, Jorge Grau, 1975). Before getting into bed with her lover, a relationship that her wealthy family vehemently disapproves of, Montse (Ana Belén) undresses in front of the mirror, first with her back to the camera and then turning around (Image 4), pulling her hair back from her face in order to *see better*. Her gaze lingers on her body, in an image whose role is to "uncover what had yet to be uncovered [...] to make the invisible visible" (Ballesteros, 2001: 177). It is a gaze that seems to tear apart the heteropatriarchal scopic drive that articulated the essence of the erotic film movement of the period known as *cine del destape* (literally, "uncovered cinema"), as here the woman asserts ownership over her own body and recognises herself as liberated from the legacy of the Franco regime (the bourgeois family), in a gesture identical to Emilia's expression when she escapes to Perpignan in search of her first love and enjoys a one-night stand, or Teresa's expression in her sadomasochistic relationships in *The Request*.

Image 4

AN INFECTING MOUTH

Teresa in *The Request* is a unique character. She is the product of a tension rooted in the vision of the filmmaker, Pilar Miró, who was known for her rejection of orthodox feminism—"I would never make feminist cinema. I imagine I'd end up going crazy making films only with housewives" (quoted in García de León, 1994: 170) or "[Feminist movements] seem awful to me" (quoted in García de León, 1994: 171)—yet who, in her free adaptation of Émile Zola's short story, refused to morally condemn her heroine, whom she considered a product of a hypocritical society: "There is an exaltation of evil [...]. I told Ana Belén when we were filming it that the situations would be presented as evil in its purest state [...]. She understood very well. The character is 'evil' because that's how she is; not because she decides to be evil, but because that's her morality" (Pérez Millán, 1992: 74). As the only daughter of a wealthy conservative family in the late 19th century, Teresa's *evil* seems to be a disproportionate expression of rebellion against a society, represented by her parents, that adheres to the behavioural patterns of a Roman Catholic upbringing (she was educated in a religious convent in France), and that silences her when she asks uncomfortable questions concerning the dubious moral conduct of her uncle, who has been expelled from the family.

It is easy to identify Teresa with Barbara Creed's notion of the "monstrous-feminine" (1993) in her discussion of the role of women in horror cinema, insofar as she threatens the patriarchal order by triggering man's primal fear of castration. It is therefore unsurprising that Deleuze and Guattari associate the becoming-animal with the mythical figures of the vampire and the

werewolf, because Teresa's monstrousness is associated with contagion rather than filiation. "Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance" (1987: 238). Contagion stands in opposition to heredity and sexual reproduction. It is therefore allied with desire, either through pleasure or through pain. In the first sequence of *The Request*, when Teresa and the housekeeper's son Miguel are children, we see an example of this contagion: after riding on the boy's back, Teresa bites his ear, drawing blood. She concludes the scene with a sardonic smile on her infecting mouth.

That mouth is what mobilises the emotions of a becoming-animal that needs to involve "a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 239). It is Ana Belén's unique mouth, wide and generous, with those prominent teeth that she had no interest in having surgically straightened (Moriarty, 1987), which becomes the singular *dental vagina* that regulates the speed of her sadomasochistic relationship with Miguel (Emilio Gutiérrez-Caba). In *The Request*, Belén exploits this characteristic physical feature with particular expressiveness. The "carnivorous laughter of a violent and optimistic woman" (Umbral, 1984: 13) manifests itself again in the first sexual contact with Miguel in the greenhouse, after her orgasm.

It is the erotic sequences in *The Request*—which inevitably incited objections from the censors, who only lifted the ban on the film under pressure from the press and prominent members of the Spanish film industry—that reveal this becoming-animal that would launch Ana Belén's career during the country's transition to democracy. As noted above, while the becoming is of the order of contagion, the becoming-animal is of the order of alliance. In the sexual encounters between Teresa and Miguel, in which they trade slaps, punches and insults, use the other's skin to put out a candle or seal their lips with hot scissors, the two constantly exchange roles as sadist and masochist, translating desire into a system of signs marked by

IT IS THE EROTIC SEQUENCES IN *THE REQUEST* THAT REVEAL THIS BECOMING-ANIMAL THAT WOULD LAUNCH ANA BELÉN'S CAREER DURING THE COUNTRY'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Images 5, 6 and 7

a scattered combination of hysterics and emotions that constantly alters their relationship.

This becoming-animal culminates in the sequence where, in the midst of a particularly violent act of sexual intercourse, Miguel strikes his head against the bedhead and dies without Teresa realising it until a few seconds later. If "the categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures" (Deleuze, 1987: 251), in this scene Ana Belén develops a whole catalogue of body gestures that project the human towards the animal, especially in the lengthy shot that captures her nakedness while she reaches orgasm, where she seems to push her body to its own figurative limit in a convulsive tension of movements and frictions, and the moment she discovers that Miguel has accidentally died, when she grabs his hair violently, bites her lip, rests her head on the corpse with her back hunched over, and looks wildly around her while screaming, growling and panting (Images 5-7). In short, Belén acts like an animal. However, this should be understood not in metaphorical or analogous terms, but as a potential contamination, because "you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 274-275). It is no coincidence that after her act of unwitting necrophilia, and after giving herself to the mute Julian (Frédéric de Pasquale) in exchange for helping her dispose of Miguel's corpse, Teresa behaves like a hybrid creature, a witch emerging out of the body of a vestal virgin. On the fog-cloaked lake, before she mercilessly kills Julian with an oar, she resembles a vampire or a siren, some otherworldly creature serenaded by the songs of the night.

The Request ends with Teresa's engagement party. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: "Families have always warded off the demonic Alliance gnawing at them, in order to regulate alliances among themselves as they see fit […]. But this spells the death of the sorcerer, and also the death of becoming" (1987: 248). It might be argued that Teresa's becoming-animal is ultimately annihilated by the apparatus of the State, by the family institution, which has absorbed her creative (or destructive) potential. However, nothing seems to end at that party, because all that belongs to the order of reality is that Teresa has deceived her parents and outwitted the system, and that she continues orchestrating a fiction in which time is suspended (the shot freezes) and the *becoming* is set loose from the confining cage of the closing ceremony. Mauricio (Manuel Sierra), her fiancé, will be the next to be bitten. The becoming occurs because it is open to a possible future, to a multiplicity.

"BARK" IS A POLITICAL VERB

In a column titled "La impotencia del macho" published in the magazine *Vindicación feminista* in the wake of the belated Spanish release of films such as *Last Tango in Paris* (Ultimo tango a Parigi, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) and *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1974), Montserrat Roig dismissed the supposedly revolutionary nature of the arrival of eroticism in the society of the Spanish transition: "This revolution has not been made by our bodies, by all bodies. This 'revolution' has been made by marketeers", who had begun selling "paper women, always alone, and in increasingly doglike positions" (1978: 19). Roig uses this adjective pejoratively to signal the relegation of women to the degrading status of a non-human animal associated with submission, obedience and passivity. In the iconography of erotic and pornographic cinema, Roig perceived a strategy to control women's bodies by perpetuating the patriarchal gaze of a "feudal fascism" that revealed men's fear of sex. If the woman loses her verticality, she becomes a quadrupedal animal in the absence of its model, merely imitating it. And all imitation, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, is contrary to the agitation represented by a becoming-animal.

Roig wrote her article just three months after the release of *The Creature*, a film in which Eloy de la Iglesia proposes a counter-discourse to this animal imitation, first, because the protagonist's character arc, which basically traces the sexual affective relationship established between her and the dog she adopts as a pet, is not aimed at arousing erotic desire in the (male) spectator, and secondly, because any sign of imitation appears under what Deleuze and Guattari call "involution", or the "form of evolution between heterogeneous terms" (1987: 238).

Image 8

Of all the protest films directed by Eloy de la Iglesia in the years immediately after Franco's death, *The Creature* is the least known and the least studied. Made between *Hidden Pleasures* (Los placeres ocultos, 1976) and *The Priest* (El sacerdote, 1978), it can be understood as one of the most radical chapters in a creative project that charts a rough genealogy of all the themes that the dictatorship had silenced (homosexuality, terrorism, political corruption, drug addiction, sexual repression, labour exploitation and juvenile delinquency), which the Basque filmmaker explores using the discursive strategies of popular cinema. "The fear of didacticism, that is, the fear of ingenuousness, is a petty-bourgeois fear" (Delclós, 1977: 6) argues de la Iglesia. And it is precisely the fragile ecosystem of a petty-bourgeois couple plunged into a crisis by the taboo of zoophilia. The protagonist's husband, Marcos, is a television presenter who is advancing in his profession by selling his soul to a Francoist party ("Alianza Nacional de España", a hybrid of two real right-leaning parties of the period: Fraga Iribarne's Alianza Popular and Blas Piñar's Fuerza Nueva). His wife, Cristina, is a sexually frustrated housewife from a well-to-do family.

The action in *The Creature* takes place between two pregnancies. In the film's first scene, Cristina's gynaecologist informs her that she is pregnant, after four years of unsuccessful attempts. She communicates this to her husband at a moment when the couple's relationship is deeply troubled, in a scene showing Ana Belén in front of a hand mirror, removing her make-up while wondering aloud whether having a child will serve to save her marriage. "I don't think so," says her reflection in an extreme close-up. The pregnancy ends in a still birth after a stray dog barks at her and attacks her at a petrol station. This arbitrary canine rage unleashed against Cristina results in the first form of contagion, hindering filiation and instilling indecision in both the character and the actress. The animal represents multiplicity ("a band, a pack") and confronts us with our own multiplicity, with the population that wavers within us. What does the dog, now given the name of Bruno, represent by the end of the film? Cristina is pregnant again, but we do not know whether the father is her husband, Marcos (Juan Diego), or Bruno, her pet dog, with whom she has had sexual relations that de la Iglesia leaves off screen. Cristina breaks up her marriage and is finally happy in her house in the mountains, sharing her life with Bruno. She

answers the dog's barks with barking of her own (Image 8), as if human language were old and outdated. Emerging between these two moments is the "involution" described by Deleuze and Guattari as the antithesis of regression. Communicating like a dog is the consequence of a becoming that is always involutionary, and "involution is creative" (1987: 238). This barking should be understood not as an imitation but as one of the most significant symptoms of the alliance established between the human and the animal, and between Cristina's becoming and Ana Belén's becoming as an actress. In a shot/reverse-shot between Cristina and the dog, Belén laughs again like she did in *The Request*, before letting out a bark that is not the bark of a human imitating a dog, but of a dog that has possessed the voice of a human. It is the mouth that has let itself be infected. The smile of the Spanish Communist Party barks.

BARKING IS THE LAPSE IN THE SYNTAX THAT PROPOSES A DIFFERENT DIMENSION OF FEMALE DESIRE, LIBERATED FROM THE CONSTRAINTS OF PATRIARCHAL REAFFIRMATION

Barking is an expression of symbiosis and is therefore not a sign of filiation. It was astute of Eloy de la Iglesia to dismiss his initial idea of revealing Cristina's child's appearance at the end, like the fleeting shot in *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), which would have rendered explicit the suggestion that her offspring was a monster—perhaps the "creature" referred to in the title. Barking, then, is "the effectuation of a power of the pack", an expression of "these animal sequences" that are "a fearsome involution calling us towards unheard-of becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 240). Barking is the lapse in the syntax that proposes a different dimension of female desire, liberated from the constraints of patriarchal reaffirmation. For Eloy de la Iglesia, "the only thing she [Cristina] can do is become bestial" (Delclós, 1977: 6). The Basque filmmaker therefore believes that "bestialising" is a political verb, and that barking is its conjugation in the present.

But this becoming-animal always occurs through the variable overlapping of the multiple layers that make up Cristina/Belén's identity in relation to the dog, which sometimes contradict the very notion of becoming. After the still birth, Cristina becomes infatuated with a dog that is identical to the one that attacked her, and ends up adopting him and even calling him Bruno, the name she had planned to give her son. In her first scenes at home with the dog, Belén's tone of voice sounds like what a mother would use to speak to a baby who has barely learnt to walk. The Freudian phantom of filiation, suggesting the animal is a substitute for the son who was born, quickly disappears; it is merely a red herring that distracts from the authentic, rhizomatic becoming-animal: with Bruno Cristina is first a mother, then a jealous girlfriend, newly-wed, playful lover and mistreated woman. Ana Belén traverses all these levels of the female condition, embracing the intrusions, ruptures and vibrations experienced by the character of Cristina, in what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as *anomal* ("anomalous") (1987: 243).

Every animal that manifests itself in a band or a pack, in multiplicity, has its *anomal*. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with distinguishing between the *anormal*, which they describe as "that which is outside rules or goes against the rules", and the *anomalie*, designating "the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization" (1987: 244). It is this space of deterritorialisation that leads to the presence of Bruno, who could be described as the *anomal* that Cristina, representing a woman of the transition with ideological leanings similar to those of the actress who portrays her ("Father Anselmo said I was unbelieving, shameless, that I would come to a bad end with those friends at the faculty ," she

Images 9, 10 and 11

confesses in the film), needs as an ally for becoming-animal. The most interesting aspect of the depiction of the becoming-animal is that it ultimately becomes difficult to distinguish whether the *anomal* is Bruno, Cristina or both, due to an exchange of positions that makes the becoming even more powerful. In the culminating scenes of the becoming-animal, Belén's performance is the camera's focus of attraction, as she controls the mise-en-scène in what seems to constitute a female subjectivity centred on the experience of her own pleasure. This is exemplified in the circular movement of the camera as it follows her in close-up while, dressed as a bride, she dances wildly around the room to the tune of Felix Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" (1842), and in the slow zoom in on her face from a wide shot when Bruno is on her lap. With her eyes half-closed, humming "Al alba"—a song recorded by Luis Eduardo Aute in 1975, which, as Carlos Gómez Méndez recalls in his thesis on De la Iglesia, "alludes to the last executions of the Franco regime, but got past the censors because it was disguised as a melancholy love song" (2015: 207)—while gazing vaguely towards the dog and her open hand (Images 9-11), stroking him in a dreamy state, Cristina/Belén and Bruno collectively constitute a sublimation of the space of feminist discourse, that *other place* "which is not a mythical or distant past or a utopian future history; it is the other place of the discourse here and now, the blind spot, the off-screen space of its representations" (De Lauretis, 2000: 62).

After Bruno has been taken away, when Marcos suggests to Cristina that they should start over and try to have a son again, she confesses to him: "When you're convinced you're a monster, surrounded by monsters in a world made by monsters, it's exciting to think of becoming even more monstrous just to be a little bit different." To be "different" is also to be *anomal*, to occupy an unstable, peripheral position, which could be identified with that eccentric subject that De Lauretis describes as "self-critical, distanced, [and] ironic" (2000: 154). Cristina and Bruno's anomaly, which will produce a dynamic variation—a becoming-animal—of the family institution when they are reunited and embrace an uncertain future alone, con-

TO BE "DIFFERENT" IS ALSO TO BE *ANOMAL*, TO OCCUPY AN UNSTABLE, PERIPHERAL POSITION

trasts with the static nature of masculinity, which remains unchanging throughout the process. It is this anomalous aspect that accentuates the film's queer dimension, which Francina Ribes identifies with the "futuristic feminism" (2024: 138) of Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*.

Cristina and Bruno's becoming-animal thus places the focus of the story on the unfolding of a female subjectivity that deconstructs patriarchal gender technologies through resistance (De Lauretis, 2000). In this sense, Marcos embodies "the impotence of the male" referred to by Montserrat Roig, which manifests itself in direct proportion to his ascent in the world of right-wing politics that explicitly extends the imaginary of the Franco regime. While Marcos feels marginalised in the bizarre love triangle he unwillingly shares with Cristina and Bruno, the political discourse of his party seizes on the opportunity to demonise the canine in an obvious attempt by De la Iglesia to turn Bruno into a symbol of the popular left, in one of those "lapses in the syntax" that Vilarós (1998) argues illuminate the possibility of the new. In the presentation at the conference held by Marcos's political party, it is proclaimed that "freedom is peace, order and security, and that is what the real Spanish people are looking for, and that is the direction we will continue to walk in no matter how much *the dogs may bark*." In his acceptance speech upon becoming a member of parliament, Marcos declares that "we do not want to hear *the barking* of those calling for a new constitution, as if everything here in our country was not already tied up and tied up perfectly." It is fitting that the scene that follows this speech is of Cristina's definitive awakening, the recovery of her temporarily abandoned becoming-animal (Marcos forced her to give up the dog) that now, in a dream, from that *other place* required by the feminist narrative, translates into an amalgam of images of Bruno, with extreme close-ups of his eyes and his panting tongue, interspersed with images of the political meeting, to the sound of distorted groans and cries celebrating Franco and culminating in the depiction of a zoophilic ritual. While rape was the only response to Cristina's sexual rejection that Marcos was capable of, Cristina responds to his speech by pushing him out of her life, claiming a new space of female subjectivity where the becoming-animal crystallises in a political gesture.

CONCLUSIONS

If we bark, we are revolutionaries. Ana Belén's barking in *The Creature* concentrates the poetics of the philosophy of resistance advocated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which she continued to put into practice until the end of the first stage of Spain's transition to democracy, with the electoral victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party in 1982 (it was no coincidence that this was the same year that she left the Spanish Communist Party due to disagreements with its leadership). Thus ended a process which, as this article has sought to show, Belén began tentatively with *El amor del capitán Brando*, consolidated in *The Request* and culminated with *The Creature*.

If feminist female subjectivity is a "nomadic subject" defined on the basis of "the subversion of set conventions" (Braidotti, 2011: 26), feminism can no longer focus on "Woman as the complementary and specular other of man but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject" (Braidotti, 2005: 25-26). The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that Ana Belén's objective was thus to resist a becoming-major, which would be the opposite of a becoming, the static constitution of a state, an order or a system. This is why Ana Belén's barking in *The Creature* is, like any good becoming-animal, a *becoming-minor*. She does not seek to gain power, but to establish herself through a kind of micropolitical gesture, in a horizon line that runs through the structures of domination to mobilise or deterritorialise them. Desire, argues Guattari, "which tends, by its very nature, to leave the subject, and to drift away" (1995: 158), is one of these destabilis-

ANA BELÉN MOBILISES HER DESIRE WHEN SHE EXERCISES THAT *DELEUZIAN* MOLECULAR FEMINISM THAT SHE CONSOLIDATED IN HER CONDITION OF "NOMADIC SUBJECT", BECOMING MINOR AND, THEREFORE, REVOLUTIONARY

ing forces, as it questions the discursive strategies of the apparatuses of power, "*opposing* repressive habits, bureaucracy and the simplistically dualistic moralising that currently contaminate revolutionary movements" (1995: 158). During this period of Belén's career, this desire was expressed in films as diverse as *Somámbulos* [Sonambulists] (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1978) and "Tiempos Rotos", the episode directed by Emma Cohen for the collective film *Cuentos eróticos* [Erotic Stories] (1980). In the first, which metaphorically predicts Belén's break with the Communist Party, she plays Ana, a woman who rediscovers her sick body as a space of pleasure and then turns to political action, defusing the party's obsolete, rigid machinery. In the second, she reconstructs the erotic games she played with a childhood friend, naked together in the middle of a field, behind the back of the latter's husband (Juan Diego), the patriarchal authority that they hide from and make fun of. In both cases, as in *The Creature*, Belén mobilises her desire when she exercises that *Deleuzian* molecular feminism that she consolidated in her condition of "nomadic subject", becoming minor and, therefore, revolutionary. Like Deleuze, Ana Belén believes that "revolutionary becoming is the only thing that can exorcise shame or respond to the intolerable" (1999: 268).

NOTES

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THE BECOMING-ANIMAL OF ANA BELÉN, AN ACTRESS IN TRANSITION

Abstract

Ana Belén was one of the most representative actresses of Spanish cinema during the country's transition to democracy. She embodied the prototype of the emancipated, modern, politically engaged woman, becoming the symbol of a new democratic society that needed to bury the moral codes of the Franco regime. In this context, women's sexual freedom found a space for representation in the actress's body, marked by impulses of rupture and dissent against the rigid heteropatriarchal logic of the dictatorship. This article investigates certain gestures and attitudes in Ana Belén's acting work during the final years of the Franco regime and the period of the transition, drawing on the philosophy of becoming by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as the feminist theories of Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti, with special emphasis on *The Creature* (La criatura, 1977), a film by Eloy de la Iglesia that has been largely overlooked by the academic literature. This film, which tells the story of love and desire between a housewife and her dog, serves as an emblematic example of the emergence of new female subjectivities in Spanish cinema during the transition, embodied in micropolitical gestures that challenged the hegemony of the phallocentric gaze.

Key words

Ana Belén; Becoming-animal; Spanish transition; Feminism; Star studies.

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EL DEVENIR-ANIMAL DE ANA BELÉN, ACTRIZ EN TRANSICIÓN

Resumen

Ana Belén fue una de las actrices más representativas del cine de la Transición. Encarnó el prototipo de la mujer emancipada, moderna y comprometida políticamente, que se convirtió en el símbolo de una nueva sociedad democrática que necesitaba enterrar los códigos morales del régimen franquista. En ese contexto, la libertad sexual femenina encontró un espacio de representación en el cuerpo de la actriz, atravesado por pulsiones de ruptura y disidencia con la rígida lógica heteropatriarcal de la dictadura. En este sentido, este artículo investiga determinados gestos y actitudes del trabajo actoral de Ana Belén durante el periodo del tardofranquismo y la Transición, a la luz de la filosofía del devenir de Gilles Deleuze y Felix Guattari y las teorías feministas de Teresa de Lauretis y Rosi Braidotti, poniendo especial énfasis en *La criatura* (1977), película de Eloy de la Iglesia virtualmente ignorada por la literatura académica. El film, que cuenta la historia de amor y deseo entre un ama de casa y su perro, es un modelo ejemplar para ilustrar la aparición de nuevas subjetividades femeninas durante el cine de la Transición, encarnados en gestos micropolíticos que hicieron tambalear la hegemonía de la mirada falocrática.

Palabras clave

Ana Belén; Devenir animal; Transición española; Feminismo; Estudios actorales.

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HISTORY TURNED INSIDE OUT: TENSIONS BETWEEN BODY AND VOICE IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SPANISH CINEMA AT THE END OF SPAIN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY*

JOSEP LAMBIES
ALBERT ELDUQUE

INTRODUCTION

This article presents a comparative study of the endings to three films with a number of elements in common: *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), *Evening Performance* (Función de noche, Josefina Molina, 1981) and *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982). The first similarity these three films share is contextual: all three were released in what could be described as the final stage of Spain's transition to democracy, which covers the twenty months from Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero's coup attempt in February 1981 to Felipe González's victory in the general elections of October 1982, an event that, for many historians (Preston, 1986; Morán, 1991; Soto, 1998; Tusell, 1999), represented a symbolic consolidation of democracy in Spain. Another point in common is that all three films posit a conflict between present and past, albeit each one in its own way. This conflict very specifically concerns the films' female protagonists, who find themselves at a crossroads between the old traditions inherited from previous generations and the creation of modern identities. Each of these characters constructs a kind of temporal polyphony through her body and (especially) the voices that inhabit it. This article explores the potential tensions and subversions produced by the protagonists of these three films in the context of the political landscape of Spain at a moment when it had quelled the last threats of a return to dictatorship and was seeking to define itself as a modern nation. In *Making Bodies, Making History*, the German literature scholar Leslie Adelson argues that women's bodies can effectively contain history: "[i]f we are willing to contemplate the body as a secret history [...], then we must also be willing to entertain history as an even better-kept secret for the body" (1993: 1). Drawing on Adelson's argument, this study explores the ways these three characters use their bodies and voices to articulate a space for rewriting the historical moment into which they are inscribed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OBJECTIVES

Each of the bodies of the protagonists in *Sweet Hours*, *Evening Performance* and *Vida/perra* is inhabited by multiple voices. It could be argued that they constitute three polyphonic subjectivities, in line with the theoretical perspective of the feminist thinker Teresa de Lauretis and her studies of female subjectivity, which she defines as "the concept of a multiple, shifting and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with, language" (1986: 6). Similarly, the notion of polyphony is defined here in line with the ideas of another feminist critic, Hélène Cixous. In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous reflects on the concepts of voice, body and writing in relation to the female subject, which she associates with an always ambiguous, multiple form of enunciation, a "language of 1,000 tongues" that contrasts with the monolithic character of phallocratic logic, as it "does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible" (1976: 889). In this horizon of possibilities described by Cixous, in this language of many tongues, it is reasonable to imagine that a single voice can at the same time be multiple voices.

Articulated around this idea of the multiple voice, the polyphonic subjectivities analysed here evolve over the course of each film to emerge clearly in their respective endings, which are characterised by three variations on the use of the same formal resource: an acousmatic division of the voice. The notion of the acousmatic voice discussed here is drawn from film theorist Michel Chion's concept of *acousmêtre*, defined as "a disembodied voice, without the image of the person speaking" (2004: 12) and as a "voice without a location" (2004: 39), which is neither "inside nor outside" (2004: 30); in other words, a voice that acts from outside the frame but intervenes in it in unpredictable ways. At the same time, Chion's theories have been refined by a number of studies by feminist critics, such as Mary Ann Doane (1980), Sarah Kozloff (1988), Kaja Silverman (1988) and Amy Lawrence (1991), who have explored the relationships between voice, body and image in cinema from a gender perspective.

The endings of all three films analysed here use the acousmatic voice in unique and unexpected ways. Eschewing the strategies of narrative cinema, these films delve fully into the radical differences between voice and image, the disjunctions between sound and meaning, which, as Doane explains, abandon the uniformity sought in classical cinema and produce a filmic body characterised by dispersion, fragmentation and heterogeneity. Drawing on ideas posited by Pascal Bonitzer (1975), Doane identifies the development of a politics of the voice based not on its meaning but on its sensory and sensual dimension (1980). In *Sweet Hours*, this dimension is represented by Berta's (Assumpta Serna) face, which becomes possessed by a voice from a bygone era. In *Evening Performance*, it is a polyphonic overlapping enacted by Lola Herrera, with a voice of today superimposed on a voice of the past. And the ending to *Vida/perra* contains a gesture by its protagonist, Juani (Esperanza Roy), that can be interpreted as an attempt to listen to an ancestral voice that she is unable to hear, while in its place is an acousmatic voice that echoes in the void. The objective of this article is to analyse these different uses of the acousmatic voice and its function as a vehicle for the construction of three different polyphonic female subjectivities, each of which conveys the contradictions and paradoxes of a political context of instability and change.

In the echoes of this polyphony, this study aims to identify the possibility of reconstructing a narrative from the perspective of women, a narrative that was obscured by the androcentrism of the official historical narrative of the period (Larumbe, 2004; González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). This is what Ramón Buckley alludes to when he refers to the "'masculine' nature" of

THE OBJECTIVE IS TO ANALYSE THE DIFFERENT USES OF THE ACOUSMATIC VOICE AND ITS FUNCTION AS A VEHICLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THREE DIFFERENT POLYPHONIC FEMALE SUBJECTIVITIES, EACH OF WHICH CONVEYS THE CONTRADICTIONS AND PARADOXES OF A POLITICAL CONTEXT OF INSTABILITY AND CHANGE

Spain's transition to democracy, which he describes as "the 'patriarchy' that persisted despite the death of the 'patriarch'" (1996: XIV). Carmen Peña Ardid would take up this idea years later in her introduction to an anthology on the cultural history of this period in Spanish history (2019), while Pamela Beth Radcliff explains that the ideological consensus of Spain's political leadership during the transition took no interest in feminism, which was dismissed as selfish, unhelpful and divisive (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). Radcliff goes on to argue that Spain had no model of "democratic citizen" at this time, because "[i]n contrast to the Franco regime, which had created a clearly defined and articulated place for women as housewives, the nascent democratic discourse was full of contradictions and conflicts between equality and frames of reference based on difference" (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009: 69). While the model of the traditional wife and mother was rejected, so was the model of the feminist, resulting in discord over rights that presumably did not apply to the whole population.

The three films analysed here reflect the mutability and diversity of the feminine theorised by De Lauretis and Cixous in the specific context of the Spanish transition to democracy. While integrating the experiences of disjunction between voice and image that characterised modern cinema, these films served to reflect the lack of clarity in relation to the public role of women at this pivotal moment of political change, as an unresolved issue that the official narrative of the democratic transition failed to address. The ultimate aim of this analysis is to identify what Buckley calls "history turned inside out" (1996: 135), referring to the twist in the narrative that can discover "an alternative to the transition itself in feminism" (1996: 165). It is not merely a question of expanding history by adding in these forgotten elements, but rather about reinterpreting history itself (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). As Cixous argues, whenever a woman speaks, whatever she says, "she draws her story into history" (1976: 881).

A FACE POSSESSED BY A VOICE FROM A BYGONE ERA

At the end of *Sweet Hours*, a pregnant Berta (Assumpta Serna) is shown walking around Juan's (Iñaki Aierra) apartment, putting some books in their place and cutting a dead leaf off an indoor plant. On the soundtrack we hear an old recording of the waltz "Recordar", sung by the 1930s singer and film star Imperio Argentina, while Berta lip-syncs to the song. Waiting for her in the bathtub is Juan, whom she treats affectionately as if he were her son, scolding him for how he smells, tickling him and stroking his face. Finally, she resumes her lip-syncing of the song, turning her gaze to the camera. The shot ends on her face wearing an expression brimming with hope and a beaming smile, while her lips move in perfect time with the voice from a bygone era (Image 1).

This ending is the culmination of a process of re-enacting memory with elements of the present, a process that constitutes the key device in *Sweet Hours*. Over the course of the film, Juan, a theatre director, reconstructs episodes from his childhood in the same apartment that he lived in as a child, with hired actors while he plays his child alter ego. In this way, he seeks to better un-

Image 1. In the final shot of *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), Assumpta Serna looks to the camera, her expression brimming with hope, while lip-syncing to the Imperio Argentina song "Recordar"

derstand his mother, Teresa, a woman silenced by the family hierarchy who committed suicide when he was still very young, and who is played by Berta, a young actress, in the theatrical reconstruction. As the film progresses, a game of mirrors is constructed between these women, both played by Assumpta Serna, and the budding romance with Berta is interspersed with scenes of Oedipal love for an affectionate but enigmatic mother. In the final sequence, the personification of Teresa moves beyond the theatrical stage and enters everyday life, turning her into a synthesis of lover and mother who, through the lip-syncing scene, also effectively fuses the image of the present with a voice of the past.

"Recordar" is a waltz originally written in French by Charles Borel Clercy and translated into Spanish by José Salado, which Imperio Argentina performed as a duet with Manuel Russell in the musical *Su noche de bodas* [Her Wedding Night] (Louis Mercanton & Florián Rey, 1931) (Bloch-Robin, 2011), although the version used in *Sweet Hours* is sung by Argentina alone. Saura had previously used this song in *The Garden of Delights* [El jardín de las delicias] (1970), as well as other songs by Imperio Argentina in *Cousin Angélica* [La prima Angélica] (1974) and *Cría Cuervos* (1976) (Hidalgo, 1981). In all these films, the old recording is associated with an evocation of the past, whether through reconstructions, embodied memories or photographs, always as a musical accompaniment to the action of the characters. In *Sweet Hours*, the song plays a vital role: the line "*Recordar las dulces horas del ayer*" ["Remember the sweet hours of yesterday"] gives the film its title, and in the rehearsal and production stages Saura would play it and other songs of the era on a tape recorder so that the cast would become familiar with them (Hidalgo, 1981). "Recordar" is always associated with the character of the mother, a connection that is powerfully established in the opening title credits, in which Imperio Argentina's voice accompanies the turning pages of a journal containing drawings, photographs, postcards, first communion mementos and handwritten notes originally compiled by Assumpta Serna as a way of asking Saura about the character of Teresa, and subsequently taken by the filmmaker to use in the film's opening scene (Vidal, 1993). The song will be heard again throughout the film to evoke the past, and then at the end it will be lip-synced by the protagonist, a practice never used in Saura's abovementioned film. Like the acousmatic voices

analysed by Chion, it is a voice that will float in the air without a recognisable source before eventually finding its place in a specific body.

Various authors have pointed out the ironic aspect of this ending, as its exaggerated, artificial nature creates a distance between Juan's nostalgic exercise and Saura's gaze on the past (D'Lugo, 1991; Bloch-Robin, 2011; Planes Pedreño, 2020). The constructed quality of this final scene, both technically and historically, is foreshadowed in two previous sequences. The first is in a dubbing studio, where Berta must repeat a phrase over and over again to match the lip movements of a character in a foreign film, exposing the effort needed to synchronise mouths and voices. Then later, in Juan's apartment, Berta takes on the role of a new version of Teresa and incorporates the waltz into her performance; she does up her hair, puts on an apron, and begins humming the start of the song while she washes the dishes. Her ironic remark "if the feminists could see me now…", inserted like a footnote, exposes the diffraction between Teresa and Berta, between the mother in the past and the actress in 1981. At the end of the film, the technical difficulties of dubbing and the ideological doubts verbalised in the kitchen dissipate, giving way to a fluid matching of voice and image, past and present, which is seemingly perfect and seamless, like those "spontaneous and effortless" numbers which, according to Jane Feuer (1980), conceal the hard work and development that goes into the traditional musical. The ending to *Sweet Hours* is thus the culmination of a transformation that instrumentalises a female body in the present to portray one from the past, stripping the body of its contemporary agency to synchronise it with the reminiscences of a filmmaker who needs to immerse himself in his memories.

Berta seems aware of this, as throughout the film we see her trying to intervene actively, telling Juan she is not convinced by Teresa's depiction as a selfless mother and urging him to abandon his idealised image of his childhood, thereby becoming what Marvin D'Lugo calls a "demystifier of cultural representation" (1991: 182). According to Assumpta Serna, these dialogues were not in the original screenplay but were suggested by her (Lambies, De Lucas & Elduque, 2025), as throughout the filming she expressed an explicit interest in participating in the construction of the character by asking the filmmaker questions, compiling the journal and reviewing the rushes (Hidalgo, 1981; Vidal, 1993). However, in *Sweet Hours* this female interjection receives no answer: neither the woman of the past nor the woman of the present is given room to become active, autonomous characters in either Juan's memory or Saura's film, beyond their role in the re-enactment of the male protagonist's ghosts. Berta's body, interrogated in the present, is what Leslie Adelson would describe as a body containing a secret history: Teresa's history, the story of an independent woman who took control of her life in a patriarchal society. But it is a story that never gets to be told. This ambiguity continues through to the lip-syncing scene at the end of the film, which allows contradictory allegorical readings: Imperio Argentina was symbolically appropriated by the Franco regime, and thus her appearance could be identified as a patriotic construct associated with Spanish folklore (D'Lugo, 1991); however, as "Recordar" is a song that became popular during the Second Spanish Republic in the early 1930s, the voice that Teresa/Berta makes her own could equally be the voice of the Republican woman whose freedoms were curtailed by the biopolitics of the dictatorship.

THE ENDING TO *SWEET HOURS* IS THUS THE CULMINATION OF A TRANSFORMATION THAT INSTRUMENTALISES A FEMALE BODY IN THE PRESENT TO PORTRAY ONE FROM THE PAST

Finally, intersecting these levels is the woman's gaze to the camera. This is a device that also appears earlier in the film, specifically in a scene of seduction in which Teresa lets down her hair and performs a striptease for the transfixed young boy Juan, played here by child actor Pablo Hernández Smith, Significantly, Marianne Bloch-Robin (2011) connects the boy's transfixed gaze with the last photograph of Teresa in the journal shown in the film's opening scene. It is also a moment of agency for Assumpta Serna, allowing her to interrogate the camera and the spectator directly. Like Teresa and Berta, with this gaze she expresses a kind of control that is gentle rather than cruel. In this way, the ending to *Sweet Hours* goes much further than synchronising the identities of a singer, a mother of the 1940s, a woman in 1981 and an actress in a Carlos Saura film. As Mary Ann Doane (1980) points out in her reflection on the erotic, sensory dimension of the voice-over in modern cinema, given that the body has always been a site of oppression of women, it is logical that it should be precisely in the body that the new battles would be waged, and thus the connection between Imperio, Teresa, Berta and Assumpta is not one of identity but of a polyphony that raises more questions than it answers.

A VOICE OF THE PRESENT SUPERIMPOSED ON A VOICE OF THE PAST

At the heart of Josefina Molina's *Evening Performance* is the notion of a polyphonic duality, which is reflected in the game of mirrors between an actress and her character. The film, which has a clearly documentary tone, revolves around Lola Herrera's experience during her first months playing Carmen Sotillo in the theatrical adaptation of Miguel Delibes' novel *Cinco horas con Mario* [Five Hours with Mario], performed for the first time in Madrid in November 1979, also under the direction of Josefina Molina. In interviews at the time, Herrera described her relationship with the character as follows: "She seemed to me a vulgar woman who was nothing like me. But little by little, in certain lines of my monologue, I began to see elements of my life. The parallels between aspects of Carmen's life and mine became so great that I began suffering an identity crisis. I had discovered everything there was of me in Carmen, and I found myself through her" (Angulo, 1981: 45). This unexpected process of identification reached a dramatic climax in early March 1980, when, after its overwhelming success with audiences in Madrid, *Cinco horas con Mario* premiered in Barcelona. On the first night, a mere fifteen minutes into the performance, Herrera fainted on stage. Various authors, including Susan Martin-Márquez (1999), identify this fainting incident as the inspiration for the film.

Martin-Márquez also suggests that *Evening Performance* was the product of a shared interest between Josefina Molina and José Sámano in making a film that reflected on the identity of women in postwar Spain. Other authors, such as Isolina Ballesteros, stress that the creative process of *Evening Performance* displays an intention to create an image of "the Spanish woman of the transition with all her problems and contradictions, still at the crossroads between the restrictions of previous decades and the freedoms of the new Spain" (2001: 52). The diptych established between Carmen Sotillo and Lola Herrera reflects this crossroads. The relationship between these two figures exposes the tensions between two eras. Carmen Sotillo is a figure of the past, a recently widowed woman who offers a monologue over the coffin in which lies the body of her dead husband, to whom she can finally express all the resentment she had kept to herself for so long without fear of reprisal. On the other hand, Lola Herrera offers no monologue, engaging instead in a dialogue with an equally confessional tone with her ex-husband and fellow actor Daniel Dicenta, whom she compares at one point in their conversation with the corpse in the play: "I mean,

sometimes in that thing representing a casket… sometimes I see you. The Mario I recognise in that box has your face." It could be argued that the film constructs a counterpoint between two eras: the era of the widow of the Franco regime, the woman who had to wait for her husband to die before she could break her silence and say everything she had always kept to herself; and the era of the divorced woman (*Evening Performance*, it is worth noting, was released in the same year that divorce was finally legalised in Spain). According to Ballesteros, the role played by Lola Herrera is not so much the role of the liberated woman of modern Spain as the role of a woman trapped between two eras, trying to shrug off an image of the past that still weighs heavily on her.

Of the three films analysed here, *Evening Performance* is the one that has been studied the most, and from the widest range of perspectives. In a recent article, Gonzalo de Lucas analyses Lola Herrera's work in the film in order to "track the tensions between representation and self-representation through the actor's body" (2024: 74). De Lucas draws on research by authors such as Sophie Mayer and Andrea Soto Calderón to discuss the healing functions of images in the feminist documentary tradition, which in the specific case of *Evening Performance* are constructed around the word: "The performative device of the images here contains the pause and the timing that brings out Lola Herrera's stifled, hesitant, silenced word" (De Lucas, 2024: 84). The search for the word lies at the heart of *Evening Performance*, both in the direction taken in the long conversation between Herrera and Dicenta, which is the key moment of the film, and in all the spaces opened up to the protagonist's voice-over. On the film's use of voice-over (a quintessential form of the acousmatic voice), Isolina Ballesteros offers a noteworthy observation: "The significance of Lola's voice-over lies not only in the fact that it assigns the female protagonist a linguistic status that she rarely enjoys in male cinema, where the woman talks a lot but her real participation in the production of narrative discourse is non-existent, but also in the fact that this voice, which does not correspond to the image of Lola when it speaks, breaks the system of mirrors and offers her the possibility of escaping a representation in exclusively bodily terms" (Ballesteros, 2001: 43-44). The voice-over's disruption of the system of mirrors culminates in the polyphony triggered in the film's final images.

THE SEARCH FOR BALANCE IS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE DISCOURSE THAT HERRERA ARTICULATES OVER THE COURSE OF THE FILM, IN WHICH SHE SEEMS TO BE FULFILLING AN AIM TO ORGANISE A NEW LOGOS, ONE THAT IS BALANCED, PRECISE AND JUST

The ending to *Evening Performance* shows Lola Herrera on the half-lit stage at the beginning of the play, reciting her character's first lines. The camera, which begins the shot with a close-up on the actress, quickly pulls away up the aisle of the packed theatre until she is just a tiny figure in the shot (Image 2). Carmen Sotillo's voice, with its solemn cadence, suddenly sounds very distant, and almost at once another voice is superimposed on it: Lola Herrera's own voice, speaking acousmatically from outside her character, as if it were her inner voice we are hearing. "How many times have I said these words?" she wonders, transforming her portrayal of Delibes's long-suffering widow into something mechanical, emotionally hollow and repetitive, as if the healing process had finally been completed and the actress had managed to separate herself from the script. "What can you do when you don't like your own life? Perhaps it's my fault. I have tried to imitate the women who educated me," she goes on, recognising a kind of mimetic inertia that prompted her to adopt what she learnt from her female role models of pre-

Image 2. In the final images of *Evening Performance* (Josefina Molina, 1981), the camera pulls away from Carmen Sotillo while in the foreground we hear Lola Herrera's voice-over

vious generations. In this sense, the ending to *Evening Performance* is similar to *Sweet Hours*, although it effectively inverts the elements: while in Saura's film, it is the old voice of an actress from a bygone era that possesses an actress in the present, in Molina's film it is the voice of the present that imposes itself on the voice of the past.

The shot described above dissolves into one taken from a high angle, almost an overhead shot. The camera pulls away again, this time with an ascending movement that once again turns the woman reciting her lines on stage into a distant figure. Lola Herrera's inner voice continues to speak, trying to find a balance between the anguish she feels over the past and a tenacious desire to move forward into the future: "Once again I remember the fainting spell; it frightens me. No, don't let the machine stop on me." In reality, this search for balance is present throughout the discourse that Herrera articulates over the course of the film, in which she seems to be fulfilling an aim to organise a new logos, one that is balanced, precise and just, that responds to the needs of women during Spain's transition to democracy and that represents them; a language that allows women to draw their stories into history, as Cixous puts it. Thus, in the last seconds of the film, when the grieving figure of Carmen Sotillo is no more than a strip of purple light on the edge of an otherwise completely dark shot, the protagonist's voice concludes with a renewed sense of purpose, opening up for the first time to the possibility of a fulfilling future: "Tomorrow I have to get up early. I have so many things to do." With these last two lines, Lola Herrera's voice departs definitively from the image of the woman of the past and presages the beginning of a different history, perhaps the modern woman's, which it seems is about to begin being written.

THE ANCESTRAL VOICE THAT NEVER GETS TO BE HEARD

Like *Cinco horas con Mario*, *Vida/perra* is articulated from beginning to end around the continuous soliloquy of its protagonist, Juani (Esperanza Roy), the only character in the film. Juani is a lonely single woman whose sad figure wanders through a series of uninhabited settings, including a deserted beach, a party hall full of empty chairs and the rooms of a large apartment, all of which constitute a phantasmagorical inversion of the real world (Lambies, 2025). The succession of images offered by all these settings constructs a

kind of representation of Juani's inner world, in which the overflowing stream of her thoughts takes the form of an uncontrolled, contradictory monologue. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, "[t]o negotiate that contradiction, to keep it going, is to resist the pressure of the binary epistemological model towards coherence, unity, and the production of a fixed self/image, a subject-vision, and to insist instead on the production of contradictory points of identification, an elsewhere of vision" (1984: 77). The mise-en-scène of *Vida/perra* reflects this elsewhere of vision, constructed as a series of mental landscapes in which Juani's monologue can only ever be an inner monologue that mixes the present with the past and confuses reality with imagination. Juani is thus always addressing a host of absent characters, some alive and others dead, none of whom ever respond to her calls or make any kind of appearance on screen. It may seem that Juani's head is inhabited by a deafening polyphony of voices, but ultimately, this polyphony is only ever formulated as an impossibility.

The idea of this impossible polyphony is hinted at throughout the film, every time Juani tries to establish a dialogue with any of these spectres of the past who never reply, and it becomes especially clear in the final sequence. Juani's long monologue culminates in a desperate invocation of the ghost of her dead mother, pleading with her between screams and sobs, looking at the camera with her arms stretched out, in a close-up that shows a hysterical, tear-streaked face typical of women's faces in the horror genre (Image 3). She cries out: "What did you look like, Mum? Help me! Help me! Right now I can't remember what your face looked like! And worse still, I can't hear you!" As she utters these last words, she brings a hand to her ear. Then she falls silent for a moment and calms down, as if imagining the ghost whispering something into her ear. The monologue continues a little longer. Finally, Juani's face, strained and soaked with her sweat and tears, turns to look at

Image 3. Esperanza Roy's long monologue in *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982) culminates in a desperate invocation of her dead mother's ghost, whose voice is never heard

us once more. She is no longer speaking, and yet her voice resounds in our ears, uttering the same series of exclamations she shouted just before, now transformed into pre-recorded echoes. Once again, with the phrase "And worse still, I can't hear you!", Juani brings her ear closer to the camera, this time with a sudden movement that is much more disconcerting than before, with both hands raised. It is her final attempt to listen for the spectral voice that does not let itself be heard now and probably never did. Instead, all Juani hears is her

own acousmatic voice, like an echo reverberating in the void inside her head, while the ghost's voice has fallen silent forever.

The ending to *Vida/perra* is a tragic inversion of the ending to *Sweet Hours*. Juani's gaze to the camera is the gloomy counterpoint to the gentle gaze Assumpta Serna offers the spectator in the final shot of Saura's film. The fusion of two different eras resulting from the perfect synchronisation of Serna's smiling lips with Imperio Argentina's voice is rewritten here in Esperanza Roy's sweaty, convulsive screams as a temporal rupture: in contrast to *Sweet Hours*, in *Vida/perra* the voice of the past never gets to be heard, either because it does not exist or because it imposes its own silence, underscoring the impression of loneliness conveyed by the film's protagonist, a woman whom even the ghosts seem to have abandoned, and who has thus been left bewildered and lost in an era to which she does not belong. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Juani constitutes an extraordinary addendum to the evolution of the spinster archetype studied by Núria Bou and Xavier Pérez in Spanish cinema under the Franco regime, epitomised by the characters of Betsy Blair in *Calle Mayor* [Main Street] (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956) and Aurora Bautista in *La tía Tula* [Aunt Tula] (Miguel Picazo, 1964). In the case of Blair, these authors identify a series of gestures, gazes and facial expressions used to express her desire "to live in another reality, to project herself into another world, to flee from the oppressive atmosphere of Spanish society" (Bou & Pérez, 2022: 39). It is precisely this longed-for other reality that *Vida/perra* recreates in its mise-en-scène, suggesting the idea of Juani as the spinster who has definitively departed from the material world to take refuge in a parallel world that she herself has constructed, where she can experience a kind of liberation that is at the same time a kind of prison sentence.

While in *Evening Performance* Lola Herrera is a woman trapped between two eras, in *Vida/perra* Juani is a woman cut off from her own time, confined to the margins of history in a limbo of oblivion. In his book *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion (2004) makes reference to voices of cinema that pine for the image, longing to find a body that will take them in. In *Vida/perra*, this longing operates in the opposite direction, as here it is a body trying in vain to find those wandering disembodied voices that will want to inhabit it and fill it with meaning. On the other hand, the fact that *Vida/perra* transforms the mother's voice into a gaping silence vests the whole film with a feeling of atavistic emptiness that grows increasingly acute from one scene to the next. It is thus unsurprising that the film should end, immediately after Juani's last gaze to the camera, with the same shot with which it began, showing Juani sitting in a chair on the beach, talking to herself as she looks out over the waves. Another image is superimposed on this one: the old black and white portrait of a woman, perhaps the picture of the mother that Juani searches for with such wild desperation at one point in the film. The vision of the mother is projected like a static, silent face that never speaks and never will, but whose presence looms over Juani's body and holds it in that parallel dimension where the only possible temporal logic is the logic of time suspended in the eternal repetition of events.

JUANI BRINGS HER EAR CLOSER TO THE CAMERA, WITH BOTH HANDS RAISED. IT IS HER FINAL ATTEMPT TO LISTEN FOR THE SPECTRAL VOICE THAT DOES NOT LET ITSELF BE HEARD NOW AND PROBABLY NEVER DID

In view of the above, the protagonist of *Vida/perra* could be understood as a symbol of a certain type of woman who was left out of the hegemonic historical narratives of both the Franco regime and the transition to democracy that followed it. The obscene and inappropriate language used by

Juani, her lewd gestures and militant isolation reveal a character who never found a place among the old values of National Catholicism, which identified the ideal of the good Spanish woman in the country's dutiful wives and prolific mothers, which meant that "[i]n the Francoist era, a woman remaining single was ultimately viewed as a personal tragedy and a reason for social disgrace" (Morcillo Gómez, 2015: 117-118). At the same time, Juani's resentment toward the customs of the society of her time and the hermit status to which she seems to have been condemned suggest she does not feel that the modernity that the newly democratic Spain sought to embrace includes her either. *Vida/perra* adds an interesting twist to the theories developed by Adelson in *Making Bodies, Making History*: instead of a body capable of containing the historical narrative, Juani's body refuses to be in history, and thus ends up opposing it without even trying.

CONCLUSIONS

In her exploration of the experiences of sound in modern cinema, Mary Ann Doane (1980) draws on the ideas of Pascal Bonitzer (1975) regarding the relationship between the fragmentation of the authoritarian voice-over and its erotic aspect, although she warns that the politics of the voice needs to be considered beyond this sensual dimension, which itself is problematic from a gender perspective. For Doane, the voice's relationship with the bodies of characters and spectators must also be based on a topological understanding of cinema as a series of spaces whose hierarchy articulates the film's representation and meaning, with the uses of the voice playing a key role in defining them. In *Sweet Hours*, *Evening Performance* and *Vida/perra*, for example, the narrative levels constructed with the acousmatic voice, whether as a lip-syncing of the past, a reflection in the dressing room or an echo with no response, act as spaces of meaning whose difference facilitates an interrogation of female bodies split between past and present, reality and representation. The polyphony that characterises the endings to these three films should also be understood as a deployment of possible embodiments, of different places that characters, actresses and spectators may inhabit. For a period like the Spanish transition to democracy, which was characterised by a series of official discourses about the modernisation of the country, these polyphonic spaces offer an alternative to the predominant historical narrative through voices that were relegated to the margins of a monolithic discourse. In their way of exposing a conflict between eras, these voices offer a possible reinterpretation of the historical contradictions of the period of the transition. As Cixous (1995) suggests, this polyphony—which is also a language of a thousand tongues—reveals that when women speak, they draw their stories into history to interrogate it, interrupt it and empty it… to turn it inside out. ■

NOTES

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HISTORY TURNED INSIDE OUT: TENSIONS BETWEEN BODY AND VOICE IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SPANISH CINEMA AT THE END OF SPAIN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Abstract

This article compares the endings of three Spanish films made in the final years of the Spanish transition to democracy: *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), *Evening Performance* (Función de noche, Josefina Molina, 1981) and *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982). The three endings all share a common feature: the dislocation between the voices and bodies of their female characters, and the acousmatic divergence this produces. Drawing on Michel Chion's concept of the acousmatic voice, and especially his revision based on the feminist postulates of authors such as Mary Ann Doane, the article identifies a correlation between the endings of these three films and Hélène Cixous's theories about the relationship between voice, body and writing and the role they play in shaping women's history. Using this theoretical framework, which also includes the theories of Teresa de Lauretis on the construction of female subjectivity, the aim of the study is to demonstrate that in the tensions between voice and body created by all three characters analysed, a space of representation emerges that establishes an alternative to the historical narrative of the Spanish transition to democracy.

Key words

Acousmatic voice; Female body; Female characters; Feminist theory; Spanish transition to democracy.

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LA HISTORIA VUELTA DEL REVÉS: TENSIONES ENTRE CUERPO Y VOZ EN LOS PERSONAJES FEMENINOS DEL CINE ESPAÑOL DEL FINAL DE LA TRANSICIÓN

Resumen

Este artículo compara los finales de tres películas españolas de los últimos años de la Transición, *Dulces horas* (Carlos Saura, 1981), *Función de noche* (Josefina Molina, 1981) y *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982), a partir de un elemento en común: la dislocación entre voz y cuerpo de sus personajes femeninos y el desdoblamiento acusmático que produce. Partiendo del concepto de voz acusmática de Michel Chion y, especialmente, de su revisión desde postulados feministas efectuada por autoras como Mary Ann Doane, el artículo encuentra un correlato entre los finales de estas tres películas y las teorías de Hélène Cixous sobre las relaciones entre voz, cuerpo y escritura y el papel que estas juegan en la configuración de la historia de las mujeres. De acuerdo con este marco teórico que también incluye las teorías de Teresa de Lauretis sobre la construcción de la subjetividad femenina, las páginas que siguen tratan de demostrar que, en las tensiones entre voz y cuerpo que crean los tres personajes estudiados, aflora un espacio de representación que instituye una alternativa al relato histórico de la Transición.

Palabras clave

Voz acusmática; Cuerpo femenino; Personajes femeninos; Teoría feminista; Transición española.

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RESISTING INSTITUTIONAL MOTHERHOOD: NAJWA NIMRI IN SPANISH TELEVISION FICTION SERIES

LAIA PUIG-FONTRODONA
NÚRIA BOU

INTRODUCTION

Najwa Nimri is a Spanish actress and singer who has been working since the late 1990s with directors such as Daniel Calparsoro, Alejandro Amenábar and Julio Medem, although it is in her roles as atypical violent mothers in television fiction series that she has recently made a name for herself. In 2015, she began portraying Zulema Zahir, a murderous, amoral mother in the series *Locked Up* (Vis a Vis, Daniel Écija, Álex Pina, Iván Escobar, Esther Martínez Lobato, Antena 3/Fox: 2015-2019). Zulema is the most dangerous inmate in Cruz del Sur, a women's prison that she repeatedly attempts to escape from throughout the series. A year later, Netflix picked up the Atresmedia/FOX Spain series and produced *Vis a Vis: El Oasis* (Daniel Écija, Álex Pina, Iván Escobar, Esther Martínez Lobato, Netflix: 2020), giving Nimri the opportunity to further develop the character. This spin-off begins with the protagonists now out of prison, but Zulema joins her former rival, Macarena, to return to a life of crime. Together, they orchestrate a robbery that not only poses new challenges for the two women but also serves as the pretext for them to strengthen their relationship. Following her successful portrayal of Zulema, Najwa Nimri joined the cast of *Money Heist* (La casa de papel, Álex Pina, Antena 3: 2017/ Netflix: 2019-2021) for its third season, which would ultimately bring her major international success.[1] The series follows a group of criminals, led by the Professor, who carry out two ambitious heists: the first of the at the Royal Mint of Spain, and the second of the Bank of Spain. Nimri's character, Alicia Sierra, is a pregnant police inspector of dubious morals who commits criminal acts in her efforts to stop the gang of robbers. However, as the series progresses, she develops a relationship with her adversaries. Finally, in 2022, Nimri starred in the series *Holy Family* (Sagrada Familia, Manolo Caro, Netflix: 2022-2023) in the role of

Julia Santos, a mother with a dark criminal past who moves with her children to the wealthy Madrid neighbourhood of Fuente del Berro, adopting a false identity in order to be able to escape the country.

The unique nature of the criminal mothers portrayed by Nimri in these three series is in keeping with a film career notable for playing unconventional women, such as her roles in *Jump into the Void* (Salto al vacío, Daniel Calparsoro, 1995), *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (Los amantes del círculo polar, Julio Medem, 1998), *Quién te cantará* (Carlos Vermut, 2018) and the mother in *The Red Virgin* (La virgen roja, Paula Ortiz, 2024). At the same time, she has cultivated an unusual star image as "she does not usually give interviews [...], she does not talk about her private life [...], she does not take a position on public issues, and she does not tend to appear at events or photo ops" (Bianchi, 2024). In fact, Nimri herself has acknowledged her anti-social streak: "I don't make any effort to get close to people or to make them like me. I think the worst thing people could say about me is that I'm 'super-nice'" (Bianchi, 2024). This way of asserting herself as an autonomous woman who declares no need for the unconditional admiration of those around her forms part of a personality that breaks with social conventions. Her deep voice with its provocative and mocking tone constitutes one of the "performance signs" (Dyer, 2001: 173) that spectators expect to find in her on-screen characters.[2] The naturalness of her performances is thus the product of "representational acting" (Naremore, 1990), whereby the actor's work is concealed to give audiences the impression that the star is "playing herself", presenting herself in fictional stories just as she is in her everyday life. It is well-known, for example, that Nimri is a single mother, and on more than one occasion, when asked by journalists about her real-life experience as a mother in relation to her violent characters, she has responded with playful and ironic quips.[3]

Drawing on the framework of star studies developed by Richard Dyer in the late 1970s in his seminal work *Stars* (2001), this article attempts to identify how Nimri offers a non-normative construction of motherhood in her characters in the different Spanish television series mentioned above. Aumont and Marie (1990: 74) warn of the difficulty of analysing actors' movements because there are so many subtle gestures that could potentially be overlooked. Similarly, Nacache (2003: 189) argues that any attempt to translate into language the "script of gestures" performed by the actors in each scene is likely to prove a fruitlessly descriptive task. In view of the problems associated with examining every movement of Nimri's performances, this study avoids such exhaustive textual analysis. Instead, the focus will be on her ironic projection in certain gestures and dialogues where her characters enact a resistance to traditional motherhood. Irony is understood here as a "polyphonic enunciation", as defined by Bruzos Moro (2009), drawing on Ducrot (1986; 1990). Irony fosters a critical distance (Schoentjes, 2001; Hutcheon, 1992), creates ambiguous discourses (Hutcheon, 2005; Frye, 1991; Booth, 1974) and often introduces an absurd perspective (Jankelevitch, 1982; Schoentjes, 2001) to call cultural norms generally considered positive into question (Kreuz, 2020). Nimri's use of irony is analysed here to identify how she addresses the non-normative quality of her characters in her acting, along the lines taken by Miriam Hansen (1986), Patricia White (Wojcik, 2004) and Virginia Wright Wexman (Wojcik, 2004) in their studies of dissident actors in classical cinema.

The aim of this article is to analyse some of the images of resistance to institutional motherhood (Rich, 1977) enacted by Nimri in *Locked Up*, *Money Heist* and *Holy Family*. According to Adrienne Rich, the good mother is represented in patriarchal mythology as "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing", and yet at the same time the woman's body is considered "impure, corrupt, the

site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway'" (1977: 15). In opposition to these two types of bodies, the patriarchy constructs the reassuring image of the peaceful and servile mother. The "good mother" must love her children unconditionally and find pleasure in motherhood, even when it means she has to suffer (Donath, 2016). This ideal is still conveyed by many female celebrities (Lagerwey, 2017) in advertising and on social media. The *invisibilisation* of the difficulties, contradictions or conflicts that mothers can experience fosters the idea that motherhood is something instinctive, as has been explored extensively in feminist studies (Tubert, 1996; Iribarne, 2010; Herrero Curiel, 2021).

The discourses around the social representation of motherhood contain preestablished ideas that do run counter to women's real lived experience (Herrero Curiel, 2021). In recent years, initiatives such as the Club de Malasmadres [Bad Mothers' Club], created in 2014 to challenge the idealised image of motherhood, along with the rise of fourth-wave feminism in Spain in the past decade (Aguilar Barriga, 2020), have promoted the image of the imperfect mother. The representation of this image in fiction film and television has been analysed by theorists such as Charo Lacalle (2021), Anna Lucia Natale (2020) and Rebecca Feasey (2017). Alternatives to the model of the good mother have also been developed in cinematic narratives where the aggressive action of female protagonists transfigures the qualities of traditional motherhood: Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992) and *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003) and *Kill Bill: Volume 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004) and Agathe Rousselle in *Titane* (Julia Ducournau, 2021) are well-known contemporary examples of such attempts to offer new versions of the mother archetype. Similarly, Najwa Nimri complicates and expands the depiction of the mother in theoretically more realistic contexts than the science fiction worlds inhabited by Weaver's, Thurman's and Rousselle's characters, with the representation of an ambivalent motherhood. This analysis focuses in particular on how Nimri's characters tie the qualities of the good mother together with those of the bad, criminal mother, eschewing the reproduction of the traditional "sacrifice" versus "malevolence" binary (Walters and Harrison, 2014). It is in this attitude of resistance to traditional polarities that Nimri sometimes projects "new" images of motherhood. However, as Andrea Soto Calderón (2023: 74) points out, these images of resistance are not easy to pin down; they are "slippery" and need to be "embraced in their provisionality".[4] This analysis will therefore focus on images offered by Nimri when she combines the qualities of the "good mother" and the "bad mother", the interstitial moments when she adopts a liminal position "designating what is 'between'. It is neither the 'one' nor the 'other', but somewhere in the middle, like an intermediary, a messenger, an intermezzo" (Deleuze, 2006: 164). It is in these interstitial images, between institutional motherhood and the possibility of new subjectivities, that Nimri's characters render visible a "multiple and contradictory" subjectivity, as Teresa de Lauretis famously describes it (1993: 97). From this position of multiplicity, the mothers portrayed by Nimri occupy "spaces on the margins of dominant discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus" (De Lauretis, 1987: 25). Nimri's characters are thus situated in a place of enunciation that has two sides, and that is located, as Hélène Cixous (1995) suggests, between the destruction characteristic of revolution and its capacity for construction.

This article considers, first of all, how Nimri's characters reject the qualities of the "good mother" (Palomar Verea, 2004); it then identifies the ambivalence of the mother characters she por-

trays, who are situated in a liminal position between the good mother and the bad. This is followed by an exploration of the way Nimri takes the most significant qualities of the good mother to the extreme to evoke the violent nature of institutional motherhood. Finally, the study reveals how the attitude of resistance of Nimri's mother roles *infects* the bodies around her, exposing a subjectivity that expands and resists hegemonic, patriarchal logic. In each section of this article, Nimri's "performance signs" are analysed in relation to her ironic way of performing the text, identifying those signs that reinforce a non-normative construction of motherhood. The ultimate aim is to identify how her characters' behaviours of resistance to institutional motherhood contribute to her characters' "processes of subjectivation" (Rancière, 2006: 21), projecting alternative images of motherhood at given moments.

RESISTANCES TO INSTITUTIONAL MOTHERHOOD

One of Nimri's paradigmatic moments of resistance to institutional motherhood can be found in the *Locked Up* episode titled "The Barbie" (#4x01: La Barbie, Marc Vigil, Fox Spain: 2018), when Zulema (Nimri) confesses to the police officer who is taking her to prison that she wouldn't be able to bear the life of a bourgeois mother: "I don't want a job with twelve monthly cheques and two bonuses, a dog with a microchip, two children, a boy and a girl, a 38-year mortgage, holidays in August and a traffic jam on the way to the beach. I don't want to go for a drink on Sundays and a fuck once a week. I love real life." Among the various actions Zulema describes in this monologue, the reference to "a fuck once a week" alludes to her need for unrestricted sexual activity, and her rejection of the institutionalised motherhood described by Rich (1977), associated with women who sacrifice their own desires or with sexual acts performed merely to satisfy their husbands. Rich's characterisation is identified by Kaplan (1998: 104) in the depiction of mothers in classical Hollywood cinema, whose asexual depiction, the author argues, reflects a need to offer a construction of the female that is not threatening to men. However, in contemporary cinema, with its violent mothers who are usually depicted as dangerous threats to their male enemies, the cinematic archetype has undergone a transfiguration that allows the characters played by Nimri (and the aforementioned Weaver, Thurman and Rousselle) to display their sexual desire unabashedly.

Nimri also resists institutional motherhood by appropriating some of the gestures associated with it. In their study of the myth of contemporary motherhood, Douglas & Michaels (2004) observe that mothers are expected to display a smile of satisfaction as proof of their unquestionable happiness. In an interview with *Fotogramas* (Silvestre, 2022), Nimri explains that her character in *Holy Family* is "a woman who looks like a conventional woman, with a smile," thus acknowledging that her facial expression helped her to "perform" the kind and affectionate mother she was required to play. She also confesses that she would practice the role when she went out with her friends: "I would go out to the café and I would try to pretend to my friends and my boyfriend, and I would ask for things with a friendly smile, and everyone would say to me: 'Why are you acting so weird?'" (Revista !Hola!, 2022). In this way, Nimri makes it clear that she is aware of the artificial nature of certain gestures of institutional motherhood and forces herself to smile to feign the "good mother" in her role as a criminal mother in *Holy Family*. In a highly significant scene from the first episode, titled "A Crack" (#1x01: La grieta, Manolo Caro, Netflix: 2022), when Gloria (Nimri) is chatting with other mothers in the park and they bring up the question of celebrating her baby's first birthday, in a momentary lapse of her "good mother" role she dismisses the idea: "He won't even notice." Quickly, she smiles in an effort to conceal

Image 1. The forced smile of the "good mother" in the series *Holy Family*

her blunder. Later, when she ends up preparing her son's party, the false smile will be performed repeatedly throughout the scene (Image 1).

The forced smile acts as an element of ironic reflexivity, exposing her false nature to the spectator. As Schoentjes (2001: 200) argues, "irony involves pretending to take seriously what one does not value; it penetrates the spirit of the other person's game to show that its rules are stupid or perverse." Indeed, Nimri *plays* with the smile of institutional motherhood to critique its artificiality and to reveal the absurdity of a patriarchal tradition that has normalised the idea that mothers must always appear to be friendly and cheerful.

AMBIVALENCE AS RESISTANCE

The "good mother" archetype is defined by Palomar Verea as a sensitive, angelic archetype characterised by "patience, tolerance, the ability to console, the ability to heal, to care, to tend, to listen, to protect, to sacrifice" (2004: 16). Nimri shows that she is perfectly familiar with these qualities of institutional motherhood, but she often performs them in combination with opposing expressions or gestures. For example, in a scene from the *Locked Up* episode titled "Betrayal" (#4x05: Traición, Carles Torrens, Fox Spain: 2019), Zulema criticises herself, saying that she is "a shitty mother" while she nervously takes her friend Saray's (Alba Flores) baby in her arms and gazes at the child sweetly (Image 2). The scene is ironic because it is ambiguous (Hutcheon, 2005). However, it is interesting to note that this ambivalence is not as polarised as it might seem; as pointed out above, Nimri often performs a motherly smile as a consciously ironic and artificial gesture. The tenderness of her facial expression in this scene could therefore be suspected of being false or feigned. But even more significant is the fact that Zulema

Image 2. Zulema looks tenderly at the baby after confessing that she is "a shitty mother" in the series *Locked Up*

identifies herself as "a shitty mother" right before offering the spectator a maternal image: through contradiction—a recurring feature of the many definitions of the term "irony" (Schoentjes, 2001: 98-99)—Nimri plays with oppositions to resist a traditional simplistic dualism, conveying a transparently ironic attitude towards the supposedly monosemous definition of motherhood.

Similarly, in the previous episode, titled "Mum" (#4x04: Mamá, Ramón Salazar, Fox Spain: 2019), in a scene where she needs to convey the impression that she doesn't care about her daughter, Fátima (Georgina Amorós), Zulema also conveys her ambivalence, partially covering her face with her hand to hide the tears that betray her maternal sacrifice as she speaks severely to her daughter: "I don't want you to smile at me. I don't even want to smell you." The contrast between the harshness of her words and the tears welling in her eyes reflects Nimri's ability to combine the bad mother with the sacrificial mother. Immediately after this, she adds an ironic touch to the scene by demanding abruptly and derisively: "Now get your ass off that chair." In the apparent incongruity between the comedic and the melodramatic, but without undermining her sacrificial gesture, Nimri uses irony to give the situation "a meaning of its own". Bruzos Moro (2009: 49) defines irony as a "polyphonic enunciation" that makes it possible for opposing meanings to engage in a dialogue, generating a "non-habitual" discourse that in the case of Nimri's characters resists the representation of a monosemous image of motherhood.

In a similarly ambivalent way, Alicia Sierra, Nimri's character in *Money Heist*, uses the tenderness associated with motherhood to extract information from Rio, the young gang member she has captured (#3x02: Aikido, Jesús Colmenar, Netflix: 2019). While protecting her pregnant belly with one hand, Alicia encourages her prisoner—who has clearly been tortured—to put his ear to her stomach to listen to the baby kicking. She allows the young man to forget about his pain for a moment: Rio smiles and caresses the belly gently, moved by the intimate warmth of the situation (Image 3). Then Alicia immediately resumes the interrogation, and when Rio refuses to speak she forces him to inhale gas to put him to sleep while she remarks softly in an ironic tone: "Come on, another little horsey ride." Nimri's performative restraint allows her to shift from tenderness to violence without changing the register of her voice, which is always serene and motherly, combining warmth with terror. In this way, her voice is deliberately "ostentatious" (Naremore, 1990) in its subtle mockery of her own method of torture. Nimri's ironic tone makes it seem as if her mocking voice acknowledged the figurative "excess" of the image. A mother's womb as a weapon of torture is certainly an image that creates a new meaning. In this sense, it is an image of resistance; as Soto Calderón suggests, drawing on Michel Foucault (2007), "resistance is neither reactive nor negative; it is a process of creation and permanent transformation [...]. Resistance is inventive" (2023: 65). Consequently, in the *transformation* of

Image 3. Alicia uses her womb to get her prisoner to talk in the series *Money Heist*

IN THE *TRANSFORMATION* OF THE WOMB INTO AN INSTRUMENT OF TORTURE, THE BENEFICENT MEANING OF THE PREGNANT BELLY IS *ALTERED*, OFFERING A NEW IMAGE OF MOTHERHOOD

the womb into an instrument of torture, the beneficent meaning of the pregnant belly is *altered*, offering a new image of motherhood.

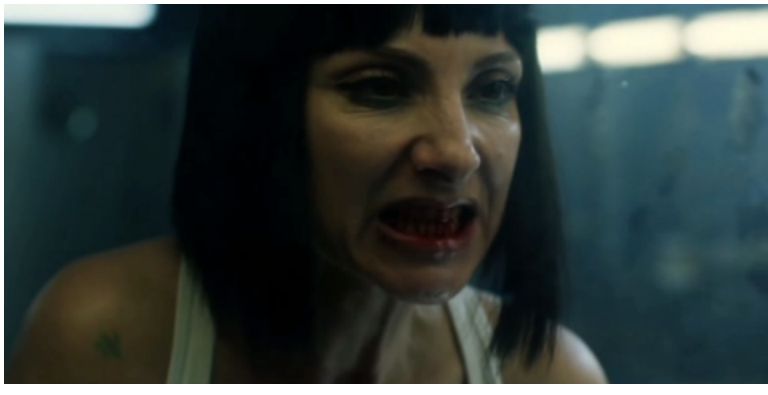
THE VIOLENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL MOTHERHOOD

In his study on the mother archetype, the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1994) identified the dual nature of this universal pattern involving the coexistence of a good mother and a terrible mother. According to Jung (1994: 76), the terrible mother has been portrayed as a destructive, threatening and extremely violent figure capable of transgressing boundaries and even unleashing chaos on organised society. In response to this aggressive female power, institutional motherhood has channelled this violence, reinforcing the mother's protective instinct towards her children and lionising women's fury when they react aggressively to defend their young. As Elizabeth Badinter (1981) points out, the maternal instinct is not necessarily present in all mothers but is influenced by a social and historical construction. In this way, by limiting this maternal force, mothers' bodies are "controlled" (Rich, 1986) to prevent them from challenging the patriarchal system.

In cinema, the overprotective mother who resorts to violence to protect her children is a common motif in both the melodrama and horror genres (Arnold, 2013). In these contexts, maternal aggression often arises as a consequence of the dictates of institutional motherhood, usually governed by patriarchal authorities. In the characters portrayed by Najwa Nimri, the patriarchy is embodied in various male characters; for example, in Sandoval (Ramiro Blas), the prison manager in *Locked Up*; in the private investigator in *Holy Family*; and in Colonel Tamayo in *Money Heist*. In all three cases, these characters try to subdue the power of the female protagonists by restricting them to their maternal responsibilities.

In the *Locked Up* episode titled "Mum" (#4x04: Mamá, Ramón Salazar, Fox Spain: 2019), Sandoval attempts to weaken Zulema's female strength by abusing Fátima, her daughter, who is an inmate at the same prison. In this scene, another prisoner, Goya (Itziar Castro), attacks Fátima in the communal bathroom in her mother's presence, on Sandoval's instigation. This sequence is of special significance because Zulema shows that she is aware of the patriarchal strategy and that she therefore needs to resist the supposed maternal instinct that Sandoval is trying to exploit, while at the same time she reveals that she possesses the desire for protection fostered by the patriarchy. The scene begins with Zulema brushing her teeth in front of a large mirror. Fátima then enters the scene and is immediately insulted and humiliated by Goya. Zulema watches the scene quietly in the mirror while she continues to brush her teeth. When Goya forces Fátima to masturbate her, Zulema's face betrays a flash of maternal anguish, which she quickly conceals to feign indifference to her daughter's harassment. Zulema's contained anger reaffirms the presence of her maternal instinct while at the same time revealing the violence inherent in it. She brushes her teeth more fiercely, her facial expression hardening, until she spits out the blood she has drawn from her gums. Her face reflected in the mirror, with her blood-stained teeth, evokes the image of a devouring animal (Image 4).

Image 4. Zulema evoking an animalised figure in the series *Locked Up*



It is clear that Zulema's fury is the product of Sandoval's strategy, which has succeeded in redirecting her subversive violence towards a protective family instinct. This makes the presence of the maternal instinct in Zulema's nature indisputably clear. However, in her aggressive attack on her gums and the conversion of her face into an animalised figure, Nimri offers an ironic picture of the inherent violence of the maternal instinct. Through the exaggeration of her facial expression, Zulema parodies the violent instinct of traditional motherhood while resisting institutional motherhood.

RESISTANCE AS A PROCESS OF SUBJECTIVATION

One of the most meaningful scenes of motherhood is indisputably the moment of childbirth, an experience that institutional motherhood has medicalised (Rich, 1986; Vivas, 2019; Crespi and Asensio, 2022) with no consideration of the spontaneous, reflexive, emotional expressions of women in labour. In this respect, the *Money Heist* episode titled "The Spectacle of Life" (#5x03: El espectáculo de la vida, Kolda Serra, Netflix: 2021), in which Alicia Sierra (Nimri) gives birth to her daughter, is a scene worthy of analysis here. Moments before her waters break, Alicia is still actively organising her offensive strategy against her superiors and part of the criminal gang holed up in the Bank of Spain. Nimri's character makes it clear that her pregnancy is not affecting her professional life and she rejects the idea of vulnerability often associated with the condition. In this way, she enacts an attitude that might initially be identified as indicative of an autonomous neoliberal subject (McGee, 2005). Instead, her excited, extremely expressive behaviour (which will reach its peak at the moment she begins the delivery stage) is the preamble to a conscious childbirth that she will end up sharing with the characters around her.

ALICIA CHALLENGES THE INSTITUTIONAL MOTHERHOOD THAT HAS CONTROLLED WOMEN'S BODIES FOR CENTURIES, MEDICALISING AND MASCULINISING CHILDBIRTH WHILE NEGATING THE DISCOURSES OF WOMEN IN LABOUR

Alicia has managed to capture the leader of the criminal gang, the Professor (Sergio Marquina), along with two other gang members, all of whom she has tied up in an abandoned warehouse. In her character's state of permanent excitement, Nimri emphasises her ironic, mocking tone as she talks to the Professor: "Your fans are going to worship him [Colonel Tamayo]; your girlfriend, the trashy Power Ranger, the teddy bear from the Balkans, the kid from the grave [...], the people you're willing to die for [...] are dead." Although sarcastic, the tone of her voice is soft and serene, like the tone she used while torturing Rio. At this moment, Alicia highlights the mocking yet sombre quality that Jankelevitch (1982: 115) attributes to irony, which has the ability to "freeze" laughter. The Professor, perplexed by Alicia's hyperactivity, warns her that she could go into labour at any moment, but she is fixated on celebrating her strategy, while belittling the Professor's gang and their doomed plan. Moments later, her waters break. At that moment, her male nemesis assures her that if she unties him he will help deliver her baby. But Alicia holds firm, confirming her decision to give birth alone: "On my own, like my grandmother did, and like hundreds of women throughout history have done." Through the female genealogy she evokes, Alicia challenges the institutional motherhood that has controlled women's bodies for centuries, medicalising and masculinising childbirth while negating the discourses of women in labour.

Alicia then falls back on a mattress while proclaiming sarcastically: "Welcome to the spectacle of life!" She thus announces a raw, carnal process

quite unrelated to the false romantic imaginary of childbirth. She makes an improvised selfie stick to hold her mobile phone so that she can monitor her own labour. As her pain becomes unbearable, the Professor tells her that she cannot take any drugs for it because it would put the baby at risk. Alicia groans, drawing out the syllables of each word as she exclaims "Are you fucking kidding me?!" in an ironic tone that transforms her groaning into a comic protest. Shortly after this, again in her invariably mocking tone, she heaps scorn on the institutional methods of childbirth and, with her voice straining under the pain of her contractions, she shouts at the Professor: "This kid adores risk, you son of a bitch!"

Image 5. The coexistence of opposing bodies in the labour in *Money Heist*

The birth is depicted using a cross-cutting technique that alternates between images of Alicia enduring her contractions, screaming and sweating, and violent scenes of the army storming the Bank of Spain to apprehend the remaining members of the Professor's gang. The clear association of her labour with the attack strategy of the military institution is reinforced when Alicia ironically announces her childbirth as "the birth plan". However, she later unexpectedly agrees to untie her prisoners to help her with the labour. The three men dutifully accept the role of midwives and at last, when the Professor lifts up the newborn baby in his hands, his excited face is as celebratory as the new mother's. This climactic scene thus constitutes a collective act of resistance against institutional childbirth. Ana Corbalán (2023) suggests that by giving into the Professor's offers of help, Alicia submits to the patriarchy. However, we would argue that this sequence does not relegate Alicia to the background, as she takes possession of the centre of the scene at this moment: in the collective participation in the labour, everyone is depicted as contributing to her unconventional logic of resistance. Andrea Soto Calderón (2023: 59) argues that resistance can be understood as a form of *contagion* between bodies which, even without recognising one another, configure a new world of meaning, opening up *the possibility of altering* the dominant discourses. In this unusual sequence, Alicia thus presents a "process of subjectivation" (Rancière, 2006: 21) that reveals that the protagonist needs the *Other* in order to render the power of her subjectivity visible. Together in the same shot (Image 5), united as enemies, they "denaturalise" their association with power, establishing a new affective configuration between them that strengthens their continued opposition to the institutional authority. It is no coincidence that this sequence is set in a transitory location: an abandoned warehouse where the Professor has set up his hideout. In this non-social space, Alicia finds herself in an ambiguous, liminal situation: she becomes the mother of a child—with the significantly triumphant name of Victoria—in the company of her adversaries, foreshadowing not only that her experience of motherhood will

IN THE COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR, EVERYONE IS DEPICTED AS CONTRIBUTING TO HER UNCONVENTIONAL LOGIC OF RESISTANCE

not be an institutional experience, but also that she will give up her role as a police officer, distancing herself from the corrupt patriarchal power to which she once belonged.

CONCLUSIONS

Nimri has previously stated that television series were all she watched for years and that she believes that acting "right now is on television" (García, 2015); she has also explained that in fiction series "you have a lot of time to try things; you learn a lot" (Pérez, 2024). In several statements, she has shown her awareness that her TV series characters make use of a groundbreaking form of humour (Céspedes, 2018; Aldaz, 2020; Reyes, 2022). It is clear that Nimri has been able to construct characters who share an ironic, mocking and often challenging tone. Netflix Spain's TikTok account posted a video titled *De la cárcel se sale, que se lo pregunten a Zulema* (Netflix España, 2024), which takes advantage of Nimri's disruptive way of talking and acting to suggest that her character in her latest series, *Breathless* (Respira, Carlos Montero, Netflix: 2024), in which she plays the president of the Valencian regional government, is not so different from the characters she portrays in the three series analysed in this article. The montage creates a narrative that exploits her characteristic irony, creating the impression that all the characters played by Nimri are variations on the same character at different times in her life. Similarly, the images of resistance to institutional motherhood analysed in this article are all interconnected, as they arise out of the same subjectivity that is aimed at transforming traditional representations of motherhood. Through expressive strategies such as the forced smile feigning a supposed maternal happiness, the pregnant womb turned into an instrument of torture, the masquerade of a face that parodies the violence inherent in the maternal instinct, and the experience of childbirth reinterpreted as an act of non-normative celebration, Nimri portrays transgressive mothers who challenge the traditional roles associated with institutional motherhood, offering new images of the mother figure. ■

NOTES

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1 Despite her success, there is hardly any research published on Najwa Nimri, except for a chapter on her work with the filmmaker Daniel Calparsoro at the beginning of her career (Davies, 2009).

2 Even in the incident where she struck a reporter's camera when he repeatedly tried to get her to answer his questions ("Najwa Nimri pierde", 2021), Nimri's violent reaction is inevitably associated with her fictional characters.

3 When asked whether she was like a sergeant as a mother to her son, Nimri replied: "More than a sergeant; it works for him and he likes it" (Diéguez, 2016). Similarly, she declares that her son likes her TV series—but not her films—and tells her that she is *"la puta ama"* ("the fucking boss") (Diéguez, 2019).

4 The English translations of all quotes originally in Spanish are the authors'.

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RESISTANCES TO INSTITUTIONAL MOTHERHOOD: NAJWA NIMRI IN SPANISH SERIAL FICTION

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to analyse some of the images of resistance to institutional motherhood offered by Najwa Nimri in her portrayals of violent, criminal mothers in three Spanish television series: *Locked Up*, *Money Heist* and *Holy Family*. Although she manages to "break away" performatively from the traditional mother archetype, Nimri nonetheless exhibits qualities of the "good mother", transfiguring some of her values and revealing the inherently violent nature of institutional motherhood. Drawing on star studies, philosophical perspectives on the notion of resistance from Michel Foucault to Andrea Soto Calderón, and the feminist discourses of Adrienne Rich and Hélène Cixous, this study focuses on moments where Nimri positions herself in the liminal spaces between the good mother and the bad mother, between tradition and the depiction of a non-normative motherhood. It is in these spaces of resistance that she amplifies one of her "performance signs": an ironic nuance that she introduces into her characters through her body or her speech. This performative projection underlines the attitude of resistance in Nimri's characters, revealing the possibility of a female subjectivity capable of projecting "new" images of motherhood.

Key words

Najwa Nimri; Actresses; Institutional motherhood; Images of resistance; Non-normative gestures; Irony; Star studies.

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RESISTENCIAS A LA MATERNIDAD INSTITUCIONAL: NAJWA NIMRI EN LA FICCIÓN SERIAL ESPAÑOLA

Resumen

El objetivo principal de este estudio es analizar algunas de las imágenes de resistencia a la maternidad institucional que los personajes criminales de Najwa Nimri generan en los papeles de madres violentas de las series españolas *Vis a Vis*, *La casa de papel* y *Sagrada familia*. Aunque Nimri consigue «romper» con el arquetipo de la madre tradicional, parte, sin embargo, de los atributos de la «buena madre», transmutando algunos de sus valores y revelando el carácter violento de la maternidad institucional. Desde los *star studies*, las aportaciones filosóficas sobre la noción de resistencia —de Michel Foucault a Andrea Soto Calderón— y los discursos feministas de Adrienne Rich o Hélène Cixous, estudiaremos los momentos en los que Nimri se sitúa en los espacios liminares entre la buena y la mala madre, entre la tradición y la proyección de una maternidad no normativa. Es en estos espacios de resistencia donde la actriz exacerba uno de «sus signos de actuación»: el matiz irónico que corporal y/o oralmente inserta en sus ficciones audiovisuales. Esta impostación interpretativa subraya la actitud de resistencia de sus personajes, revelando la posibilidad de una subjetividad femenina capaz de proyectar «nuevas» imágenes de maternidad.

Palabras clave

Najwa Nimri; Actrices; Maternidad institucional; Imágenes de resistencia; Gestualidad no normativa; Ironía; Star studies.

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DIALOGUE

LIBERATING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY

A conversation with
ELENA MARTÍN
about *Creatura*

LIBERATING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY

A CONVERSATION WITH ELENA MARTÍN ABOUT *CREATURA**

MIREIA TRIAS ALGUACIL
GONZALO DE LUCAS

In *Creatura* (2023), Elena Martín Gimeno—in her triple role as actress, director and screenwriter—documents the evolution of a character at three different ages: child, teenager, and young adult in her thirty-year-old present. Mila's story constitutes a retrospective look at adolescence and childhood, exploring the causes of the mental blocks she experiences in her relationships and sex life as an adult, associated with processes of female socialisation. The film patches together these three stages of life to reflect on the actress's body from the perspective of the gaps between each stage, where the mental blocks tend to be rendered invisible. An actress can facilitate or bring about image changes that could potentially free her from what is paralysing her and open her up to the possibility of a different way of life. The film explores the tension between the real body and the imaginary body: the "body we have in our head, which affects us to the point that it can cause a complex, even an obsession, which arises out of social norms, imposed imaginaries, images of other women" (Joudet, 2024: 14-15). In order to liberate the real body from the imaginary body, an actress's policy of creativity and resistance must involve focusing on the little perceptible movements: a gesture, a reaction, or the duration of a gaze. She must attend to the little details, the signs of fallibility. But she also needs to play around and take risks—with the body itself—to be open to the unpredictable: sometimes in a profound or exacerbated physical alteration, such as a crisis of hysteria, a possession, a trance or a fit of madness.

While she was working on *Creatura*, Elena Martín starred in *Watermelon Juice* (Suc de sindria, Irene Moray, 2019), a short film about a young woman who experiences possibility and healing as a survivor of a sexual assault. At the same time, she took part in the performance piece *Pussy Picnic* with colleagues in the theatrical artistic collective VVAA. In parallel with these activities, she engaged in an exhaustive process of theoretical research to write Mila as a protagonist who is fully consistent with the traumas she has suffered. We talked to her about her creative process of exploring questions about excesses of the body, gestures and emotions that push normative boundaries, and how to imagine other possible attitudes that challenge the pre-established models for female characters. ■

1. ON ACTING: WITH GAPS AND PROHIBITED GESTURES

This issue considers the body and the performances of actresses, exploring the tension between inherited models and the production of new subjectivities. In this regard, *Creatura* is especially relevant for its treatment of the connection between the teenage Mila (Clàudia Malagelada) and the adult Mila (Elena Martín). How did you work on this gap between the two, in everything from the preparation and casting choice to acting and editing?

We were explaining a very specific wound that is treated in therapy: the Oedipus complex by default. There are two types of Oedipus complex: by excess and by default. In the Oedipus complex by excess, the most extreme cases involve sexual abuse in childhood. On the other hand, the Oedipus complex by default is the opposite: the denial of desire or contact. We documented all the phases of how people redefine their bodies as they grow to adapt to this initial wound of being rejected by the father. At that age, Mila understands that if she feels desire, she won't be loved, and if she isn't loved, she will die. So she starts adapting to everything to avoid that death, to stay alive. As a child, her first gesture in this regard is to say: "I don't want us to call it vulva anymore," which is symbolically equivalent to an amputation. The same thing is repeated in the adult Mila's dream, when she dreams that she doesn't have a vulva. Her dream is linked to that amputation in childhood and her unconscious decision that "if I have to remove this part of me for you to want me, take care of me and protect me, I will do it, symbolically."

Some of these wounds are present in the film, while others are not. We didn't have the time or space to show every phase of the Oedipus complex. But in adolescence, the conflict is reduced to its minimum expression. This is a body that begins to discover the male gaze, which has happened to many women and men. When Llorenç (Biel López) tells her "I don't remember you being like this last summer," for Mila there is something strange and confusing about his observation. She likes it, but at the same time she thinks: "I've been here the whole time, and I haven't noticed the change" until someone from the outside points it out.

We had a scene that we cut in which, when Mila was going out to a party, her uncle told her she was beautiful and made her turn around on his arm. While she turned around, he was staring at her breasts, and she realised. It was a very strange moment. When Mila perceives that her body is starting to be looked at differently, on the one hand, she experiences a sensation of violence, but on the other, from the perspective of the Oedipus complex by default, she realises that through her body she can get revenge for her father's rejection. The character didn't end up going in that direction, but there are vestiges of that logic: seduce and abandon, seduce and abandon, usually the most inaccessible person, like Llorenç. In this way, unconsciously, she tries to prove that it was a lie that she didn't deserve her father's love.

Generally, this is a phase of discovery and overexploitation of the body. That's why the teenage Mila is provocative, flirtatious, wears her hair long, and is much more feminine. In contrast, the adult Mila wears jumpers and loose-fitting trousers, no make-up, and short hair. She has entered a more masculinised space. Somehow, she has internalised the idea that in order to find stable and familial love, she has to give up the *seductive beast* image and go back to denying her femininity.

Between the teenage Mila and the adult we had to take a very big leap, including with the wardrobe. We told the crew: the child and the teenager are clearly the same character as they share the same playfulness, but in the adult Mila this is not evident until she begins to be more playful with Marcel, to suggest games to him. At first, she didn't seem to be the same person, and that was a risk we noticed in the editing. But as

we had studied it, we knew it made sense that the mischievous part of her personality had been dormant for a long time and that over the course of the film it was coming back to life.

The big difference between adolescence and adulthood is that teenage Mila is more exposed because she is more fragile. On the one hand, she is more connected to her primal instincts, which is something that the adult Mila needs to recover. When she recalls her adolescence, she allows herself to be lighter, more upbeat, which is more noticeable in the central part of the film than it is with Mila in the first act. The dream where boys jump on top of her to lick her shows she is in touch with that more primal desire.

The choice to cast Clàudia was very complex because we were looking for an actress who, in situations such as noticing that someone is looking at her breasts, would elicit a protective reaction from the spectator, who would be perceived as fragile. But, at the same time, she had to have the strength and curiosity necessary to be daring and not to look uncomfortable with physical contact or showing her body.

At the casting call, we asked the girls if in their group of friends there were different levels of experience with sex or romance. They all said yes. Then we asked them if they were one of the ones who had more or less experience. I was interested in the ones who had less. Then I asked them: "When they tell you about these things, what do you feel? Fear, rejection, curiosity, hope?" Clàudia told me she had less experience, but when I asked her this second question she answered quickly: "No, no, I want to be them." That was the energy we were looking for! We needed someone bold, who had no mental blocks that might make the film shoot a bad experience for her; someone who would understand the character deeply. In the scene on the floating platform, for example, I said to her: "Clàudia, the idea is that you would eat them." And she answered: "Yes, yes, I get it perfectly."

Regarding the adult Mila, we wanted to ask you about your experience with the theatre and working with the body, when there is a kind of emotional overload and physical alteration that is perhaps easier to experience or work with on the stage. This might be because the cinema tends to encourage restraint in acting, given that the camera amplifies gestures and details, making it more likely that something will be perceived as excessive. All of this may be connected to the ending to the film, which points to a potential that is open rather than something resolved, suggesting a possible transformative shift—yours as both an actress and a filmmaker—towards a different place. We would like to know your experience in this regard, both in the theatre work you've done and in its connection with your life. Do you think you have been transformed in a way that would have been harder to achieve without the theatre, especially in relation to the liberation of gestures and the body?

Totally. I feel that the theatre doesn't influence me as much as I would like it to; in fact, I would like to go more in that direction. What I have done in theatre, especially with the VVAA collective, is quite extreme in performative terms. There is a lot of risk because we are often performing in the audience, without a protective barrier, and the performative code is really outlandish. I remember starting performances and seeing this feeling of second-hand embarrassment on the faces in the audience and thinking: "Keep going, at some point they'll crack the code." It wasn't easy.

On the other hand, in cinema, all the acting I've done has been in a very naturalistic register. On the level of the staging, with *Creatura* I allowed myself to explore something more, especially with the figurative imagery and the dreams. That was very gratifying, to be able to locate myself in a more theatrical and symbolic place. But as a film actress, I haven't yet reached the same level that I have in theatre.

In terms of tools, the theatre has given me a lot, not only technique, but also in relation to risk. Acting in front of an audience is very different from acting in front of a camera. In a film, knowing that I can repeat a scene three times is a big relief for me. For example, in the series that I just shot, I came back from holidays and on the first day I was stumbling over every sentence in Catalan. The director very tactfully told me that nothing I was saying was intelligible. Without the theatrical background I have, I would have been completely blocked in that situation.

In fact, the idea for *Creatura* came while we were doing *Pussy Picnic*, where the level of physical exposure was much higher than it is in the film. Not so much in terms of the exaggeration or alteration you mentioned, but in terms of explicitly showing the body. In *Pussy Picnic*, as part of a performance piece, we stripped naked in a very technical way: we lay down on the floor, took a gynaecological speculum and opened our pussies, and a video artist filmed inside with a spotlight and projected our whole cavity on a huge screen. Obviously, it was a safe space, where we had decided on everything in full awareness. On the other hand, in the series I just did, I decided not to undress. Not because the crew wasn't trustworthy—they definitely were—but because in that context I couldn't see how it was going to work.

When films show these states of emotional overload, female characters are often immediately pigeon-holed as hysterical. Godard used editing to show how this configuration originated with Charcot's photographs in the 19th century, which turned hysterical patients into a spectacle; this image was then passed onto silent film, as can be seen in the example of Lillian Gish in Griffith's films: the same form, the same image. However, what interests us here is to consider these states, such as possession, from a different perspective, related to the empowerment of the body, to an outburst that transforms, both in creative terms and in terms of a physical liberation.

I'm very interested in emotional overload, whatever register it might be in. I'm thinking of films about possession: there is something almost magical about that energy that seems to come out of nowhere and suddenly pulls you in. But it is true that when it comes to female characters, this type of expression tends to be punished. A lot of people have told me that at the beginning of *Creatura*, Mila "looks a little crazy." And yet, there have been many women who have told me after watching the film: "I've had these attacks in arguments with my partner." It doesn't necessarily have to happen in sex; it can occur in any moment of frustration.

That's why I find what you mention about hysteria interesting. In therapeutic terms, what happens to Mila at the beginning of the film is not an anxiety attack, but an attack of hysteria. But I use the term *anxiety* because people understand it better. When you say *hysteria*, it evokes the image of Sigmund Freud and of women tied to a bed. But if you look at films like *Thelma* (Joachim Trier, 2017), where the protagonist's convulsions follow the pattern of hysteria, or the new version of *Nosferatu* (Robert Eggers, 2024), where Lily-Rose Depp repeats that same posture when she is possessed, the connection between hysteria, possession and sexuality is clear.

It's almost always about girls in puberty or at the moment of their sexual awakening. *Carrie* (Brian de Palma, 1976) begins with the protagonist's first menstruation; in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), the possession is manifested through transgressive acts that symbolise the passage to adulthood and sexual awakening. And all these stories repeat the same discourse: the characters that surround the protagonist say things like "she's not like she was before" when in reality what is happening is that she's becoming a woman. In therapeutic terms, hysteria is closely related to sexual repression.

As for the ending to *Creatura*, we cut it down because the film already had certain internal rules that didn't allow us to take it to an extreme that was too radical. But we originally had the idea that what happens in the ending wasn't real. It's strange in itself that Mila, with all the mental blocks we've seen in her, would wake up at three in the morning, walk across a forest alone and wade into the sea at night. It's a bit of poetic licence. But in the first version, the scene was much more explicit: she masturbated on the rocks, had an orgasm and then time passed without the spectator realising it. When she opened her eyes, it was already morning and she was surrounded by people, in an awkward situation. I think this space is very interesting because it is tangentially related to possession, although the relationship isn't explicit. Ultimately, possession is only one way to explain erratic or explosive behaviour, from a religious perspective. It's easier to believe that there is a demonic force inside you than to accept that you have simply overstepped certain limits.

This commonly reflects male insecurity or fear of the woman, of her uncontrolled body; these are momentary outbursts that usually leave the man feeling paralysed or besieged. However, perhaps women have begun to conquer other spaces, like power dynamics, expressing themselves through their bodies, being excessive outside the private sphere. All of this is intertwined, and this intersection makes the crossovers so interesting. There are a lot of films that address this in some way, even though they don't belong to the horror genre. I'm thinking of Ingmar Bergman. In *Secrets of a Marriage* (Scener ur ett äktenskap, Ingmar Bergman, 1974), Liv Ullman's character takes a new direction and the man's response is not paralysis, but physical aggression. However, in recent times this has evolved. The woman has the man up against the ropes. In the drama genre, this conflict is often shown. The woman exercises her power the only way she can, which is usually through emotional manipulation, because it is the only space of power that she has been allowed; women are highly educated emotionally, as this is the only territory they have left. And those are her weapons: make his head explode, smother him until he cries. It's a dynamic that has been heavily criticised, but it seems incredibly powerful to me. Not in my personal life, but as a space of creation I find it thrilling.

In Hagai Levi's television remake of *Scenes from a Marriage* (2021), the roles are reversed, swapping the one who commits adultery and the one who leaves, but the power of manipulation remains in the woman's hands, as it is unthinkable that the man could ever be emotionally smarter. Unfortunately, many women are abused by their husbands, who also psychologically manipulate them. But in this context of an intellectualised semi-bourgeois couple who have probably been through therapy, it is clear that the husband is lost.

In the creative process I'm working on now, there is a bullying female character who starts to have outbursts of violence and at one point does an online search: "I almost killed the person I love most. Am I an abuser?" While researching for this project, I also entered this question online [in Spanish: *¿Soy una maltratadora?*], and then I searched the same question in masculine form: "*¿Soy un maltratador?*" In response to the question in the masculine form, a lot of people try to console you, but they don't deny that you're an abuser. In response to the question in the feminine, there was one answer that has stayed with me, which said: "*Maltratadora* [abuser] is a very big word," and the user's message literally read: "When my boyfriend doesn't listen to me, I break things, I hit him, I scream..." And of course... Maybe the word isn't all that big, is it?

2. CREATION BASED ON THE GESTURE: IMAGES BEYOND THEIR LITERALITY

From a cinematic perspective, it is important to discuss and explore how to reconsider these

dynamics. In this sense, the final sequence may be the one that most openly expresses the adult Mila's desire: a desire that is self-sufficient and reflects a fuller connection. Her blocking and unblocking in this scene are deeply tied to the physical dimension, to something that doesn't need to be rationalised, interpreted or gauged, but that manifests itself as a purely experiential and material desire. Do you think that films made by women today are exploring this dimension in depth or are they still too timid?

I think there are people who are exploring it a lot and there are other cases that are more timid. My inspirations come to mind, like *Elle* (Paul Verhoeven, 2021), for example. Michelle (Isabelle Huppert) is an irreproachable character, despite the fact she sleeps with her friend's husband. She is an extremely kind person; when she first met her friend Ana (Ann Consigny) in the hospital, she offered to breastfeed her baby because her own child was in an incubator. But at the same time, she is capable of unbelievable violence, with all her power. I get the impression that with any hostile, violent or unpleasant character, there is a tendency to explain the origins of their problem therapeutically, to spell out their previous trauma; I too fall into this trap, and I have to make an effort not to reinforce the dynamic. Socially, we try to show empathy, to contextualise everyone. For example, I really like *Titane* (Julia Ducournau, 2021) because yes, she had a car accident, but so what? This doesn't explain why she kills; it doesn't explain why she's a serial killer, and I like that. At the same time, it's almost incidental. The emotional dimension in the film happens elsewhere and not in relation to the crimes.

In *Raw* (Grave, Julia Ducournau, 2016), for example, there is an eroticising gaze from a subjective female perspective that we are not used to seeing on screen. This gaze destabilises the usual representation of desire and breaks with our traditional understanding of sexualisation, as can be seen in the scene of the football match. In *Creatura*, bodies *en masse* also play a key role, like the bodies of the firefighters in *Titane*, exploring a collective physicality that challenges conventions related to desire and the representation of the body.

Yes! *Raw* is an influence. The scene on the platform is inspired by the football match in *Raw* and we showed the scene to Clàudia so she could understand what we wanted to achieve, which she understood perfectly. As for this other gaze you mention, it is already so naturalised in our conversations that I wonder: What do people do when they write a film? Do they reinvent themselves to adapt to a standard gaze? Between you and me, I think this option has always existed. For example, as a teenager, I had a lot of friends who decorated their notebooks with images of naked boys. That has always been around.

I think I have always thought about it because of literature, which has given me a lot of influences, from Annie Ernaux to Anaïs Nin. Also more contemporary stuff like Miranda July, which reveals a subjectivity and a compulsion of desire. In her diaries, Anaïs Nin describes how she devours one man after another. It's not just about sexualising them but also about dominating them emotionally, manipulating them, and then abandoning them.

But yes, during the filming I said to the boys too: "In this scene, we are sexualising you, we're filming you shirtless in slow motion." And we would ask them: "Are you comfortable with that?" We didn't want to replicate what men have done to us, right? And at the same time, I liked that all the boys in the scene had different bodies, many of them non-normative. Her desire isn't like that: it's not pornographic; it's hormonal. They're young boys, full of energy; it's something much more animalistic than aesthetic.

Desire in *Creatura* is expressed through animality rather than standardisation. A clear example is the dream scene, where the boys move like animals, generating a feeling closer to the cannibal-

istic than to the strictly sexual, as if they were devouring her. This context unleashes a different type of body movement that expands the register of the erotic, shifting away from conventional representations of desire.

When we were writing and pitching this scene to the producers, interestingly, it was the most controversial. However, once we filmed it, everyone got it. I thought about the dream scene: do you really think a teenager couldn't dream about a fantasy of submission in which five boys devour her? Of course she could have that kind of dream! But that doesn't mean that she wants anyone to overstep any boundaries in reality. In the dream, it's a given that they are not hurting her; in fact, several boys are giving her pleasure at the same time.

We worked a lot on this scene physically during rehearsals, giving it a more theatrical treatment. Writing a dream is an amazing experience; it makes you understand why people choose to write books rather than making films. In a dream, you can explore a space where anything is possible. The protagonist enters a garden that isn't necessarily the garden at her house; it's an imagined garden that is transformed into an endless path filled with subjective elements. One day, when I have a bigger budget for a film, I will invest in these things.

When we saw the boys walking, the scene lost its power. In the script, they were naked, but a lot of them were underage, so we couldn't do that. That's why we decided that they would wear the swimsuits they have on in the scene on the platform, creating a connection between the dream and another moment when she felt desire for them. We got them to crouch down gradually. What we lost by filming the dream in a realistic location, like the garden at her house, we tried to compensate for with little distortions of the setting and the attitudes of the characters, to make it clear that they were in an unrealistic environment.

Literature invites us into more of an imaginary mental space, which in many cases is able to circumvent censorship more easily. On the other hand, although it also draws on the imagination and connects with the spectator's subjectivity, cinema is usually more restricted due to the tendency to interpret the images in a literal and explicit way. It is important to work to recover and expand that imaginary space in cinema, especially because it is a highly industrialised medium conditioned by codes and conventions imposed by the distribution market, which limits its expressive potential.

In *Creatura*, it gave me great pleasure to be able to keep a scene that I still don't understand completely, one that emerged when we first started writing the script and made it through to the final cut. I understand it emotionally, but I don't know what it means. When people ask me about it, I don't know how to answer. It's the scene where Mila's mother tells her that she dreamed about Mila and her grandmother, when Mila was little, and the three of them were in bed. In the dream, Mila asked her mother to pat her on the *culete* [bottom]. Mila, now an adult, is taken aback and asks: "Did I used to ask you to pat me on the *culete* too?" Her mother replies: "Of course, every day!" Mila then feels conflicted, because this scene, in some way, suggests a reinterpretation of everything we've seen, although I don't know what it is. Her mother is a secondary character, and we never see her pat her on the *culete*. I don't know what this scene means, but I find it moving. Maybe it's a reflection on how memories are subjective and how we can receive unexpected information in unexpected moments. Some people have asked me whether Mila is displaying a moment of hysteria, or whether the scene isn't real and is in her imagination. But no, it's real. It's simply a perceptive nuance, and the sensations it conveys are real.

This scene comes from a real conversation with my mother. It's the only scene in the whole film that wasn't analysed. The rest of the film, as I

said before, was designed with an almost scientific approach. But this scene was born while we were writing the script. One day, while we were writing, my mother called me and told me that she'd had a dream about me when I was a child. She told me that my grandmother was in the dream too. And she explained that I'd asked her to pat me on the *culete*, and apparently it was something I often used to ask her. When I hung up, I told Clara Roquet (the scriptwriter): "We've made a mistake." And she answered me: "No, no, we have to put this scene in." In fact, the storyline of the grandmother and the mother is the only one in the film that is based on autobiographical facts. The rest is a hotchpotch of research and personal accounts. However, we had to do substantially cuts to the part of the grandmother, who originally appeared much more in the sections of Mila's childhood and adolescence. For example, when she reads the grandmother's diaries, that part is a personal experience, but those scenes didn't make it into the final cut.

And did you have to cut out a lot the mother's scenes in the editing process? Ariadna Ribas (the editor) explains that the first cut was about four hours long. We get the impression that the mother is a character whose part was heavily cut down.
We had to cut scenes with the mother during Mila's childhood quite a bit. That was the moment when her mother began to be important again and was stepping into the foreground, and at the end of the film we wanted to bring her back in. We shot several scenes from the point of view of Carla Linares, who plays Mila's mother when Mila is a child, but in the cut they looked strange. The film is so focused on Mila's point of view that although we liked them a lot, those scenes didn't fit.

In fact, there was quite a long scene in the kitchen, between Carla Linares, Paula Hernando and Teresa Vallicrosa, where they were preparing a meal. At one point, Teresa, who plays Mila's grandmother, starts telling Carla off for complaining about her husband, when Carla says: "He's with the girl all day, but after that he doesn't do anything." And the grandmother replies: "You're so ungrateful; you have the best husband," and so on. Carla felt totally cut off. There were a lot of similar dynamics, where family members constantly praised Gerard, and she felt completely overshadowed. But Mila doesn't understand it. It looked strange, like: why is this here if Mila doesn't understand it, and all the rest of the story is told from her perspective? This scene explained how the mother felt, but Mila doesn't get it.

In a way, the feeling we wanted to convey in the chapter on her childhood is already made clear by the simple fact that we don't see the mother when she should be present. Some shots left from Mila's point of view were kept in, such as when she rejects her on the beach and she moves away into the sea, jumping into the water. From that scene, you can infer her mother's unhappiness.

Returning to the subject of genre, we wanted to ask you whether the horror or mystery element that pervades the film, especially in the nocturnal and nightmare scenes, which were filmed in a horror register, came naturally due to the topic of the film, or whether it was an aspect that was debated and determined during the process.
No, no, it arose in a completely natural way from the beginning. In fact, the film was much more permeated with a horror tone. We even shot some horror scenes, but we didn't include them in the final cut because they didn't fit. There were several where Mila was home alone, hearing noises clearly typical of the horror genre. I remember one in which I'm working at home, looking towards the window, while the camera is filming me from behind. There's a very slow tracking shot. Strange sounds are coming from the house, and there I am with my back exposed, which is a classic trope of the genre. At one point there's a loud bang, and I turn and say: "Guys, I have to hang up," because I'm on a video call. Then I go into my grandmother's

bedroom, where the noise came from. There was a whole plotline related to the grandmother, who was dead now and manifested herself in the film. In this scene, I come to the door of her room and it's the first time I've gone in there. The window is completely open and a box has fallen to the floor; everything's a mess. I begin picking the things up and I find her diaries. I close the window and sit down to read them. At one point, I read something about my grandfather and begin feeling a growing anxiety. Increasingly anxious, I start stripping off my clothes due to my discomfort, when the door and window open suddenly, almost magically. There's a shot that was one of the most impactful in the film: me on my back, starting to take off my clothes and discovering that my back is completely covered in hives, at the peak of the allergic reaction. It's a pretty terrifying and also monstrous moment, because my whole back is covered with spots, while the window is open. Mila stays there, trying to soothe her itching with the breeze.

Is this a film that you feel is still unrealised inside you? Do you feel the desire to continue exploring it, to delve into those images from the perspective of your own evolution as a filmmaker?
Yes, there are several things that are still unrealised. One of them is the question of adolescence and post-adolescence, that cycle of seducing and abandoning, seducing and abandoning. The power dynamic between the adult Mila and the teenage Mila, which we've seen. This would represent an arc towards the end of adolescence, but in *Creatura* we couldn't make such a wide arc, so we limited it to the key elements that were important to the story. That part was left out, but in a more extreme way, without being subordinated to a whole therapeutic explanation of repression.

The question of therapy, which we also left out, really interests me. There were therapy sessions in the film that we ended up cutting out, and that's something I'd like to explore more.

Then there's the question of possession. I'm a big fan of horror films; it's what I used to watch most. My favourite film for many years was *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Scott Derrickson, 2005). I feel that in horror there's a kind of justification for doing evil, for the impossible, you know? Like "I've got a demon inside me." We talked about it with Clara Roquet. There is something almost of the superhero in this, that a possessed woman acquires superhuman powers, and I love to think about that. It's a fantasy that goes beyond the erotic. It's a fantasy of violence. My anxiety, instead of staying inside me, would turn into destruction. I think that is a pleasure rather than a physical consequence.

And it happens to me when I'm writing, that as I progress with it I wonder: "Why does she do this?" But why? "Because she feels like doing it, right? Because she desires it." As women, we have a very strict relationship with violence, as if we're never able to feel immoral. If we hit someone, it's in self-defence, or because they're about to rape us. But writing a female character, why couldn't you write that she hits someone simply because she wants to, without having to justify it?

I haven't read Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*, but the other day I was told that in this book Carrington describes how, during her moments of psychosis, she experienced a superhuman strength. This happens in people who suffer a fit; perhaps it's the adrenaline, which gives you a huge boost of power. People acquire disproportionate strength when they're in danger, a strength that seems impossible. That's why straitjackets were invented, for example.

I've been thinking a lot about the idea of transgression. In the project for the series that I'm going to direct, I'm exploring the sheer banality of male violence. You start unpacking all this and you realise it's there because it's violence that is structurally permitted and supported. You think: "Why do they do it?" And the answer is because they can, because it's approved of, or at least not disapproved of; it is permitted. Sometimes when

I'm writing female characters I think: "If a man did this, it would be horrible." And I always have to remind myself that she's a woman. Unconsciously, I always do this translation. In cases of partner violence, for example, if it was the man who committed the violence it would be terrible, but why do I have so much fun writing it if it is her? And I think it's perverse and I question myself: "What am I trying to say?" I try to justify it, but what the character I'm writing is doing is a transgression. It's a given that she shouldn't be doing it, but she does it anyway. And this is where a very important dramatic problem arises: the chase. In real life, the police would arrive and there would be a chase. And I ask myself: "What fantasy realm can I create to prevent that chase from happening, or at least for it not to be successful? Violence can also be ecstatic; I've been thinking a lot about this idea for my next film.

But it is essential in the field of artistic creation that you can get dirty in this sense, exploring contradictory and challenging images. Especially when it comes to gender, everything tends to be subject to a system of control that structures it too rigidly. There needs to be something that can break with these norms; otherwise, you run the risk of creating from a place that is too comfortable.

Totally. I don't know whether there will be another driving force after this, but for me, after *Creatura*, this is the only driver. I loved a tweet that Clara Serra posted about *Creatura*, where she shared an article in [the Spanish newspaper] *El País* that related the film to *Elle*. I didn't understand how anyone could make this comparison, but she talked about the expression in both films of an "improper" desire on the part of a female character, liberating desire from the obligation to be healthy, exemplary and harmless. It liberated desire from the pressure to civilise the world, from being an example of civility in the face of male barbarism. And she said: "No, female desires are powerfully dark, unfathomable, toxic and harmful." ■

NOTES

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FREEING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY. CONVERSATION WITH ELENA MARTÍN ABOUT *CREATURA*

Abstract

An interview with the filmmaker and actress Elena Martin Gimeno, discussing the creation of new female subjectivities in cinema to challenge inherited models of gender and performance. With reference to her latest film, *Creatura* (2023), she explains the process of researching, writing and creating a character depicted at different temporal and emotional points. The discussion of this film raises issues such as the influence of theatre on her life and her way of working, writing and acting, excessive gestures and their relationship with transgression, the representation of hysteria or demonic possession, and the use of these gestures to find ways of pushing the normative limits of cinematic language in order to liberate the gaze.

Key words

Creatura, Female subjectivity, Hysteria, Possession, Excessive gestures.

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LIBERAR EL CUERPO REAL DEL CUERPO IMAGINARIO. CONVERSACIÓN CON ELENA MARTÍN SOBRE *CREATURA*

Resumen

Entrevista con la directora y actriz Elena Martín Gimeno, con quien hablamos sobre la producción cinematográfica de nuevas subjetividades femeninas con relación a los modelos heredados de género e interpretativos. A propósito de su última película, *Creatura* (2023), nos explica cómo es el proceso de investigación, escritura y creación de un personaje contado entre intervalos temporales y emocionales. A raíz de esta obra surgen temas como la influencia del teatro en su vida y en su forma de trabajar, escribiendo e interpretando; los gestos excesivos y la relación de esto con la transgresión, cómo puede ser la representación de la histeria o la posesión demoníaca; así como el uso de estos gestos para encontrar maneras de hacer desbordar los límites estándares del lenguaje cinematográfico para liberar la mirada.

Palabras clave

Creatura; Subjetividad Femenina; Histeria; Posesión; Gesto excesivo.

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(DIS)AGREEMENTS

BODY AS INTERVAL: THE ACTRESS'S PERFORMANCE IN EDITING*

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Gonzalo de Lucas
Annalisa Mirizio

discussion
Julia Juániz
Ana Pfaff
Ariadna Ribes

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introduction

GONZALO DE LUCAS
ANNALISA MIRIZIO

Recalling some of the few films that have shown the editing room on screen, Nicole Brenez mentions the sequence in *Bellissima* (Luchino Visconti, 1951) where Maddalena (Anna Magnani) walks through a cutting room "depicted as a dark basement where poor exploited young girls are working" (Brenez, 2021: 87). In his article "What an Editing Room Is", Harun Farocki writes:

> Editing studios tend to be found in back rooms, basements, or in attics. Much of the work is done outside normal working hours. Editing is a recurring chore and gives rise to solid jobs, yet each cut is a particular effort and one which draws the editor under its spell, making it hard for him [*sic*] to keep work and life apart. [...] Through this winding back and forth you get to know the film very well. Children who have not yet learned to speak will still notice if a spoon is on the wrong hook in the kitchen. With this kind of familiarity, a film becomes a space you can inhabit and feel at home in. (Farocki, 2001: 78)

Very little attention has been given in film studies to the particular ideas applied to address the specific issues posed by each reel of raw footage in the course of the different versions, tests or experiments that characterise the editing process. Often carried out over months, editing is a process of creative rewriting and discovery of the film that goes far beyond mere technical labour. In this sense, Walter Murch suggests—based on the number of hours the editor spends reflecting on or testing different possibilities—that what editing attempts is "not so much a *putting together* as it is a *discovery of a path*, and that the overwhelming majority of an editor's time is not spent actually splicing film" (Murch, 2021: 31).

But what do we know about all the doubts, reflections and ideas that occur to editors over the course of this long, meticulous, tentative exploration? Although they are inscribed in the film like underground layers (each version always remains,

concealed below the next), they are rarely documented, and scholars seldom ponder or explore filmmaking from this perspective. The idea behind this dialogue is therefore to explore this specific knowledge that tends to be kept concealed inside the editing room, to reflect on actresses' performances on the basis of their composition in the editing process and the new elements that process creates or draws out. Returning to Farocki:

> At the editing table you learn how little plans or intentions have to do with producing pictures. Nothing you have planned seems to work. [...] At the cutting table you discover that the shooting has established new subject matter. At the cutting table a second script is created, and it refers not to intentions, but to actual facts. (Farocki, 2001: 78, 80)

In this process, the editor engages sensitively with the film footage and with the actresses, understanding them—and their bodies—based on their rhythms, pauses, tones or gestures (particularly the most suggestive ones), in an emotional poetics that involves an experience of feeling with them, internalising them or mimicking them—even physically in the act of editing—to be able to put the process into words, out of which arise associations between images and sounds, as well as intervals.

Julia Juániz's editing credits include the Carlos Saura films *Tango* (1998), *Goya in Bordeaux* (Goya en Burdeos, 1999) and *The 7th Day* (El 7º día, 2004), as well as *Alumbramiento* [Childbirth] (Víctor Erice, 2002) and *The Sky Turns* (El cielo gira, Mercedes Álvarez, 2004). Ana Pfaff has edited films by Carla Simón, Carolina Astudillo and Adrián Orr, as well as *The Sacred Spirit* (Espíritu sagrado, Chema García Ibarra, 2021) and *Foremost by Night* (Sobre todo de noche, Víctor Iriarte, 2023). Finally, Ariadna Ribas is a regular editor for Albert Serra—with credits including *The Death of Louis XIV* (La Mort de Louis XIV, 2016) and *Pacifiction* (2022)—and for Elena Martín—*Julia Is* (Julia Ist, 2017) and *Creatura* (2023)—and also edited Neus Ballús's *The Odd-Job Men* (Sis dies corrents, 2021). As the Dostopos collective, Ana and Ariadna have also worked together on *Southern Brides* (Las novias del sur, Elena López Riera, 2023) and both are lecturers in the postgraduate program in editing at UPF-BSM (Universitat Pompeu-Fabra-Barcelona School of Management). ■

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discussion

Could you describe the viewing process and the points of attention or tension that guide your first choices of material? When you start viewing the footage, what elements grab your attention first in the actresses' performances (e.g. gestures, tone of voice, photogénie, relationships with other characters)?

Julia Juániz

I like to be able to get a copy of the script before they start filming. I feel it is essential to establish a dialogue with the director in order to exchange opinions. Based on that premise, I'm also keen on attending script readings, especially for a fiction film, because that's how you can find out what the cinematographer, art designers, etc., are thinking. In that reading/meeting you start getting to know the people on the film crew, which is very useful. I want to have the proximity and confidence to be able to say things. And then I'm in keen on attending the film shoot. I try to contribute something during filming, and I even learn a lot about how they do things. After that, when my work on the film starts, I study the script thoroughly. I study every change of sequence, how it's written, the characters, and I think, if I haven't been told who's acting, which actor for me would be the ideal one for that character... It's like I'm internalising the film. When I'm editing, that part becomes less important and I'm looking at what they bring, what has actually been filmed. I only return to the script if I have a doubt.

For me, the first shot I see of the film is decisive; I mean, the first frame, or the first two seconds of any take, whatever they've filmed, it doesn't matter. If I see something special for the film there, I already have something; it's like that image touches me. It's like seeing for the first time: the landscape, if there's a car, you see whether there's colour in the actress's face, how her hair is done, how she's dressed... I always tell my assistants that this first moment for me is sacred. So the way of looking at the footage is very sensitive; I have to do it carefully because I want to understand what I feel, what I think... I look for the emotions.

Based on these first impressions I begin to analyse how the actor performs the role, how she speaks the dialogue, and so on. In the first few

days your assessment might be clumsier, in your choices you use your intuition a lot, all the knowledge gained from what you read in the script, but once you've got a few sequences done you start to understand better what the film is like. I also pay a lot of attention to the actors' gestures, whether they're in character or not. And finally, when choosing a shot, I place a lot of importance on the camera movements, the framing of the shot and the sound. And, above all, ensuring that the direct sound is good. Finally, it is essential that the actresses make me believe them; that I totally believe in what I'm watching.

Ariadna Ribas

The first viewing is crucial; it defines your first impressions and marks the relationship you establish with the material. Most of the time I view everything before I start editing and only then do I decide how to approach the process. Viewing all the raw footage helps me to get a "bird's eye view" of what has been filmed, a better understanding of the evolution of the characters—and the performances of the actors and actresses—and a sense of the ideas behind the execution of each shot. One way or another, the film begins to reveal itself in its most embryonic state.

It's that first viewing that shapes my relationship with the material: what elements seem important to me—sometimes there's something you love, that surprises you and stays etched in your memory—or what things don't interest me as much or that I even sense may end up left out of the final cut. You establish a kind of emotional relationship with these rushes, before you start making a more rational and considered judgement.

At that time I also find it really important to take notes by hand. I recently read that writing by hand helps lock in mental processes in a deeper way and I think it's true. It allows me to connect with what I'm watching and fix it in my memory. I write down by hand what grabs my attention, and I even think the act of writing itself gives me information about what I take note of.

And on a purely practical level, when I'm working with the editing program I highlight every shot that I find interesting in some way in the timeline to differentiate it from the others, as I find it really useful to have these visual guides. It allows me right away to see what I liked, what passed the first filter. In that first viewing I try not to go too far into the details; I try not to lose sight of the overall experience. The more precise perspective comes in the second viewing, when I take more detailed notes about the footage.

When we start editing a scene, often in collaboration with the director, we review the rushes again. And that's where your perception can change. It's interesting to check your notes from the first viewing and discover things you hadn't noticed before or that take on different nuances now.

In general, in the case of fiction films, for me the first and biggest determining factor of whether something works or not is, above all, the acting. The staging and the camera are also important, of course, but what really makes the most impact for me is the actors' performances. When something isn't working, I almost always detect it first in the acting. In general, I can put up with a less precise camera or staging, but if the performance is good, or even if something special, unexpected or unplanned happens, that's what hooks me in. That's what I find thought-provoking. That's the heart of everything.

I realise that, for me, this is sometimes more important than it is even for the director, who is perhaps more focused on camera issues or narrative intentions. As I come into that first viewing of the footage as more of a "virgin", I concentrate on detecting whether it is true, whether something genuine is happening. And when it isn't, the search for that something becomes part of the editing work.

This process is a form of filtering. I would say it's a question not of *improving the acting*, but of re-

moving layers, of trying to get to something more essential, which is exactly what I try to identify right from the first viewing.

All this happens inside the shot, even before we place it in relation to others. There is another dimension: the fact of putting shots in relation to each other creates energy flows, emotional and narrative rhythms that are inevitably connected to the performances of the actors, to their timing, and also to the delivery of the information: what is revealed, what is withheld. The emotional weight of each moment can guide you in one direction or another, depending on what is made known, what can be intuited or what is still kept concealed.

Ana Pfaff

I always take notes right from the first viewing. They're quite intuitive and closely tied to feelings. Sometimes I point out very specific things, like "this line works" or "that gesture has something special about it," and sometimes I just write: "Something is happening here that I don't know how to explain." I even make drawings that only I will understand. It's as if I need to translate what I feel into my own visual, almost corporeal language.

Over time I've sharpened my perception a lot. Now I focus on details that I might not have noticed before: a sparkle in a character's eye, a blink, a slight inclination of the head. We've developed a very keen sensitivity to read the micro-movements of the face. Sometimes I surprise myself by getting obsessed with tiny differences between one shot and another, and I ask myself: "What is happening to me?" But often that's where the key is, where something changes, even if you don't quite know why.

There are some things that can't be put into words. I suppose that's why I sometimes talk about magnetism, gravity. It's a very physical intuition, which doesn't obey a rational logic. I remember a scene in *Alcarràs* (Carla Simón, 2022), for example, where I looked at all the takes and I knew clearly right away which one I wanted. In the film shoot another take had been marked as the good one, but when we looked at it at the editing table it was obvious that it wasn't the one. There's something that only gets revealed there, in the work with the captured image.

It also has to do with how the actors' bodies relate to the camera. If you're filming with camera in hand, the tiniest thing changes your perception: the position, the distance, the space around a body... everything is affected. The camera is also a body, and its movement really conditions the emotion that a scene conveys.

There is a kind of red line that I always keep in mind: the moment you can tell that the actor is conscious about what they're doing. It can be a tiny gesture, a slight change of the gaze. Between two almost identical shots, one is true and the other is self-conscious. And it shows. The take that isn't "acted" consciously is always more powerful. I wouldn't know how to explain it technically, but you can feel it. I'm not thinking so much in terms of character construction, but in the emotion that resides in a gesture, a silence, or a reaction.

That creates a very profound connection with the films I edit, not in terms of authorship, but in terms of vision: of how I see people, the world, through editing. And sometimes I wonder: Do I feel these films are mine because I choose to work with directors I connect with? Or is it the process itself that makes me inhabit these stories until they become a part of me? I'm not sure, but I do know that there's something of that embodied empathy, that emotional immersion, that stays with you.

In your daily practice, how do you deal with differences in acting registers? How do you manage to find the character among the different tones or nuances of each actress? How do you negotiate between what you imagined and the actual material?

Julia Juániz

In general, the actors in the films I've had to edit have been very good. I haven't had the need to start from scratch or change something completely. I've always started with what was there, and I feel it had a correlation with what was in the script. Even so, when you're editing you construct the characters with a particular rhythm and tone of voice for each film, so what I look for in an actress is for her to move me and allow me to see what the character is thinking, and often I have to make that visible. As an editor I can't just cut the shot anywhere; I have to base my decisions on the character's emotions or on what she wants to convey, what she's thinking about when she's looking at something, and so on. Sometimes I really like it when an actress or actor is acting or looking one way and you're feeling or seeing something else. For example, whenever I worked with Carlos Saura, he would always tell me the same thing: "Julia, you're holding two films in your head, not one." He was very funny because I would tell him what I saw in certain things, multiple meanings, and he would laugh. He was a lot of fun, although he always seemed very serious. But I always remember that he would often say to me: "Julia, you're holding two films; people aren't going to get both of them." But I have to edit the films so that people can get all the details of the actors and the whole narrative using different structures and ways of storytelling.

For me, spectators have to be active; they have to discover things little by little, which means I have to hide, conceal, supply the information little by little and never in a repetitive way.

Ana Pfaff

For me, in editing, a key part is being very attentive to the bodies as expressive material, not only in the narrative, but also in the moods, in moments that are almost choreographic. It's important to find the specific qualities of the characters through their use of gestures, the way they move, walk, touch. Everything that allows us to discover something of their identity.

For example, in the film I just finished editing, *Romería* (Carla Simón, 2025), one of the big fears, or what we talked about a lot with Carla, was whether the protagonist was too "soft", whether she looked like a naïve kid, more of an observer than an active agent. In the casting we had other options: a girl who was more stunning, more sexualised, with a different power. And during the editing process the doubt came up: what would the film have been like if we'd chosen the other girl? It was interesting, because the actress we finally chose has something really lovely and specific, although she's not the type of actress that tends to predominate in films today. She has a very particular way of walking. I remember that at first, while looking at the rushes, I talked to Sergio Jiménez (the other editor) and we said: "She looks a little clumsy here coming out of the water," but we thought it was great that she looked like that.

And, in the editing, keeping those moments was key. For example, if at one point you walk in a special way, it's better than if you did it the "right" way. Or if you have a peculiar gesture, like touching your nose in a strange way or sitting differently, those things are essential to the construction of that unique character. Ultimately, those gestures are what prevent us all from just being clones.

In terms of sensuality, the mother's character had a part that was worked on much more in that sense, due to her relationship with the father/cousin. Although there are nude scenes, their function wasn't to sexualise the naked body but to normalise it, in the context of an era (the 1980s), of the hippie movement, of a naturalism aimed for in the mise-en-scène. I remember that various people in the sector, such as sales agents or distributors, commented that they didn't understand why the naked body was shown so much at certain moments. But our intention was precisely to normalise the female body in a context that wasn't sexualising it.

Physical and emotional transformations like this are revealed above all in the editing. In *A nuestros amigos* [To Our Friends] (Adrián Orr, 2024), for example, we can see clearly how the body of the protagonist, Sara, changes over the course of four years, how her energy becomes softer, how her femininity is transformed. Or in *Facing the Wind* (Con el viento, Meritxell Colell, 2018), Mònica García's body at the beginning is very tense, very hard, and then slowly begins to open up. The editing follows this change: at first, close and fragmented shots; at the end, more air, more space, more time.

In *Summer 1993* (Estiu 1993, Carla Simón, 2017) the casting was crucial. Carla looked for a girl with an emotional darkness, like her at that age. Laia Artigas had that look, that tension. In the editing, we often picked up odd spontaneous gestures that weren't part of the action, but that added a look of truth. Some people even said: "The girl doesn't smile in the whole film." And that was just what we wanted to bring out: that contained emotional tension, which is finally released in the last scene with crying. That crying is a beginning, not an ending.

For me, editing is always an empathetic task. Sometimes I notice how my body reacts physically while I'm looking at the footage, as if I'm mimicking it unconsciously. It's a way to connect with what's happening, not to get stuck on the narrative level. I talk a lot about feelings of weight, gravity, almost like they do in dance. About rhythms, accents, intensities. In the end, this whole process has to do with how we inhabit the film from within. Editing isn't just organising a story: it's understanding how the bodies that inhabit it feel, how they transform and how they transform us too.

In my editing process, it's also important to point out that I usually work on the voice separately from the image. Working with voices and tone is something we always focus on. We've also discussed this with Carla, because in her films—especially when we're working with non-professional actors—we need to do exhaustive work on the audio. In *Alcarràs*, this was key: when working with non-professional actors, you have to find the exact tone for each one. Sometimes a take wasn't perfect, but it was genuine. With actresses like Ana Torrent or Lola Dueñas you can refine it more, because the control they have of their bodies and emotions is impressive. But the challenge is to balance everything so that nobody is "out of tune". In *Foremost by Night* (Sobre todo la noche, Víctor Iriarte, 2023), one of the most delicate parts was working with the voice-overs. At first, I thought it would be necessary to re-record them, but finally we managed to integrate them by editing word for word, with a lot of attention to the tone. This painstaking work allowed the voice to accompany the image without undermining its emotional force.

For the acting, I like to use timeline blocks, which in my case is a list of responses or lines, just for the audio. Some people work on it based on the visuals, but I don't. For the visuals, I go to the rushes and work with complete takes, maybe because I find it more immediate to see what is visually interesting in one take, while the audio is something more abstract and difficult to identify in each one. That's why I review the audio takes over and over, comparing tonalities and checking for nuances. In editing, we often dub the actors with their own lines, which opens up a range of possibilities. The visuals are enhanced by the different audio ver-

sions; we can tweak and fine-tune the tonalities in the performance, and that, for me, is crucial.

Ariadna Ribas

Sometimes I think my work is similar to acting. I ask myself: "Would this character do this? Would they act this way?" If something doesn't fit with its moment of action, we cut it. That logic gives me a lot of clues about the characters. I remember, for example, that the first assembly cut for *Julia Is* (Julia Ist, Elena Martín, 2017) was put together quite quickly, adhering very closely to the script. That allowed me to identify something that usually happens in the first viewings: the story tends to be told from outside rather than inside the character. It's common for the first cuts to prioritise clear understanding of the story, even though some attention may be given to the acting. But the focus is usually on the structure, on external time rather than on the internal experience.

With *Julia Is*, I noticed it especially in the treatment of time: the boredom, the character's worries, everything was observed from a distance, from outside the character, through descriptive actions. So we began working on shifting this: slowly moving into the point of view of the character, to tell the story from her place in time. It was a great learning experience. For the first time, I felt that the editing was transforming the film completely, bringing it emotionally closer to the character.

I took advantage of something that at first seemed naïve to me, but that proved very useful: since the film was highly autobiographical, I asked Elena about specific aspects of her experience. "How did you feel when you arrived in Berlin?" and "How did you feel about your return to Barcelona, after everything you'd experienced on the Erasmus [exchange program]?" That helped us a lot, for example, to find the ending. We had tried some endings where the protagonist resolved or closed certain plotlines or conflicts that arise throughout the film, but something didn't seem to fit. After going over it a few times we sat down with Elena to talk. I asked her that question about how she had really felt about her return, and her answer was: "I just felt unsure about what to do with my life." That helped us understand that the ending needed to be much more open than what we were initially aiming for. So the key to that and other decisions was to draw from the real experience, from the character.

In *Creatura* (Elena Martín, 2023) Elena also plays a leading role, and it is again a film very much focused on the character. Because I had worked with her a couple of times, I knew her a little better as an actress, and that's where another job begins: detecting acting "tics" and neutralising them. For example, systematically hesitating when speaking to make it seem natural, or making gestures like raising your hand to your head to express intense thought; when they become automatic, these things become clichés. We talked a lot with Elena because she is also very interested in looking at these things, and she herself was surprised to see how they worked. But it's interesting to understand them in order to avoid them.

In *Creatura* there was also a very rich and complex mix of actors: natural, professional, performers with backgrounds in the theatre or the circus, from television series, children with no prior experience... And that requires careful tonal fine-tuning. Oriol Pla, for example, can go from clowning around to an intimate register in the same scene. Elena has quite a natural presence, but with certain marked gestures (or "tics", as I said before) that can sometimes appear, which we decided to soften. Theatre actors tend to emphasise the text and with children it's hard to film long takes or do exact repetitions... they work through play. All of this conditions the editing style. In the scenes with children, for example, we had to work with shots of shorter duration, using elliptical cuts and even montage sequences with music. In the childhood section of *Creatura*, this was very clear: the pacing was more fragmented, more energetic. On the other hand, in the adulthood section, with professional actors,

with more control and precision, the approach could be measured and contained. This radically changes how you treat time, the points where you cut, the construction of the action.

The same thing happens in Albert Serra's films. You've got professional actors together on the set with people with no training in acting, performers and people with backgrounds in other fields. The question is how to unify these styles without erasing the differences and the particular and interesting qualities of each one, to ensure there is a dialogue, an internal coherence. This doesn't mean that everyone has to be in the same register, but it does mean that they need to be able to coexist.

Interestingly, I've found one element that occurs a lot with all of them: difficulties with controlling their hands. Actors' hands are a whole world of their own. If you don't give them something to do with them, they become a problem. It may be that when they make an effort to say their lines, that effort tends to be expressed physically, often through redundant gestures.

In *The Death of Louis XIV* (La Mort de Louis XIV, Albert Serra, 2016), for example, with Jean-Pierre Léaud, some shots had to be cut out for that reason: his gestures were exaggerated, affected. Sometimes we even used masking (image editing) to keep his hands still. When they're used to highlight something that should be happening internally, gestures become obstacles.

In fact, I'm currently working on a project, Gabriel Azorín's *Anoche Conquisté Tebas* [Last Night I Conquered Thebes], where we're using this image editing technique a lot to change the actors' hand movements, expressions or other physical gestures, within the shot itself and with image masking, which we believe help a lot to polish their performances.

There is another less visible but equally important dimension: voice and intonation. I like the idea that intonation is "the gesture of the voice". In editing, we work a lot with that: we use lines (audio) from one take with the image of another take. If the intonation is better in one take but, for whatever reason, the visuals are better in another, they can be combined. It's a powerful resource. If we could do the same thing with gestures it would be ideal, but there we come into the realm of visual effects that are much more complex to apply. This ability to tweak the acting through the sound allows us to refine details and enhance intentions. And as many actors have the ability to repeat takes with a very similar tempo, it usually works very well. It's an invisible but very effective tool.

Between revealing and concealing, what role does editing play in the narrative and sensory construction of the body? In the case of female characters, how do you work with the interval between inherited gestures or models and new subjectivities? What lived, aesthetic or collaborative learning experiences with other women have been decisive for your way of editing today?

Julia Juániz

Well, I think that when you do editing, what influences you a lot is your own life and your mental and physical experience of everything, of knowledge, of how you move. Even knowing how to dig in a garden. Those basic things that aren't important to people; to me, they are. If I see someone digging in a garden and doing it wrong, I think it's a disaster. In filmmaking, I ask myself questions constantly; I mean, my job as an editor is always to ask myself things, even if I have no answers. I've got some information, but my head needs to be free as well to get inside the head of the spectator, who doesn't know, and what clues I'll gradually give them to discover.

This means that filmmaking creates tensions and emotions. You have to give the spectators the chance to experience through someone else's body or through other things that they don't have access to in their lives. In my experience, in my editing I always put myself in the other's skin; I embody the character, trying to see life from their perspective, with their subjectivity and complexity. I need to live it and feel it, and to do that what I experience in my own life is very important.

In the editing room, I make decisions based on my own life. For example, with an actress I always try to understand the timing of her lines and pauses, and at the same time I need to understand the character's. So I have to have that character inside me to be able to make good cuts, pauses and breaths. I experience the dialogues through myself, the life experiences I've had with those or similar issues, and from there I work out how I would respond. Normally, I'm very much guided by the timing, the breaths, how the character thinks and takes time to think; that's part of the dialogue. Sometimes, as an editor, you also have to leave that time for the other to think. If a character is giving important information that another character needs to receive, you have to create or construct those pauses and that timing in the editing, because perhaps the actor hasn't given it or marked it. I take inspiration from life, from how people talk to each other, how they express heavy or important news, and I reproduce that in the editing. So I always say that experiences are very important. I couldn't edit anything that went against my ideas, where a woman would be made to look terrible. I think my job is also to educate and to move forward with the times.

Regarding collaboration I can say that in general I have worked very little with other women, especially when I was getting started. In my case, the fact I didn't have a background in film was also a factor; I had studied for a different career, but I was always interested in filmmaking and I got into editing quickly. After four years I became a lead editor. Starting out was hard for me. I began in 1990 in Madrid, and things were very different from now. For example, I'm envious when you [young editors] talk about and show your edits to each other; that's what I would have wanted to do. But back then any other editor would be seen as a rival, and that was terrible. Now it has changed, and I'm really thrilled that it has. I had to learn more on my own and by reviewing the work of other filmmakers. But since my life is filmmaking I always keep studying different narratives: jumping from experimental cinema to classic cinema, and so on. There are a lot of women I've studied that I'm totally spellbound by, including Elena Jordi, Cecilia Mangini, Margot Benacerraf, Maya Deren, Agnès Varda and Chantal Akerman. Every time I see a film of theirs I learn something new.

Ana Pfaff

I can talk about working with the [Deleuzian] interval between bodies based on *Romería*, where it is associated mainly with a question of the era, as it's set in the 1980s, a time when the body represented a site of liberation; it was more uninhibited. Moreover, it's not just the body but also what the characters do. What does the mother do? What does the daughter do? The daughter has a way of doing things that we could say is much more childish, but as I said with Carla, we also liked to question it. Because although the daughter doesn't have this liberated body, it is because of a clear decision: "I'm not interested."

For example, there's a moment when she says: "No, I'm not interested in boys; I don't want to have a boyfriend." There was a kind of assumption that a girl her age had to experience that sexual liberation, but in her case she simply doesn't feel like it at that point in her life. It's interesting how that part is not seen as a "liberation" but as a kind of activism in its own way. That interval is not so obvious; it's subtler.

We started working together with Carla well before *Romería*, on her short film *Lacuna* (Llacunes, Carla Simón, 2016). Her mother's letters, which would later appear in *Romería*, were also in that film. I thought it was a really beautiful short. Carla travels to the places where her mother wrote the letters: from the summer gatherings when she was a child, to the last ones, where she writes, for example, about taking an acid trip or about her wish for her brother to take care of her daughter when she dies. These letters run through a whole life. Carla shot the film with a handycam, reading aloud, but never appearing in the shot. Yet we feel her presence constantly behind the camera. That idea always seemed really beautiful to me: a filmmaker looking for her mother through the act of filming, knowing that she'll never find her, but she does it anyway.

In *Romería*, that idea is transformed. Now it's not just a search for an absent mother, but an attempt to reconstruct and imagine a life: the protagonist's parents' life. There is a shift. In the short film, Carla was filming an absence. In the feature film, that absence is filled with imagination, fiction, desire. It's not just a question of seeking, but of embodying, of living what was never lived. And that transformation seems very powerful to me.

There was a very important moment in the process of editing *Romería*, where Marina's character appears filming with a camera. That element was not in the original script; it was proposed much later on. Carla said: "Gosh, this has to be there. It's important for her to have a camera, right?" Why does Marina take this journey? Because she's a filmmaker. We worked a lot on those moments in the editing: she is shown filming in the beginning, then when she sees her grandparents, and then at last in the final shot. That last shot, with Marina filming her family, was a very significant decision. It wasn't in the first cuts, and when we added it everything took on another dimension. It was necessary to end with that act: that's where the filmmaker is born. When the film ends, we sense that she has accomplished something, but it also raises a question: What does all this mean?

All the footage filmed on the handycam was essential, not only as a visual resource, but as a subjective device. It allowed us to connect Marina with the locations, with the memory, with the reconstruction. In the editing, we were constantly making connections between the parents' past and the daughter's gaze: the cameras, the places, the gestures. All this allowed us to paint those spaces from the perspective of Marina's imagination as well. Working with that device was key to ensuring a resonance with the dream world, with the part of the dream.

I'm also deeply interested in working with archives in relation to the body. In *Southern Brides* (Las novias del sur, Elena López Riera, 2024), for example, we worked a lot with that idea. We talked to Elena about how the wedding becomes a mise-en-scène for the female body: white, pure, on the verge of being deflowered. There is a theatricality in the rite that places the woman's body at the heart of it. With the archive footage we decided to work on very specific motifs: for example, the hands. We started with waiting hands. And the last shot we edited was of a woman listening to the priest, who looks at her hands and makes a hesitant gesture, as if wondering: "What am I doing here?" A tiny gesture that contradicted the idealised image of the rite.

In another sequence, we used a very unsettling video of a visibly nervous bride. The person filming kept on zooming in on her face. We edited all these zooms together to create a growing tension. The camera became something aggressive or invasive. It was a very powerful moment in the film because right at that point they start talking about how to break with the official discourse of love. I thought a lot about *Amateur* (Martín Gutiérrez, 2022), which also works with zooms on his grandmother's body, but with a different idea: an affective, almost tactile zoom. And I liked to think of that same gesture of zooming in as something

that could be intimate or violent, depending on the context.

In *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* [Ainhoa, That's Not Me] (Carolina Astudillo Muñoz, 2018), there were also some very powerful moments with archive footage. There is a sequence where we hear one of Ainhoa's last letters, written after she'd become very disconnected from life. We edited the letter with night-time shots of her in a bar, filmed with an infrared camera. It created a really ghostly atmosphere, almost like a farewell. Another key scene was when Patxi, Ainhoa's brother, recounts how she died. Carolina made it clear that she wanted to use some footage of them playing in a pool when they were children. What we did was to edit that sequence so that they were always under the water; we never let them out. That created a feeling of confinement, of a shortage of air. Then, when he talks about what was believed to be an accident, we edited all the moments when Ainhoa threw herself over and over again into the water, and the children's game was transformed into something extremely violent. And at the end, when they jump in together holding hands, it becomes a metaphor for the brutal separation of the siblings after her death.

All of this has to do with how the editing becomes a way of contemplating the body, the image, the aesthetic experience. Sometimes what guides you are your own physical reactions. Sometimes while I'm editing, I begin to gesticulate or move my face without realising it, as if my body were responding to what it's watching. That is also part of the reading process. That's why it's so important to try to put into words what you feel when you're editing. Although it can be hard, even if you don't have the exact words, the effort to verbalise helps you to understand what you've experienced, to communicate not only with other women, but also with yourself. To say: "I don't know what has happened to me, but I need to recount it." And by putting it into words, you begin to understand.

In fact, we spend most of the time at the editing table reflecting, talking, doubting. But I don't like the idea of "therapeutic editing" that is often used to describe this, because it implies a one-way relationship. For me it's the opposite: it's about caring. It's not "I listen to you so that you can unburden yourself"; it's mutual support, working together through dialogue, caring and listening. This also has to do with the fact that a lot of us started work outside the industry, editing at home, sharing meals, time and processes, and that creates different types of connections.

Ariadna Ribas

I think it would be really interesting for everyone working in filmmaking—cinematographers, art designers, film crew, actors, etc.—to spend a few days in the editing room to understand what we do and how our work complements and enhances theirs. In fact, on a couple of occasions I've had actors or actresses thank me for the editing work, not because I've "improved" their acting, but because they've understood that editing is a collaborative job that supports and fine-tunes their performance, where we try to get the greatest brilliance out of their work.

In the editing process, like in the film I'm doing now with Gabriel, focusing on a single setting (some Roman baths) and in the work with the actors, we spent days reviewing shots over and over again, analysing details. This should be the norm, but often there's no time. Watching a shot over and over doesn't wear it out; it provides an opportunity to explore its nuances. The director and his co-writer, who is a stage creator with a close relationship with the theatre, talked about how during filming the directions need to "pass through the body". For us, the editors, there's a similar process: we have to translate the first impressions that an image (or a sound) gives us. And it's also through the body that we experience so that we can name something, and we name it so that we can better understand what viewing the

material does to us, whether in terms of rhythm, tone or emotion.

For me, it's important to understand what the camera really captures, because the greatest power is not always in the obvious gestures, but in what happens underneath, in what is hinted at or left undone. In Albert Serra's films, for example, there's a lot "left undone", an unlearning that is reminiscent of Bresson and his use of repetition to erase automatic and established gestures.

In Albert's films, there's no traditional narrative, there's no search for the characters' emotional arc or psychologising; instead, there is an approach through the senses—light, sound, rhythm—that envelops the character in states close to paranoia or exhaustion. It was like that in *Pacifiction* (Albert Serra, 2022), for example, where everything was more geared towards creating an atmosphere, constructing something purely cinematic, in the most formal or aesthetic sense of the language: with the use of sound and visual composition, trying to create an ambient density.

There was a character in that film who had to be played by an actress, but on the first day of shooting we realised that she didn't fit the tone of the film. She was a girl from the world of music and fashion, and she gave the impression that she was constantly posing, very conscious of the camera. This didn't square with the method proposed by Albert, and the simple fact of not being part of this dynamic made her very disruptive: she was so out of place that not a single scene could be made with her. We had to cut that character from the film, but in the end another one came in. And it was wonderful, because a completely unexpected character appeared: a trans actress who gave the film a lot of power, and who also had a very good connection with the protagonist, Benoît Magimel. I explain this because I was on the film shoot, I saw the rushes for that first scene, and I was able to participate in that decision. When I'm not on the shoot, I have to work with those things in the editing room, and you have much less room to move there because everything has already been filmed.

In *Creatura,* on the other hand, there is a clear narrative, a well-defined arc and a central subjectivity. That means thinking a lot about how the spectator gets to know the character, how we support that process. Work on the structure is important to determine how time is ordered, how scenes are located to reveal or withhold certain pieces of information about the story or the character, to understand what is happening to her.

Again, in the beginning we had an assembly edit that was closer to the script, where the time jump from the adult Mila (the protagonist) to her adolescence happened quite early. But that meant that the construction of the character was cut very short, and it wasn't very clear what was happening to her, what her conflict was.

We decided to rearrange some of the scenes and provide more emotional information at the beginning—in this first section about Mila as an adult—so that the spectator could understand more about her conflict before entering the teenage section, where some specific situations related to Mila's sexuality are more directly addressed. The goal was to put Mila rather than the couple at the heart of the conflict, so that instead of being understood as something shared by them both, the conflict is viewed as Mila's personal crisis in relation to her body and her desire. All of this was worked on through the editing. And that's where the editing becomes crucial: to deliver the information in doses, to focus the meaning of the scenes (the story you want to tell or what you want to convey), to find the character's timing or decide when we need to go to one place or another in her arc.

Elena and Clara Roquet told me that while writing the script they worked on the structure with the idea of the female orgasm in mind. They had read an article by Britt Marling, who argued that when you analyse the classic structures of films (conflict in *crescendo*, explosion and anticlimax), these narratives reflect an experience

associated with the male orgasm. Stories have always been told from that perspective. What they wondered was: what would happen if we thought about the story from the perspective of the female body and the female orgasm, which is perhaps more of a coming and going than a linear progression in *crescendo*? When we had doubts about the structure of Mila's ages (adulthood, adolescence and childhood), we came back to that idea and that was why we decided to respect the structure of time jumps proposed in the script.

On the other hand, we also tried to be very careful when explaining Mila's sexual conflict. We know that this is a woman who has a problem with her own body, an Oedipal relationship with her father and a bad relationship with her mother. When exploring the question about the origins of this trauma, we found that there was a fairly widespread idea that sexual trauma is always linked to abuse in childhood. And that was how the film read. Instead, the story we were trying to tell is that Mila's trauma is the result of the micro-abuses we are subject to every day as women: the shame imposed on us in relation to our bodies and their free expression, the repression of desire, and so on. We wanted to focus on those little things in the protagonist's life, especially in childhood, to render visible those little signals, those little acts of violence. That was one of the biggest challenges.

In Elena López Riera's *Southern Brides*, the idea is: "I'm going to break that chain of repeated gestures." Because I'm not going to be a mother, I'm not going to get married, I'm not going to play that role I've been told to play… when I was told "when you're a mother you'll understand", right?

For this film, what we did at first was to analyse a lot of material from wedding records, both film footage and photographs. And in the end, what we found overwhelming was the repetition of the same gestures. And not only between photographs, but even within the same photo: in some of them, the groom was accompanied by girls and boys carrying the rings, dressed the same as the adult couple and posing in the same way. In other words, as a miniature reproduction of bride and groom.

There is something that encompasses everything, all of our female identity, any aspect of our lives. We are encapsulated by that gesture that we supposedly have to repeat, although I believe this is in a process of transformation and different models are beginning to be created.

When I studied cinema, I asked myself: how am I supposed to be as an editor? One day someone told me: "Oh, you want to be an editor? You don't look like one." And it got me thinking: how am I supposed to be in order to fit in?

I think that, in general, female energy—if we can use that term—is allowed a little more room to drift, not to impose, to be able to doubt. Because creativity is not a precise formula. Over time, I keep allowing myself to doubt more, and by doing so I don't feel less self-confident; I feel more. ■

conclusion

DIANA TOUCEDO

It is profoundly revealing to listen to editors with the level of experience of Julia, Ana and Ariadna, whose practice provides an opportunity to continue reflecting on the complexities of editing as a creative act that encompasses and transforms the multiple dimensions, processes and discoveries that a film undergoes in the course of its creation. Despite its importance, editing remains one of the most invisible and least understood aspects of filmmaking. Through their experiences in very diverse films, these three editors offer new ways for us to understand the great complexity of the work of ideation, of sensitive selection and decision-making, of (re)writing footage through gestures, words, bodies and actions to facilitate an encounter between what was conceived and filmed and what now, in the editing room, becomes malleable, sculptural matter. All three share this encounter with us as a living logbook, guided by a constant questioning of the parts that long for a whole that only seems possible by giving one's life and body to the process.

What an editor brings into play in the cutting room is not so different from the performance work of an actress; all three have given us examples of this, together with the moving idea that editing could be calibrated towards a quest for truth, rather than self-conscious expression, as Ana points out. As an editor myself, having also worked on numerous documentaries and hybrid films, I share this idea of a quest for the potential truth that only the film contains. It is one of the editor's great desires. When I edit a film, I don't want it merely to tell a story, or to present a plot, or even to be reduced to a sensory, sonic, or narrative experience. I aspire to turn the film into a spatio-temporal realm that spectators can enter to find a truth, or to come away with a meaning that can only be conveyed in this way, through cinema. And perhaps, in the best-case scenario, to stimulate thoughts and emotions that will prompt a different understanding of the world, and even embody the possibility of being *others*.

Julia shares her constant dedication and even devotion to the questions which, without needing to be answered, underpin her work as an editor. I feel that this constitutes another essential element of our work: an attitude based on doubt, curiosity and careful observation. An attention that doesn't stop at the level of words or meaning, but that operates in more underground realms, touching the intuitive and the unknown, the fragile and intangible, the invisible and the visible all at the same time. I like to think of editing in terms of the performative possibility of a constant becoming, a process of revelation and transformation of forms of knowledge. In this process, women editors work on the expressive richness of gestures, tones of voice, performative registers, production planning or styles, through methods of displacement, relationship or resignification... to see anew, to offer new aesthetic experiences that connect current films with past genealogies, and perhaps also with future ones. In this sense, editing also becomes an act of responsibility. As Ariadna puts it, it names something. And by naming it, editing, as a mode of sensitive thought, contributes to the political construction of the world we inhabit now and the one that is yet to come. ■

NOTES

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BODY AS INTERVAL: THE ACTRESS'S PERFORMANCE IN EDITING

Abstract

This section presents a conversation between three prominent editors of contemporary Spanish cinema: Julia Juániz, Ana Pfaff, and Ariadna Ribas. Drawing on their experiences in fiction, documentary and hybrid films, it offers a collective reflection on editing practices as a mode of sensitive, political, and embodied thought. The discussion touches on aspects such as viewing raw footage, the construction of the actor's performance through editing, tensions between acting registers and directorial styles, working with archival materials, and the affective presence of the body in the editing room. The authors explore how editing can reveal subtle gestures, establish emotional and narrative rhythms, and support processes of subjectivation—particularly in female characters. The text also highlights collaborative practices and ways of inhabiting the editing process through doubt, attentiveness, and care. Editing is conceived of here as a space for listening and rewriting, in constant dialogue with what has been filmed, lived, and imagined.

Key words

Film editing; Acting performance; Interval; Body and gesturality; Subjectivity; Contemporary Spanish cinema; Gender perspective; Archive; Collaborative practices.

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EL CUERPO COMO INTERVALO: LA INTERPRETACIÓN ACTORAL EN EL MONTAJE

Resumen

Este texto reúne una conversación entre tres montadoras destacadas del cine español contemporáneo: Julia Juániz, Ana Pfaff y Ariadna Ribas. A partir de sus experiencias en películas de ficción, híbridas y documentales, el texto ofrece una reflexión colectiva en torno a las prácticas del montaje como forma de pensamiento sensible, política y corporal. Se abordan aspectos como el visionado del material bruto, la construcción de la interpretación actoral desde el montaje, las tensiones entre registros actorales y estilos de dirección, el trabajo con el archivo y la dimensión afectiva del cuerpo en la sala de edición. Las autoras exploran cómo el montaje puede revelar gestos mínimos, establecer ritmos emocionales y narrativos, y acompañar los procesos de subjetivación, especialmente en personajes femeninos. El texto también se detiene en las prácticas colaborativas y en las formas de habitar el montaje desde la duda, la atención y el cuidado. El montaje es aquí concebido como un espacio de escucha y reescritura, en diálogo constante con lo filmado, lo vivido y lo imaginado.

Palabras clave

Montaje cinematográfico; Interpretación actoral; Intervalo; Cuerpo y gestualidad; Subjetividad; Cine español contemporáneo; Perspectiva de género; Archivo; Prácticas colaborativas.

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VANISHING POINTS

RURAL HOSTILITY IN THE HORROR FILMS OF LATE FRANCOIST SPAIN: *THE VAMPIRES NIGHT ORGY*

ERIKA TIBURCIO MORENO

INTRODUCTION

Developmentalism under the Franco regime resulted in some major transformations in Spain. The changes included a massive rural exodus and accelerated urbanisation, which fostered the incipient growth of a consumerist, capitalist and individualist culture (Radcliff, 2017: 244-245). The aspirational goals of modernity, such as owning a Seat 600 automobile and being able to drive to the countryside or the beach, coexisted with the persistence of a rural world characterised by traditional structures and a slow-paced daily life. However, the rapid spread of the urban bourgeois mentality took place in a context of continued totalitarian control over most of the population. It is important to understand that the last years of the Franco dictatorship were characterised by a questioning of the National Catholic values and institutional repression that defined the regime. On the one hand, various sectors (students, workers, intellectuals and progressive religious leaders of the younger generation) were calling for a more open society and the establishment of a democratic system. On the other, the regime, in its need to maintain a positive international image, continued to use repressive instruments to quell any actions it deemed subversive (Babiano et al., 2018: 133-134). The creation of the Tribunal of Public Order (*Tribunal de Orden Público*) in 1963, which took over responsibility for trying political offences from the military courts, was one example of this dual reality of modernity and authoritarianism.

The dichotomy was also evident in Spanish cinema. Alfredo Landa's comical depiction of the country's social frustrations and the acerbic critiques of Francoist Spain by filmmakers such as Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem reflected the tensions of the time. Spanish horror filmmakers also located these tensions at the heart of their stories. The horror genre was en-

joying international success at this time thanks to American filmmakers such as Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper, the work of Britain's Hammer Film Productions, and a European movement that combined horror with eroticism and excess (Olney, 2013: 21). In Spain, the horror boom took place in the wake of the government corruption exposed by the Matesa scandal in 1969, the decline of the Spaghetti Western, and the promotion of international co-productions as a funding solution (Pulido, 2012: 36-37). In fact, horror films became so successful in the final years of the Franco regime that a third of all films produced in Spain between 1968 and 1976 belonged to this genre (Lázaro-Reboll, 2012: 11). However, their box office success did not ensure a stable industry, as the studios behind these films, with the exception of Profilmes, tended to disappear after making one or two titles.

Spanish horror film narratives were characterised by a markedly internationalised approach (traditional monsters, international production teams) and by an aesthetic based on erotic and macabre excess. Their hybrid style gave them an appeal beyond national borders, although in Spain alone they regularly managed to attract around 300,000 to 500,000 spectators. Outside Spain, co-production and the presence of established distribution and exhibition circuits expanded the reach of these films (Lázaro-Reboll, 2012: 17).

Despite their apparently apolitical nature given their focus on breaking taboos and achieving box office success, Spanish horror films were also capable of exploring the social upheavals of the late Francoist period (Willis, 2003: 75). In general, the relationship in the horror genre between the monstrous and the normal—the protagonists and their context, as well as the attitudes, behavioural norms and beliefs they represent—constitutes a cultural response to something whose presence is denied or which exposes some form of historical oppression based on gender, class, ethnicity, etc. (Poole, 2019: XVIII). In the specific case of Spanish horror, images of explicit violence and eroticism symbolised the struggle between modernity and tradition or between authoritarianism and the desire for democracy. At the same time, the conflict between city and country facilitated the idealisation of the urban model, which was associated with bourgeois rationalism, and the denigration of the rural space, which was portrayed as macabre and sinister. Examples as diverse as *The Witches Mountain* (El monte de las brujas, Raúl Artigot, 1972) and *Bell from Hell* (La campana del infierno, Claudio Guerín, 1973) presented the rural world in similar terms, as an oppressive, isolated setting that reacted aggressively to outsiders.

The Vampires Night Orgy (La orgía nocturna de los vampiros, Leon Klimovsky, 1973) was one of the films that engaged with the aforementioned tensions through the depiction of monsters radically different from the protagonists biologically (undead vampiric creatures), as well as socially and culturally (cannibals subject to a strict hierarchy controlled by a noblewoman). In this confrontation, the parameters of tradition-primitivism and modernity-rationalism serve as narrative resources that at the same time reveal the prejudices and discursive contradictions of developmentalist Spain. Moreover, the violent encounter reflects the turbulent context of crisis that the dictatorship was experiencing at the time while connecting with the highly successful folk horror tradition. All the films in this subgenre, which include the American picture *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) and the British film *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973), depict the city-country conflict as a survival scenario in which urban classism and the moral superiority of rationalism were meaningless in the face of communities governed by very different norms.

The Vampires Night Orgy is an ideal case study for four key reasons. The first is related to fundamental processes behind the changes that were occurring in late Francoist Spain, such as the emigration of large numbers of Spaniards to other countries, the rural exodus, and the trans-

formation of gender roles. The second is that the monster, rather than being constructed as an individual creature, forms part of a hierarchical social system that replicates a vision of the Franco regime. In this sense, although there was no intention to make a political statement against the dictatorship (Leon Klimovsky's work was always oriented exclusively toward achieving box office success and turning a profit), certain similarities can be identified between the monster and Francoism, such as the tyrannical power exercised by the noblewoman and the use of violence and coercion to maintain social stability. The third reason is that the film distorts the cinematic stereotype of the Spanish peasant, the so-called *paleto*, depicting him as an insatiable monster. A recurring figure in Spanish comedy films, the *paleto* became the most familiar embodiment of the rural isolation that modernity had given rise to. But in this case, the figure is transformed from the good-natured, innocent country bumpkin into a voracious vampire who destroys outsiders without hesitation and turns them into slaves. And the final reason is that the sinister depiction of the town of Tolnia and its inhabitants challenges the familiar nature of a setting like this for Spanish spectators.

AN OVERVIEW OF SPANISH FOLK HORROR DURING THE LATE FRANCOIST PERIOD

The term "folk horror" was originally used to refer to a series of British films made in the 1960s and 1970s that explore the terrifying aspects of witchcraft or rural folklore. Of these, *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971) and *The Wicker Man*, collectively known as the "Unholy Trinity", are considered the founding films of the subgenre due to their focus on the violent reaction of rural communities to strangers (Thurgill, 2020: 42). In the wake of such films, folk horror stories explored pagan traditions and engaged in a dialogue with the fear inspired by the association of countercultural values with the murders committed by the Manson family (Scovell, 2017: 13). The formula spread to other countries, with the invariable pattern of city dwellers discovering a rural community that exists outside the norms of modernity, inevitably resulting in brutality being unleashed by both sides.

In this way, such films could explore the protagonists' fear of an encounter with the unknown and the fragility of the barriers separating their urban rationality from rural savagery, as the futility of laws and urban sophistication in the rural context forces them to defend themselves using the same violence that they have always disdainfully attributed to these communities (Pinedo, 1996: 22). The narrative and aesthetic violence of folk horror could thus subvert the political (metropolis-colony), economic (power-powerlessness) or cultural (modernity-backwardness) hierarchies established under the capitalist model (Williams, 1975: 297), which were justified on the basis of educational or technological levels. For example, films such as *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977) show the futility of firearms against the savagery of people familiar with the local terrain. Through this central conflict, this sub-genre engaged in a dialogue with other social issues, such as the coexistence of consumerism and poverty embodied by the protagonists and the family of rednecks in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, or concerns among older generations about young people questioning social structures such as Christianity in *The Blood on Satan's Claw*, where the ritualistic murders of children represented a distortion of the values of hippy culture.

Spanish cinema similarly produced a series of films that projected the anxieties over the country's rapid transformation onto the rural world (Palacios, 2019; La-Janisse, 2021). Although many of these films imitated international successes, the recycling of stories and monsters did not prevent the inclusion of uniquely Spanish aesthetics

and symbols, as evidenced by *Night of the Blood Monster* (Il Trono di Fuoco, Jesús Franco, 1970) and its resemblance to *Witchfinder General*. Both films use witch hunts in 17th-century England to offer a horrific depiction of authority figures, but the choice of a sadistic judge (*Night of the Blood Monster*) rather than a sexually abusive lawyer (*Witchfinder General*) allows the Spanish version to allude to the abuses of power and arbitrary decisions that characterised the Franco regime's judicial system in the post-war years.

One of the recurring themes of this subgenre is the idea of the journey from the city to the countryside as a trigger for an encounter with an isolated realm that is hostile and alien to the capitalist world. Examples can be found in *The Witches Mountain*, *Horror Arises from the Tomb* (El espanto surge de la tumba, Carlos Aured, 1972) and *Who Can Kill a Child?* (¿Quién puede matar a un niño?, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, 1976). where the perspective of the city dweller suggests a markedly classist gaze on the exotic or socially and culturally inferior locals. The migration of millions of Spaniards from rural zones to the cities between 1950 and 1975 coincided with the popularisation of an urban bourgeois lifestyle and the abandonment of traditional ways of life by the younger generations. The government's promotion of this lifestyle resulted in the deterioration of rural health and education services (FOESSA Foundation, 1966: 258-260) and in the movement of most young Spaniards to the cities (Paniagua, 2015: 163). The image of the *paleto* was used in Spanish cinema to embody a dual discourse on the rural population, navigating between their inability to adapt to modernity due to illiteracy or primitivism and their resistance against urban secularisation and corruption to protect their Catholic values (Rincón, 2014: 172-175). In horror narratives, their uncouth appearance and uneducated nature was used to construct a savage, brutal image of monsters that would attack any outsider who wandered into their territory.

The confrontation between the urban and rural worlds was always based on ignorance and physical and psychological distance. Physically, the modern style of the urbanites' bell-bottom trousers, denim jeans, miniskirts and patterned shirts contrasts with the country peoples' plain outfits, white work shirts and old-fashioned skirts and jumpers in *Who Can Kill a Child?* In films such as *Night of the Seagulls* (La noche de las gaviotas, Amando de Ossorio, 1975), the old, ugly and shabbily dressed rural inhabitants are presented in opposition to the youth and sophistication of the protagonists, who dress and look much like the Spanish celebrities and pop stars of the era. Psychologically, a discourse of moral decline and superstition is used to represent the rural world, as reflected in the beliefs of the household servants in *Horror Arises from the Tomb*. More specifically, the superstitions of the rural peasants are used as a way of highlighting the protagonists' recklessness in ignoring the taboos imposed by local curses, or as a tool for the perpetuation of a rural hierarchical structure by privileged rulers who control the villagers through fear. For example, in *Night of the Seagulls,* the locals are forced to provide the Templars with young girls for ritual sacrifices to keep them from wiping out the whole village. From a cultural perspective, the connection made in these films between traditionalism, rural life and tyranny evoked the Franco dictatorship's rigid control of rural society in the post-war years, as its close relationship with the religious and political authorities facilitated surveillance and the identification of rebels (Román Ruiz, 2018: 318-319).

The recurring image in Spanish folk horror of the repressed rural community reinforced the stereotype "of the countryside as a world subjugated and immobilised by the repressive apparatus of the regime" (Ortega López, 2011: 303) while associating that subjugation with violence, ignorance and poverty. This resulted in an anachronistic portrait that permeated films depicting a journey

from the city to the countryside and others set entirely in a rural context. Among films in the latter category, both *Bell from Hell* and *Night of the Seagulls* depict a place dominated by a feudal hierarchy and a rigid morality that demands the expulsion of any who do not obey its rules. The rural setting was thus constructed based on a series of characteristics eschewed by modernity: disease, death and the grotesque (Schlegel, 2015: 25). This construction of the rural world thus stands in opposition to a society that identifies hygiene and technology as essential qualities of the modern lifestyle and that aims to eliminate any practices deemed primitive. The abjection of the location is established in scenes that revel in violence such as the scenes of torture in *Night of the Seagulls*, or the scenes showing blood spurting from a lamb being cut to pieces and the unconscious cannibalism in *It Happened in Nightmare Inn* (Una vela para el diablo, Eugenio Martín, 1973). Such depictions revive the so-called Black Legend of Spain, represented in *The Ancines Woods* (El bosque del lobo, Pedro Olea, 1970) by the women dressed always in mourning, the austerity of the humble dwellings and the funeral rites that combine Catholic and pagan practices. The obscurantist nature of these images and the transgressive prominence of death (corpses, bodily fluids, blood) evoke a vision of a backward Spain rife with superstition and poverty and steeped in the religious fanaticism of the Inquisition, whose funeral rites and gloomy festivals are features of everyday life (Núñez Florencio, 2014: 55).

The Black Legend also served to evoke the brutality of the Franco regime, which upon its establishment had imposed a strict social order through militarisation and punitive justice. Despite the apparent softening of its approach in the 1950s, the dictatorship continued to make use of states of emergency, police surveillance or legislation to perpetuate the repression (Babiano et al., 2018: 133-136). Indeed, it never abandoned its practice of purging subversive elements deemed anti-Spanish (communists, anarchists, nationalists) through the excessive use of force. The horror film genre established a dialogue with this violence, using monsters who justified their crimes on the pretext of moral purification (*It Happened in Nightmare Inn*), the sacrifice of individuals due to their outsider status (*Night of the Seagulls*) or the danger represented by the stranger's difference (*Who Can Kill a Child?*).

Spanish folk horror connected with cinematic models developed in Britain and the United States and adapted their formula to a context in which the growth of a modern urban society was displacing Spain's rural traditionalism. The horror genre took the stereotyping of the Spanish countryside to the extreme, turning it into an obscure, macabre setting where savagery, backwardness and poverty pervaded both the land and its inhabitants. This discourse of otherness, based on the austerity and lack of sophistication of the rural world, also signalled the conflict in a society moving away from the values of a regime that continued its repressive practices with the aim of subjugating its people. Like the vampires of Tolnia, the dictatorship presented a modern face while nevertheless seeking to perpetuate itself by eradicating subversion and maintaining a submissive, depoliticised society.

MONSTROUS RURALITY IN *THE VAMPIRES NIGHT ORGY*

The Vampires Night Orgy, released on 30 June 1973 and taking 12,740,509 pesetas in box office receipts, was a modest success compared to other horror titles, such as the blockbuster *The House that Screamed* (La residencia, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, 1969) (Pulido, 2012: 56). The setting for the story is Tolnia, a fictitious village in Romania, where a bus taking workers to a castle in the region is forced to stop after the driver's sudden death. Although at first the village seems deserted, the travellers soon discover that it is in fact in-

habited by some kind of cannibalistic spectres in thrall to a noblewoman known simply as La Señora (Helga Liné). One by one, the protagonists are devoured and turned into spectres, joining a gang of vampires forever trapped in Tolnia. The only survivors, Alma (Dyanik Zurakowska) and Luis (Jack Taylor), manage to flee after killing La Señora; however, the disappearance of the village upon her death means that the crimes committed there will go unpunished as Alma and Luis are unable to convince the police of the village's existence.

The most notable aspect of the story is the theme of outsiders arriving at a village whose inhabitants are hostile toward them. In contrast to films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which uses the narrative resource of the pleasure trip to signal class inequality, the journey in this case is associated with a search for opportunities, an idea that ties in with the importance that the rural exodus had acquired in developmentalist Spain as a result of the economic shift toward the industrial and service sectors. The consequent demographic changes to the rural population, which became older and predominantly male, and the impoverishment resulting from technological backwardness (FOESSA Foundation, 1970: 299) were two of the biggest problems that devastated rural Spain during this period.

The image of the rural exodus is represented in this film with the arrival of a bus at an empty village, a prelude that elicits a sensation of uncanny familiarity both from the characters and from Spanish spectators with rural backgrounds. In cinematographic terms, this idea is expressed with the initial cut from a wide shot to medium shots of a typical country village without a single inhabitant to be found either in the local tavern or in the square. This arrival is quite distinct from the positive depictions in comedy films, where the triumphant, consumerist emigrant returns to his hometown for the holidays and shows off the success he has achieved in the city (Rodríguez Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2007: 63). Instead, Tolnia is a place that the characters find familiar yet at the same time alien. First of all, the knowledge that the characters believe they possess proves useless here, as reflected in the first conversation between Alma and Luis, when she suggests that the villagers may all be at church, alluding to a custom in her hometown, but he dismisses this possibility because there is no church to be found in the village. And secondly, Tolnia is a village in Romania, a remote country that is totally unknown to the protagonists, who, as Alma remarks, have been travelling for more than a day and a half on their way to a castle where an employment agency has arranged work for them.

Like the characters in the film, millions of Spaniards who emigrated to other parts of Europe were forced to confront realities outside their experience. The protagonists' working-class status is underscored by their unskilled professions (housekeeper, cook, butler, gardener, driver), except for the teacher among them, and by fact they have travelled by bus, with the exception of Luis, a professional sales agent who has arrived at the village in his own car. In late Francoist Spain, the possession of a car (especially a Seat 600) was significant, as it symbolised a higher social status (Martín-Sánchez, 2019: 949). However, the sheen of freedom afforded by their modern modes of transport is quickly stripped away when the group is forced to stay in Tolnia after the bus driver's sudden death, leaving them unable to complete their journey. The strange village grows progressively sinister with the protagonists' inability to leave, their unconscious cannibalism (the inhabitants serve them human flesh, pretending that it is animal meat) and finally, their enslavement.

Tolnia is also characterised as an anachronistic society based on the feudal servitude of its locals and the absolute domination of La Señora, a noblewoman who reveals her upper-class status in the refined tastes she has inherited from her grandfather, "an actor, author, poet and director; a life-sized Shakespeare," and a sophisticated style

that distinguishes her from the rest of the women of the village, who are all dressed more simply. La Señora imposes a hierarchy that places Boris the Mayor (José Guardiola) and an axe-wielding giant (Fernando Bilbao) in intermediate positions, responsible for maintaining order and carrying out her wishes through diplomacy with the outsiders (mayor) or by force (giant). While the mayor communicates with the strangers, conveys orders and solves supply problems, the giant assumes the executive task of dismembering the villagers for the purpose of feeding the newcomers. At the bottom of the hierarchy, the rest of the villagers are responsible for manual labour and depend completely on La Señora as the guarantor of their survival, as illustrated in the scene where she herself tosses the teacher's body from her balcony as a gift to the hungry inhabitants. In this scene, the editing accentuates her domination through low-angle shots that underscore her superiority and high-angel shots of the villagers that make them look smaller.

Moreover, the close connection between La Señora and her underlings is made clear upon her death, which causes the disappearance of the whole village. This connection seems to allude to certain aspects of the dictatorship that positioned Franco as an all-powerful, uncharismatic leader (Saz, 2019: 127-131) closely identified with the regime itself. However, Tolnia's monstrosity is also based on the challenge it poses to the established gender hierarchy, as it undermines the patriarchal order imposed by the dictatorship that had relegated women to the private sphere, to marriage and Christian motherhood. Although it is true that during the developmentalist period women were given increased access to work and education and greater autonomy as consumers, the domestic role was still considered to be their main contribution to the nation (Morcillo Gómez, 2015: 311). The female monstrosity of La Señora thus defied this model with the depiction of a female ruler who enjoys political agency and unquestionable power. Indeed, the horror genre often used constructions of femininity for pedagogical purposes, portraying women who had characteristics of goodness or virginity as survivors, in opposition to doomed women who displayed deviant or dangerous qualities (García Fernández & Cordero Domínguez, 2017: 50). In *The Vampires Night Orgy*, this opposition is established in terms of class (La Señora occupies a position of privilege while the women in the group of protagonists work in typically female caregiving roles) and sexual-affective relationships (La Señora's relationship with the teacher is exclusively sexual and ends with his grisly death, while Alma and Luis's relationship transcends sexuality and has a happy ending). Sex is often associated with death in Spanish horror films (Pulido, 2012: 49-52), whose stories often stress the abject and perilous nature of vampirism as a threat to the patriarchal order.

In short, Tolnia's horrific nature as a rural space evoked the tensions between urban modernity and the persistence of traditional ways of life despite the fact that most Spaniards were living modern urban lifestyles by this time. The film stresses this image of the village as a site of danger because of a backward culture that has produced half-witted villagers and an aberrant, antiquated political system. This anachronistic quality characterises both the setting and the monsters who inhabit it, whose dual nature as vampires and *paletos* symbolises a rural population that should be dead and a lifestyle that ought to be abandoned.

THE *PALETO* VAMPIRE AS A RURAL MONSTER IN *THE VAMPIRES NIGHT ORGY*

Like other films of the genre, *The Vampires Night Orgy* is a visual pastiche of different international influences, with a plot similar to *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1964) mixed with local Spanish references (the small town of Patones, an hour's drive north of Madrid, is the location chosen to represent Tolnia). For Spanish

audiences, the film's local origins were immediately recognisable, as is evident from the comments entered on the censors' file: "Vampires *a la española*" and "just another horror film *a la española* with *paleto* vampires" (Ministerio de Información y Turismo, 1973). In addition to the dismissive tone of these comments, the use of the word *paleto* highlights the rural setting and evokes the stereotype of the coarse, uneducated Spanish peasant (Rincón, 2014: 156-157).

In this film, the rural Spanish traits of humility and simplicity born out of poverty are distorted to portray a crowd of mindless ghouls dependent on cannibalism for survival. Their status as undead *paletos* relegates them to a repugnant otherness for two main reasons. First, their primitive nature automatically made them repellent to modern Spanish urbanites as a vestige of the autarky of the early Francoist period, amplified by their poor, degenerate, deformed and inhuman appearance (Murphy, 2013: 149-150), while their ability to control the outsiders symbolised the tension provoked by the ghost of a past that threatened to return, a ghost that was incompatible with the desired sophistication of a modern Spain. Second, vampirism blurs the boundary between life and death by fusing the two states into a single body (Carroll, 2005: 118), while the vampire's need to devour human beings in order to survive transgresses the moral order. In this case, the vampires' cannibalism is aberrant because of its function of feeding and social reproduction, as the victim serves as food for the other vampires while at the same time becoming another member of their anachronistic community.

The qualities that define the protagonists, such as friendship (Godó [Luis Ciges] and Marcos [Manuel de Blas]), love (Alma and Luis) and family (Raquel and her daughter), all vanish the moment they are infected and join a monstrous group that eschews Catholic values (there is no church or parish priest in Tolnia). The cruelty of the rite of passage into vampirism constitutes a dehumanising cycle whereby a victim, whose screams are ignored, ultimately becomes objectified and consumed as food, before being turned into a vampire who will behave in the same way. The best example of this cycle is the scene of Raquel's murder (at around the 69th minute of the film). After searching in vain for her daughter through the village and discovering that La Señora is actually a vampire, she locks herself in her room, weeping in desperation. At that moment, a shot/reverse shot shows her horrified expression on seeing her former companions, now turned into vampires, staring at her sadistically. A low-angle shot showing the group of spectres combined with a shot of her expression of fear as she realises her horrible fate reinforces the idea of the power imbalance between them. Next, a wide shot shows the gang of vampires as they push her onto the bed and brutally devour her while her screams fade into the background. In a manner similar to previous attacks, the group fuses into a destructive mass that dehumanises and subjugates a victim who, after dying a terrible death, will become another slave of Tolnia who must resort to cannibalism to survive.

This image further reinforces the stigmatising discourse of the rural world based on the new conception of poverty that began to emerge in the 1960s. According to the sociological report published by the FOESSA Foundation in 1966, the growth of the consumer culture in Spain led to the association of poverty with material scarcity, and thus social status came to be identified with the possession of consumer goods such as a television set or a car. Consequently, the lack of products and services outside Spain's towns and cities shaped an image of the countryside as a place of misery and deprivation (p. 276). In this context, Tolnia represented the Black Legend of a Spain "halfway between the stark reality of the homeland and the flatly grotesque" (Pulido, 2012:49), which, combined with cannibalism, evoked the Gothic mode of Spanish horror and its perverse,

sacrilegious aesthetic (Aldana Reyes, 2017: 200). Indeed, the repugnant nature of this cannibalistic village is central both in the film itself (Alma screams when she discovers that the meat that the locals had been serving them was actually the flesh of other human beings) and in the censorship file (which contains explicit comments on the cannibalism: "Cannibals, moreover, at least force others to be cannibals", "an indispensable condition for approval is the removal of the finger on the plate").

From a cultural perspective, cannibalism also becomes a rite of passage in an anachronistic system that automatically erases the victim's individuality and human traits. In this way, the infection of the *paleto* vampire and the alienation of the outsider foregrounds the conflict between rural traditionalism and urban modernisation. Being turned into a spectre meant being stripped of individuality, becoming one both physically and mentally with Tolnia and La Señora, thereby abandoning the possibility of social advancement represented by the journey onto the castle. In other words, it meant giving up the relaxation of customs, the individualism of consumer culture and the modern lifestyle that was taking over the country and had even begun to affect the Spanish language, with the incorporation of anglicisms such as *aparcamiento* (derived from "parking") (Sánchez Vidal, 1990: 156). It also meant the horror of returning to a past that developmentalist Spain sought to leave behind, and a reminder that these poor, remote rural villages still existed.

Tolnia and the *paleto* vampire thus embody the rural monstrosity of Spanish folk horror, which connects with other features of the genre identified by Adam Scovell (2017: 17-18). Geographical isolation is transformed into a menacing hostility when outsiders are dragged into a realm whose norms are alien to those of their urban places of origin. This small village is characterised by irreligious practices and a social order outside the modern world, defined by a kind of tyrannical feudalism imposed by La Señora. Yet despite the remoteness, the uncanny familiarity of rural Spain facilitated the construction of a discourse typical of Spanish folk horror films, which associated rural poverty with the degeneration of its people to the point of turning them into brutal, abject cannibalistic monsters. In this way, the *paleto* vampire provided an opportunity to explore the tensions between the desire to embrace modernity and the continued existence of traditional ways of life.

CONCLUSIONS

The Vampires Night Orgy offers an example of how the horror genre examined the tensions between the city and the country during the late Francoist period. In this film, the dark side of Spain explored by artists such as Solana and Goya is turned into a space of uncertainty and brutality that reproduces the stereotypes that had begun to emerge during the country's developmentalist period. The *paleto*, a stereotype of the Spanish peasant that had become popular in comedy films, is turned into a cannibalistic spectre belonging to a rigid, oppressive hierarchy controlled by a diabolical noblewoman. Male fears of women's liberation are thus mixed with new discourses that associate Spain's rural areas with violent traditionalism, old age and depopulation, in a territory of grotesque ugliness that attacks any who threaten to disturb its anachronistic order.

From a cinematic perspective, it is essential to understand the external influences on Spanish films that resulted in the adoption of international trends in the horror genre. On the one hand, their depiction of the rural world as a hostile space characterised by disturbing and sinister beliefs gives the film studied here a close resemblance to British folk horror. On the other, the conversion of Tolnia's inhabitants into vampires and the supernatural power of La Señora place the film squarely in the vampire genre, as its ti-

tle suggests. In *Vampires Night Orgy*, all these elements are used to evoke the Spanish reality of the period, including the rural exodus and the abandonment of a traditional way of life, the emigration of Spaniards abroad in search of better employment opportunities, and the efforts of the totalitarian regime to control the population and subdue any individuals who might stray from the ideals of National Catholicism.

Despite the reluctance among Spanish scholars to accept horror as a suitable genre for exploring sociohistorical changes in the country, this article has sought to show that the very nature of the genre, with its exaggeration of fears and anxieties through the depiction of the monstrous, offers opportunities to analyse the mentality of a historical period characterised by rapid transformations.

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RURAL HOSTILITY IN THE HORROR FILMS OF LATE FRANCOIST SPAIN: *THE VAMPIRES NIGHT ORGY*

Abstract

The tensions between modernity and traditionalism reflected in Spanish horror films provide a unique opportunity to examine these two concepts through their confrontation of city and country. As a folk horror film, *The Vampires Night Orgy* (La orgía nocturna de los vampiros, León Klimovsky, 1973) uses the isolated village of Tolnia as a metaphorical representation of Franco's dictatorship in the form of a hierarchy of vampires that eradicate any human being who enters their realm. In this way, this film evokes the rural exodus, the stereotyping of the rural Spaniard, and the changes to gender roles that were central to the transformations occurring in Spain in the 1970s. With this case study, the article aims to show that horror films can serve as reliable historical sources for understanding the sociocultural transformations that took place during the late Francoist period.

Key words

Spanish Folk Horror; Spanish Horror Films; *Paleto* Vampire; Late Francoist Spain.

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HOSTILIDAD RURAL EN EL CINE DE TERROR TARDOFRANQUISTA: *LA ORGÍA NOCTURNA DE LOS VAMPIROS*

Resumen

Las tensiones entre la modernidad y el tradicionalismo encontraron en el cine de terror un espacio privilegiado donde explorarlas a través del encuentro entre el campo y la ciudad. A modo del *folk horror*, *La orgía nocturna de los vampiros* (León Klimovsky, 1973) utiliza al pueblo aislado de Tolnia como escenario metafórico de la dictadura franquista a través de una jerarquía vampírica que eliminan a cualquier ser humano que aparece. Así, en esta película se tratan el éxodo rural, la estereotipación de lo rural y las transformaciones de género, procesos esenciales para comprender las transformaciones durante la década de los setenta. Con este estudio de caso, el artículo busca situar al cine de terror como una fuente histórica válida para comprender las transformaciones socioculturales durante el tardofranquismo.

Palabras clave

Folk Horror Español; Cine de Terror Español; Vampiro paleto; Tardofranquismo.

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IN THE PLACE OF THE DONKEY: THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE NONHUMAN ANIMAL AND THE ANTI-SPECIESIST PERSPECTIVE IN *EO*

ENRIC BURGOS

INTRODUCTION: THE ANIMAL TURN AND ITS IMPRINT ON AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION

Since the beginning of this century, the academic world has resolutely taken up the challenge posed by the so-called *animal turn*. Within the transdisciplinary framework of human-animal studies, traditional conceptions of animality and human-animal relationships are being increasingly called into question. Despite the variety of approaches, a common aim can be detected in the different studies: to move away from the valuation of non-human animals as objects—the Cartesian *machina animata* devoid of cognition, emotion and consciousness—and towards an appreciation of them as subjects. As von Uexküll (2014 [1909]) pointed out many years ago, and as Yong (2022) has recently argued, recognising this subjectivity requires a consideration both of the animal's inner world (*Innenwelt*) and of their own way of experiencing their surroundings (*Umwelt*), the shared, more-than-human world (Abram, 2017: 37) that they inhabit, contemplate, and help to construct—not as accessories, but as agents. The acknowledgement of the animal's subjectivity thus emerges as essential to the purpose of abandoning human exceptionality and establishing a general ontology that includes all creatures.

Audiovisual discourse analysis is one of the fields that is contributing the most to the anti-speciesist cause. Unsurprisingly, as authors who have been exploring the question point out (Burt, 2002: 15; Pick, 2011: 3 and 2015; Safit, 2014: 212; Malamud, 2017), audiovisual production can serve not only to reflect but also to help transform our relations with other animals. In order to pursue this transformation, these authors argue that it is necessary to abandon anthropocentric ways of representing nonhuman animals. Thus, the stereotypical tendency to depict them as commodities, therapeutic pets, or wild beasts that threa-

ten us (Koilybayeva, 2023: 4, 7), or conversely, as inferior beings that need our help (Freeman & Tulloch, 2013: 117) should be called into question. Similarly, as Pick suggests (2013: 177), we need to eschew the sentimental anthropomorphic caricatures that have little to do with the real animal, as well as the use of animals as mere props to reinforce human identities and stories. And finally, it is important to overcome the temptation to reduce animals to spectacular objects to be made available to the human gaze (Malamud, 2010: 7; Adams, 2010: 88).

In opposition to these voracious habits, there is a need to explore new ecologies of images. This is what vegan cinema does (Pick, 2018: 28), with its commitment to a filmmaking approach that replaces the pleasure of consumption with the love awakened by the animal that is simply allowed to be and to stand in front of the camera without being the object of a narrative that is more palatable to human eyes, as also suggested in Fijn's observational approach (2007: 306). Pick's proposal broadly aligns with the slow cinema movement advocated by McMahon (2019), which facilitates audience access to the non-human animal's world. This is a world that can unfold on the screen if it is not forced by the demanding tempo and causal, linear structures of conventional storytelling (McMahon, 2019: 8, 20). It is also worth noting, as Fijn (2007: 306) and Rejnen (2023: 7-8) suggest, that these different approaches allow for a more haptic style of filmmaking, resulting in films that prioritise the sensory over the verbal in their effort to give voice to the non-human creature.

While approaches inspired by ethnographic documentary are certainly viable, there are other proposals that engage more flexibly with dominant audiovisual conventions. Considering the corruption of the animal's naturalness that any filming process entails, Burt (2002: 165-166) points out that the ethical potential of animal imagery is not necessarily a function of its truth value. Regardless of the degree of artificiality of the representation, film can constitute a gateway to our connection with the natural world (Burt, 2002: 47) and a confirmation of the moral significance of the links between the human and the animal (Burt, 2002: 22). In other words, certain imaginative (speculative) models can point towards a horizon shared by all animals capable of transcending human exceptionality (Malamud, 2017), of changing the attitude of the audience and motivating them to take action (Finn, 2023). Such models may thus still involve the use of cinematographic conventions that elicit empathetic reactions from the audience, even though this may run the risk of producing a kind of sentimental anthropomorphism.

The contribution of audiovisual production to the defence of animal rights is not limited to theoretical reflection. In recent years, an increasing number of films have been exploring other ways of dealing with non-human animals and trying to reflect a world that is also their own. The (admittedly modest) boom in this type of film has mainly involved non-fiction works focusing on the everyday life of animals—more specifically, domesticated animals. These include the documentaries *Kedi* (Ceyda Torun, 2016), *Stray* (Elizabeth Lo, 2020), *Space Dogs* (Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter, 2020) and two titles that have garnered particular attention for the boldness of their approach and the impact they have had, particularly in academic circles: *Cow* (Andrea Arnold, 2021) and especially *Gunda* (Victor Kossakovsky, 2020). Both films have been noted for giving visibility to farm animals visible from a new perspective (Porter, 2023a) and for their contribution to an emerging trend in *ecocinema* that presents animals as socio-political subjects and encourages audiences to reflect on the hierarchies of our culture (Schultz-Figueroa, 2022). At the same time, the rhetoric of these documentaries has been associated with the principles of vegan cinema (Rejnen, 2023: 9) and the aforementioned slow cinema (Hoffmeister, 2022: 21-23), with an emphasis

on the possibilities of a filmmaking approach that replaces the word with communication through the senses.

Attempts to develop another cinematic perspective on animals have been more furtive in fiction cinema. There are fewer feature films in this category, and those that do exist are generally characterised by a lower degree of experimentation and less powerful messages than those of the documentaries cited above. Nevertheless, titles such as *Spoor* (Pokot, Agnieszka Holland & Katarzyna Adamik, 2017) and the animated film *Marona's Fantastic Tale* (L'extraordinaire voyage de Marona, Anca Damian, 2019) are worth mentioning, although neither of these two have attracted as much attention as *Okja* (2017), a film directed by Bong Joon-Ho, distributed by Netflix and starring Tilda Swinton, Jake Gyllenhaal and Paul Dano. The positive reception of *Okja* has aroused considerable scholarly interest in its critique of capitalist globalisation (Jin, 2019; Lee, 2020: 115-138), which researchers have associated with the different forms of oppression denounced in the film (Uzuner, 2020; Lee, 2022). Such studies have analysed its attack on the meat industry and its defence of animal rights (Imanjaya, Amelia & Meilani, 2021) and explored the kind of interspecies relationship it proposes (Oh, 2022), focusing on its cinematic representation of the animal's subjectivity (Koilybayeva, 2022).

A more recent example is veteran filmmaker Jerzy Skolimowski's *Eo* (Io, 2022), which follows the adventures of the donkey that gives the film its name. *Eo* is unique for the leading role it gives to the donkey, for its emphatic anti-speciesism and for an unorthodox technical approach that explores different ways of representing the non-human animal and its world. The relatively recent release of *Eo* explains why it has yet to be the subject of much research. Indeed, studies of the film to date seem to be limited to a few significant reviews (Coy, 2023; García Serrano, 2023; G'Sell, 2023; Porter, 2023b), an article by Couchot (2023) that contrasts *Eo* with the anthropocentric gaze that has defined film history and an interesting contribution by Mouton (2024) that compares *Eo* to *Au hasard Balthazar* (Robert Bresson, 1966), the work that inspired the Polish director to make his film (Skolimowski, 2023).

EO IS UNIQUE FOR THE LEADING ROLE IT GIVES TO THE DONKEY, FOR ITS EMPHATIC ANTI-SPECIESISM AND FOR AN UNORTHODOX TECHNICAL APPROACH THAT EXPLORES DIFFERENT WAYS OF REPRESENTING THE NON-HUMAN ANIMAL AND ITS WORLD

Eo's distinctive features and the limited academic attention it has received make it a useful object of analysis for the purpose of exploring how it takes the animal's subjectivity as a cornerstone for the articulation of its anti-speciesist plea. To this end, this article examines the various strategies used in the film to emphasise the donkey's status as a subject, assessing how it shifts the gaze by eschewing the spectacular objectification of the donkey and portraying the protagonist's *Umwelt* and *Innenwelt*. It thus offers a textual analysis as proposed by Marzal & Tarín (2007: 46-53) to explore several key sequences, focusing on the film's narrative and expressive resources and above all considering the components of the shot, the editing and the relationship between sound and image.

IN THE EYES OF THE DONKEY: THE PROTAGONIST, HUMANS AND THE INVERSION OF THE GAZE

The most striking aspect of *Eo* is the leading role it gives to the donkey, who serves as the protagonist of a loose, episodic narrative for a unique kind of road movie that traces his journey while relega-

ting the humans he meets to the background. As much as *Eo* portrays the conflicts between people and their miseries, the film adopts the donkey's point of view and transcends the typical use of an animal as a mere cover for a story about humans. Indeed, it could even be argued that *Eo* subverts this tendency by pivoting the human presence around the central figure of the donkey and emphasising the kind of relationship that people establish with him (and/or with other animals) in numerous subplots.

Humans generally come off badly in depictions of their treatment of the animal, with the exception of just two people. One is a priest who talks to Eo and confesses his guilt at having eaten donkey salami while sharing the animal compartment of the van they are travelling in. The connection between the two is short-lived, however, as the donkey soon decides to continue his journey without him. The other, who is especially important, is Kasandra, his kindly companion at the circus, who treats him with affection. She is also the only character who will reappear in the film, as she visits the sanctuary where the donkey is relocated after the circus is shut down, and her image is also shown again in Eo's memories.

However, most of Eo's interactions with humans in the film serve the purpose of exposing different attitudes that our culture has normalised and that reflect our desire to dominate other species. The protagonist thus suffers as a beast of burden, as a victim of mistreatment, as a creature who is not allowed to roam freely but must be held captive, kept in a stable or transported like merchandise, as a therapeutic instrument for children with disabilities or as a spectacular object serving only to delight the human gaze[1]. The condemnation of human behaviour even includes animal rights activists, whose protests against the use of animals in the circus have the effect of separating Eo from the life he enjoyed with his beloved Kasandra.

Skolimowski's scathing critique of animal protestors introduces a paradoxical element into his film. Indeed, in its effort to place us in the donkey's position, *Eo* runs the risk of committing the same error as animal rights advocates who presume to speak on behalf of the voiceless. Moreover, the specific demand of the activists depicted in *Eo* raises the question of whether the film itself—ultimately a spectacle for human eyes—may constitute a case of exploitation of an animal put on display in a manner similar to a circus performance. To address this question, it is worth considering the film's opening scene.

Eo starts with shots bathed in deep red using a colour filter and punctuated by strobe lighting, showing Kasandra's face beside the donkey, who is lying upside down, as if dead. The young woman reacts in fright as she caresses Eo and speaks his name. Rapid cuts, choppy editing and a gloomy musical score dominated by the low notes of the wind instruments heighten the tension. In the midst of the visual confusion we see Kasandra blowing air into Eo's mouth. Seconds later, the donkey quickly turns over and stands up. At this moment, a wide shot—now free of strobe effects and red filtering—places Eo in the centre of the frame, illuminated by a spotlight. The next shot shows the audience applauding in the stands, revealing that we have been watching a circus act.

By combining the circus performance with cinematic effects in the opening moments of his film, Skolimowski highlights the intersection at which *Eo* is positioned and the risk he runs of turning the animal into a spectacle in his effort to take us into the world of the film's protagonist. Various scenes could be cited to confirm that the director manages to avoid this risk, but there is one scene in the middle of the film, where the donkey witnesses a football match, that perhaps best illustrates Skolimowski's intention to invert the gaze.

A horizontal pan across a pitch introduces the football match, ending with a wide shot of the benches where a group of fans are cheering on

their team. The camera zooms in to show the part of the frame where the donkey appears, standing behind the fans. A full shot of Eo looking out onto the pitch (Image 1) establishes him as the spectator of an event in which it is now the humans and their skills that are on display. But the scene is not limited to reversing the roles assigned in the opening scene; it goes further, exhibiting the acerbic humour that is peppered throughout the film. The referee signals a penalty shot, and a player prepares to take it. The image of the player approaching the ball is intercut between a couple of detail shots of Eo's hooves kicking the ground. In the second of these, we hear a loud braying, which, as the next shot shows, distracts the striker and prevents him from scoring. The fans of the winning team celebrate the donkey as the hero of the match and the scene thus ultimately invites us to recognise both Eo's status as a subject in control of the gaze and his capacity to intervene, to be an agent in a world that he does more than just observe.

Image 1

IN THE DONKEY'S SKIN: EO, NON-HUMAN ANIMALS AND NATURE

In the attempt to capture Eo's subjective experience of the world, the many instances of the protagonist observing and/or interacting with other non-human animals are also significant. One of the most remarkable examples of this takes place in a stable where Eo observes a white horse being meticulously shampooed and groomed. In an earlier scene, while carrying out his loading duties, the protagonist sees the horse posing for a photo shoot with a human model. Apart from stressing the spectacularisation of animals, the most interesting aspect of this scene is the way it exposes the hierarchies that humans establish between species, and also how we are led to attribute the awareness of such discrimination to Eo. The grooming scene alternates between detail shots of Eo's eyes and others of the same scale showing the majestic horse being brushed. The donkey and the horse then attempt a friendly interaction, but the horse's handler trots him off while Eo watches, leaving the donkey alone in his confined space.

IT EXPOSES THE HIERARCHIES THAT HUMANS ESTABLISH BETWEEN SPECIES, AND ALSO HOW WE ARE LED TO ATTRIBUTE THE AWARENESS OF SUCH DISCRIMINATION TO EO

At different moments, with an editing pattern also based on contrasting images—and sometimes also with the help of powerful, emotive music—we are similarly encouraged to empathise with what we see and to attribute feelings to Eo. For example, a longing for freedom is suggested in Eo's eyes when he looks out from inside the vehicle transporting him at a herd of horses galloping across a meadow, while compassion is hinted at in his gaze when he observes a crowd of pigs squealing inside a truck taking them to the slaughterhouse, and his constant braying at an aquarium full of fishes in the window of a pet shop seems empathetic.

On other occasions, Eo's reactions make it easier for us not only to attribute emotions to him, but even to identify intention and the capacity to

intervene. An example of this can be found in the scene where the donkey is taken to a place full of caged foxes. A series of quick edits show multiple exchanges of glances between Eo and the foxes. The close-ups of Eo and the detail shots of his eyes attempt to convey his emotional reaction to the sight of the electrocution of several foxes by a man who then loads their corpses onto the cart that the donkey is required to pull. Having completed his macabre task, the man hits Eo to make him move, but Eo refuses and then delivers a vengeful blow to the man's face that leaves him unconscious on the ground. The scene concludes with an extended shot of Eo's face (Image 2), which wears an unmistakably intriguing look that vests the donkey with another act of agency—breaking the fourth wall—while also compelling us to take a position on what we have just seen.

Image 2

In any case, the sequence that best serves to appreciate the relationships established between Eo and other non-human animals—and, in general, to appreciate the protagonist's connection with a natural environment—occurs just after the fleeting nocturnal visit that Kasandra pays him on the occasion of the donkey's birthday. Eo breaks through the fence that holds him back to trot along the road after the young woman, who has left on a motorbike. Frightened by a car, the donkey changes course and wanders into the forest. Thus begins a sequence of almost ten minutes in which Eo enters the natural habitat of various wild animals, and which, although the long shadow of human influence will appear, includes no people and no spoken words.

A fisheye-lens shot of a frog drifting downstream suggests, as do similar shots elsewhere in the film, that we are seeing the world through Eo's eyes. Moreover, the shot establishes the stream as a kind of natural highway that will guide the donkey—and us—through this part of his journey. After shots of a spider spinning its web and of the donkey following the stream under the watchful gaze of an owl, we begin to hear the howling of wolves. A POV shot of Eo pushing through the branches is juxtaposed with another that shows him walking by some graves. The bluish tones of the cinematography and the ominous ambient music make their technical contributions to thematic motifs typical of the horror genre.

Eo comes to a halt and looks around. In a wide shot of the peaceful forest, the menacing laser sights of a group of hunters gradually emerge, while technological synthesiser sounds take over the soundtrack. A camera movement follows the path of a laser light on the protagonist's back until it reaches his head. We then hear a thunderous gunshot and the music suddenly stops. A detail shot of Eo's eye is accompanied by a faint, repeated braying, like a whimper. Without cuts, a camera movement crosses the stream to show the image of a wolf dying on the bank, ending with another detail shot, in this case of the wild dog's bleeding wound. In another example of the editing technique mentioned above, the juxtaposition of the image of the mortal wound with a new close-up of the donkey's eye suggests sympathy in Eo's gaze.

The protagonist flees, passing through a long tunnel full of bats. His way through the underground corridor marks the transition to another scene, far away now from his encounter with the

animals of the forest by night, which emphasises the donkey's independent experience in contact with nature. A ground-level tracking shot passes through the bushes and up to Eo, who is eating grass in a meadow. One shot shows the light of dawn bathing his back and the next offers the image of his mane moving gently in the breeze (Image 3). As at other moments, the sensory quality of the experience is highlighted through a haptic approach distinct from the logocentrism that tends to characterise film industry production. Another ground-level shot of Eo's legs, followed by one taken from behind his head with a shaky camera at shoulder height, track the donkey's movement and help us to put ourselves in his skin. These shots also constitute an example of the various occasions in *Eo* that vindicate bodily experience through the use of somatic camera techniques.

Image 3

From above, Eo looks out over a horizon tinged with the reddish tones of dawn. In the aerial shot of the forest that follows, we see the same red filtering effect we saw in the film's first images, which is maintained throughout the rest of the scene. Several wide shots taken with a drone offer a bird's eye view over the forest, followed by a shot that pierces through the trees and follows the path of the stream. A single dissonant keyboard chord is repeated throughout the shot, increasing in intensity as the camera moves faster and faster, as if both sound and image were emulating the increasing rhythm of the water rushing down the mountain. The scene cuts abruptly to the image of windmills and an aggressive distorted guitar with a wah-wah effect begins to play. Approaching one of the windmills, the camera rotates sharply on its axis, imitating the movement of the blades it is pointing at. The sequence ends with an indirect shot of the windmill's blades, reflected in a small puddle. We hear a bird cawing, and then just when this sound ends and the keyboard chord stops, we see a bird drop dead into the water (Image 4).

Image 4

This sequence condenses certain recurring themes throughout the film. First, it individualises Eo, conveying his particular way of experiencing the environment and portraying him as the subject at the centre of his world. Second, it creates bonds of fraternity and solidarity between the different species in the face of the human threat. And finally, the animalist, anti-speciesist message is linked to—or rather, presented as part of—an environmentalist critique of the absurdities of the Anthropocene.

IN THE DONKEY'S HEART: ENTERING EO'S INNER WORLD

The film also includes sequences intended to make us share in Eo's pain and suffering, immersing us in his private world. These sequences are, in general, the most effective in fostering audience identification. One notable example is the scene showing the beating inflicted on Eo by the fans of the losing football team, who spot the donkey and decide to get out of their car to attack him. Eo tries to flee, and the chase is captured by a shaky handheld camera that conveys the distressing nature of the situation. The fans catch the donkey and begin to strike him with their bats. The excessively unstable framing, the underexposed, blurry shots, and the frantic pace of the editing inflict a violence on the audience that runs parallel to what the donkey is experiencing. The use of a fisheye lens and the low angle of the shots prompt us more directly to empathise with Eo, who collapses to the ground and continues to be beaten. Through Eo's eyes, in a strange ground-level shot, we watch the attackers walk away. The shot lingers a few moments longer, offering us the image of the grass and a distant light.

We then cut to a new scene that interrupts the narrative, beginning with a shot similar to the one immediately preceding it, though now accompanied by some eerie synthesiser music and the same red filter effect used in the film to emphasise certain scenes. Behind the grass, we see the head of a robot staring at us with its artificial eyes. The frame widens, and the canine-shaped automaton walks until it reaches a reflective surface where it gazes intently at itself (Image 5), as if becoming aware of its own existence. The juxtaposition of the final shot of the scene that has given us the most intense sensation of Eo's suffering with the opening shot of this robot scene creates a contrast that hints at a critique of the Cartesian conception of the animal as *machina animata*. Moreover, Skolimowski's allusion here might even prompt us to

Image 5

ask why, in this post-humanist age, we seem more open to recognising the self-awareness of machines than to acknowledging the subjectivity of the creatures with whom we have shared the world since our species first emerged.

The best examples of the film's attempt to get inside Eo's mind are undoubtedly the scenes that feature the speculative device of visualising his memories, going beyond the aforementioned invitations to the audience to attribute qualities traditionally considered human to the donkey. The three moments where these recollections are depicted underscore Eo's longing for that time spent with Kasandra, particularly the first two. In both cases, the flashback is introduced after a prolonged focus on Eo's lonely and distressing situation, expressed in lingering shots of the donkey accompanied by a moving musical composition.

In the first one, four shots serve as a prelude to the flashback: a barred window dimly lighting the place where the donkey is being kept; a detail

WE SEEM MORE OPEN TO RECOGNISING THE SELF-AWARENESS OF MACHINES THAN TO ACKNOWLEDGING THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE CREATURES WITH WHOM WE HAVE SHARED THE WORLD SINCE OUR SPECIES FIRST EMERGED

shot of Eo's eyes that travels down to his mouth; a wide shot showing some neon lights turning on, suggesting the tedious passage of time; and a final shot of Eo simply staring at a wall. During this shot, with an auriculisation strategy suggestive of an internal voice, we hear Kasandra whisper, softly calling the donkey's name. This is followed by the only shot that encapsulates the protagonist's nostalgia, where we see Kasandra kissing and caressing Eo beside the warmth of a comforting fire (Image 6). Similarly, the second flashback further emphasises Eo's physical and emotional contact with Kasandra, showing them exchange a reciprocal gaze of the kind which, according to Burt (2002: 39), enables psychological and social contact between humans and other animals in the absence of verbal language. These scenes clearly intensify the haptic intentionality and emotional charge present throughout the film, and thus highlight the sensitive connection *Eo* seeks to establish with the audience.

Image 6

The final depiction of one of Eo's memories uses a different formula, with a pair of shots that return us to the circus performance at the beginning of the film. The intrusion of these two red-filtered shots is heightened by the addition of brief musical phrases played on a flute. In the second, we see Kasandra calling out Eo's name anxiously, and immediately afterwards—no longer in the flashback—the donkey begins to trot, as if responding to his companion's call. The allusion to the circus act with its simulation of the donkey's death and resurrection indirectly foreshadows the film's final scene, which precludes the possibility of a happy ending for Eo. In this way, it sketches a kind of circle linking the beginning and the conclusion, while decrying the ceaseless cycle of exploitation to which non-human animals are subjected. In fact, shortly after the flashback, we see the donkey joining a herd of cows as they walk into a slaughterhouse. Overhead shots show the animals packed together, the erratic, nervous movements of a calf separated from the rest, and the panoptic architecture of a space designed for discipline and efficiency. The music adopts an increasingly tragic, piercing tone as Eo and his companions travel along their private corridor of death until they reach their fatal destination. A black screen accompanies the final, sharp and repetitive blows of the orchestral score, and as they end, the sound of a short electric burst abruptly ends the film.

CONCLUSIONS

Skolimowski's film makes Eo its true protagonist without resorting to the stereotypes traditionally associated with audiovisual representations of non-human animals. Although in certain scenes Eo is depicted as a spectacular accessory, faithful companion, therapeutic pet, commodity, helpless victim, or cold avenger, the film as a whole strives to present him simply as a donkey—as an individual and a subject with agency, whose prospects are nonetheless constrained by his circumstances. By adopting Eo's point of view, the film invites us to enter both his inner world (*Innenwelt*) and his subjective experience of his environment (*Umwelt*), with all the other characters made to revolve around him.

In its depiction of the donkey's contact with his surroundings, *Eo* pays special attention to the dy-

namics that arise between different species, including humans. His interaction with other non-human animals serves to open our eyes to a shared world built and inhabited by all living creatures in it, to explore alternative forms of communication and coexistence beyond human parameters, and to forge bonds of empathy and solidarity among the victims of exploitation and the speciesist hierarchies imposed by humans. As this study has shown, the condemnation of these conditions of domination is just as evident in the sequences portraying Eo's relationships with humans, who are generally depicted in a highly negative light. In this way, the film traces a kind of spiral, starting with Eo and the affective bond we establish with him, and gradually expanding to convey an animalist, anti-speciesist message that ultimately forms a fundamental part of its environmentalist critique.

This analysis has also highlighted how *Eo*'s alternative message is underpinned by a technically diverse and experimental approach that is equally transgressive. Just as the protagonist takes multiple unexpected directions throughout the narrative, Skolimowski's unorthodox style explores different textures and tones with a cinematic sensibility that breaks with convention and upends our expectations. In this respect, it is worth noting the film's fragmentary nature, most clearly expressed in the episodic structure that defies conventional narrative logic. The tone of the various episodes also varies significantly, taking us from scenes marked by dark humour to others in the category of existential drama, and even at times flirting with the conventions of other genres, such as horror. These tonal shifts are undoubtedly an effective way of immersing us in Eo's state of mind as he navigates the different situations he finds himself in.

The film makes use of other devices that similarly draw us into Eo's experience. At various moments, it employs POV shots from the donkey's perspective and special lenses that suggest a gaze different from that of humans. Similarly, the use of somatic camera techniques brings us closer to Eo's movements, emphasising the bodily nature of the cinematic image and our shared condition as *res extensa* with other animals. In other cases, long takes and the calm pacing of the editing convey Eo's boredom in captivity, or—as we saw in the scene where the protagonist wanders freely through the forest—to shift the film's rhetoric toward an observational style (akin to that found in *Gunda* or *Cow*) in which the donkey sets the tempo for a scene where nothing significant takes place in narrative terms. Beyond the specific expressive power of each of these devices, all of them combine to varying degrees with the film's sensorial (often haptic) and emotional force to explore and highlight alternative channels of communication shared across species, relegating verbal language—which underpins the logic of human exceptionalism—to the background.

Special mention should be made of another cinematic technique that brings us closer to Eo's experience, vested with the affective sensibility discussed above: the moments where the film imagines—or gives visual form to—the donkey's memories. While this device might be interpreted as a sign of anthropomorphism, the speculative imagining of Eo's memories could equally be described as yet another example of the donkey being attributed qualities that have traditionally been considered exclusive to humans. Rather than reading these attributions as anthropomorphic tics, the licence taken in such cases seem to constitute yet another layer of the film's multifaceted effort to assert the animal's subjectivity. It is important to remember, after all, that *Eo* is a work of fiction about a donkey, but made by humans for humans. And it is also worth noting that Skolimowski's film does not sidestep the problems involved in the representation (of the donkey's subjectivity), as is made evident in the animal rights protest scene discussed above—or, for that matter, as is already suggested by the title. Indeed, despite the

THE FILM AS A WHOLE ENCOURAGES US TO RESPOND TO WHAT IT SHOWS US WITH A COMBINATION OF FEELING AND THINKING

evident intention to give the donkey a voice by giving the film the protagonist's name (which in turn is taken from the sound a donkey makes), the linguistic representation of braying and the act of naming itself are unavoidably human.

In short, *Eo* puts us in the donkey's place through a powerful emotional charge sustained by a rich rhetorical arsenal that nevertheless appeals to us to reflect on it. The film's self-questioning approach, the moments when the narrative is suspended, and Eo's inquisitive glances at the camera invite a certain critical distance. In this way, the film as a whole encourages us to respond to what it shows us with a combination of feeling and thinking. It is up to us whether we allow ourselves to be carried away by the bleak panorama depicted, or to be moved by the spirit of criticism and by the hope that Eo's memories hold, and so begin to acknowledge non-human animals as subjects and to transform our relationships with them.

NOTES

1 The film presents the donkey as a domestic animal which, despite being deeply integrated into everyday life (as it is in rural Poland), is particularly scorned and mistreated in popular culture. Consider, for example, the many synonyms for "donkey" in both English and Polish that are used pejoratively to describe humans. The choice of a donkey as the protagonist thus serves to underscore the state of vulnerability in which we keep animals—and, as will be discussed here, nature as a whole.

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IN THE PLACE OF THE DONKEY: THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE NONHUMAN ANIMAL AND THE ANTI-SPECIESIST PERSPECTIVE IN *EO*

Abstract

This article investigates how the anti-speciesist message conveyed in *Eo* (Io, Jerzy Skolimowski, 2022) hinges on the assertion of the subjectivity of its donkey protagonist. Following a consideration of the "animal turn" and a discussion of its manifestations in audiovisual studies and recent film production, *Eo* is examined using the methodology of textual analysis. Attention to key sequences reveals the authentic leading role played by a non-anthropomorphic donkey who is presented as a subject with agency. The analysis also highlights the access the film provides both to the donkey's subjective way of experiencing his surroundings (*Umwelt*), including the depiction of his interaction with other species, and to his inner world (*Innenwelt*). It also explores the director's unorthodox technical approach, which places us in the donkey's point of view and connects us to him on sensory and emotional levels. The conclusions underline *Eo*'s subversive message supported by cinematography that is at once experimental and transgressive and the original alternative the film offers to the traditional depiction of non-human animals and the relationships we establish with them.

Key words

Animal Subjectivity; Antispeciesism; Film Analysis; *Eo*; Jerzy Skolimowski; Animalism.

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EN EL LUGAR DEL BURRO. LA SUBJETIVIDAD DEL ANIMAL NO HUMANO Y LA PERSPECTIVA ANTIESPECISTA EN *EO*

Resumen

El presente artículo investiga cómo el mensaje antiespecista que lanza *Eo* (Io, Jerzy Skolimowski, 2022) pivota en torno a la reivindicación de la subjetividad del burro que lo protagoniza. Tras considerar el *giro animal* y comentar sus manifestaciones en los estudios audiovisuales y en la producción cinematográfica reciente, examinamos la película guiados por la metodología del análisis textual. La atención a pasajes clave permite apreciar el protagonismo auténtico de un asno no antropomorfizado que es presentado como sujeto con agencia. Igualmente, se destaca el acceso que el film procura tanto a la manera subjetiva del burro de experimentar el mundo circundante (*Umwelt*) —incluida la plasmación de la interacción del protagonista con otras especies— como a su mundo interior (*Innenwelt*). Asimismo, valoramos la aportación de una heterodoxa propuesta formal que nos sitúa en el punto de vista del burro y nos vincula sensorial y emocionalmente. Las conclusiones subrayan cómo el mensaje subversivo de *Eo* se apoya en una experimental cinematografía paralelamente transgresora y cómo el film ofrece una original alternativa a la tradicional representación de los animales no humanos y de las relaciones que establecemos con ellos.

Palabras clave

Subjetividad animal; Antiespecismo; Análisis fílmico; *Eo*; Jerzy Skolimowski; Animalismo.

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ALIENATION, CRITIQUE AND THE FAILURE OF RATIONALITY IN THE ANALYSIS OF *DISCO ELYSIUM* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

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A TALE OF INDIVIDUAL ALIENATION AND THE COLLAPSE OF LATE CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Disco Elysium (ZA/UM, 2019) has established itself as one of the most acclaimed video games of recent years, winning numerous awards at prestigious international competitions. At the 2019 Game Awards, it won no fewer than four: Best Narrative, Best Role-Playing Game, Best Independent Game and Fresh Indie Game. The video game provides an immersive experience, characterised by Tan and Mitchell (2020) as a type of dramatic narrative game that fits within the context of Aristotelian drama. However, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Hejná (2023) describe it as an expansive role-playing game, while Novitz (2021) highlights its narrative conflicts, which place it between a detective role-playing game and a work with elements of Gothic literature.

Beyond these various perspectives and considerations, the game has aroused considerable academic interest, especially for its narrative structure, defined as multi-level by Shibaev (2022), and for its innovative game mechanics, which integrate moral decisions and sociopolitical themes. It is important to note that academic studies on *Disco Elysium* are extremely diverse, both in their disciplinary perspectives and in their findings, which once again highlights the multidisciplinary and intertextual nature of game studies (Freire-Sánchez, 2024; Maté, 2020; Pérez-Latorre, 2023). For example, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Hejná (2023) analyse the game in relation to how the vocal performances of the characters can support the sociomoral orientation of the gamer, while also concluding that voice stereotypes can serve to enhance perceptions of the characters rather than increase existing stigmas and prejudices. Shibaev (2022), on the other hand, analyses the char-

acteristics of the dialogue and polyphonic narration in the video game's text in order to determine its replayability and immersiveness. In contrast, a study by Novitz (2021) focuses on how the influences of Gothic elements and its status as a detective adventure allow for a more transparent appreciation of the sociopolitical critique emerging from both its story and its gameplay mechanics. *El Viaje del Antihéroe en el Videojuegos* (Freire, 2024) analyses the construction of Harry DuBois, the protagonist of *Disco Elysium*, highlighting how his fragmented personality and alcohol addiction distance him from both the monomyth or narrative pattern of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey and the traditional hero archetype. A study by Spies (2021) also explores the configuration of this character, but from a perspective of the mental disorders suffered by DuBois and his existential connection with the absurdism of Albert Camus' work. Spies' article is not the only one to approach the game from a philosophical perspective; McKeown (2021) examines it in relation to various post-humanist theories, concluding that the game represents an ideal narrative resource to address gaps in contemporary post-humanist research from the perspective of the video game sector.

The plot of *Disco Elysium* presents a story that blends fantastical elements with more realistic ones while exploring numerous social problems, such as depression, racism, alcoholism and drug addiction, trauma and corruption. At its narrative core is a bleak portrait of a disintegrated society where everyday life is characterised by a lack of opportunities, extreme ideologies and institutional failure. At first glance, the game also seems to be based on premises that use the control of the protagonists to immerse the player in a scenario of individual alienation and the collapse of late capitalist society.

It is precisely this critique of late capitalism that constitutes one of the rallying points of thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, founders of the

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Frankfurt School. This critique focuses on how dominant ideologies alienate the individual (Podvoyskiy, 2021), limiting their capacity for action and promoting the commodification of the self (Langman, 2009). With this in mind, this article offers an analysis of *Disco Elysium* with reference to the main axioms of the Frankfurt School with the aim of examining how these critical concepts are expressed in the video game's narrative and interactive design.

This research is framed within the discipline of game studies, a critical perspective that recognises video games as a cultural and artistic form with the capacity to reflect and represent society (Maté, 2020). This capacity is due to inherent characteristics of the medium, such as interaction, immersion and the ability to influence choices and narrative paths. In this respect, Jiménez-Alcázar and Rodríguez argue that video games "narratively function in the same way as other cultural products, but with the novel factor of the necessary intervention of the player" (2018: 59). These elements of interaction and immersion allow video games to represent rather than simulate worlds (Frasca, 2019), transforming the passive into the active (Gómez and González Álvarez, 2017).

Thus, based on the specific case of *Disco Elysium*, this article aims to analyse how video games, through their narrative designs and interactive mechanics, facilitate critical reflection on philosophical, social and moral problems. It also highlights their ability to shape and question the dynamics of contemporary society, thereby positioning them as devices of social criticism and satire of extreme ideologies. At the same time, this

study seeks to explore how *Disco Elysium*, through its interactive structure, offers a critical perspective by actively engaging players in philosophical reflections through moral decision-making and determinations.

STATE OF THE QUESTION ON THE APPLICATION OF CRITICAL THEORY TO DIGITAL ART

The Frankfurt School, founded by philosophers including Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, emerged in the 20th century as a radical critique of the social and economic structures of advanced capitalism (Kellner, 2012). This group of thinkers, despite the significant disagreements between them, as Hohendahl (1985) explains, developed what we now know as critical theory. Initially, the aim of critical theory was to analyse society and propose a transformation through philosophical reflection on the conditions that perpetuate oppression and the alienation of the individual (Bronner, 2017). The concepts of alienation, ideology and instrumental rationality, fundamental to their work, provide a theoretical framework that is essential for understanding the relationship between contemporary social systems and the human experience within them (Holanda, 2019).

As mentioned above, one of the most important concepts of the Frankfurt School is alienation (Podvoyskiy, 2021), which takes up and reworks Karl Marx's critique of the individual's relationship to the capitalist system. For Marx, alienation was the result of exploitation in the production process, where workers are separated from the products of their labour, from their fellow workers and from their own humanity (Øversveen, 2022). Adorno and Horkheimer, however, contribute new layers of reflection and extrapolate this idea to the cultural sphere. In their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2016 [1944]), they argue that alienation is not just an economic phenomenon but a cultural and emotional entity. The cultural industries, according to these thinkers, impose a homogenisation that reinforces the passivity of individuals and distances them from a critical understanding of their reality, even leading them toward self-estrangement (Roberts, 1987).

Today, one of the main interpretations of alienation is the transformation of the products of individual and collective activities into an independent force that subjugates people, who cease to see themselves as active agents and lose conscious control over the circumstances of their lives, experiencing their own creations as alien and beyond their reach (Schweitzer, 1991). This alienation has implications for culture, which, rather than being a space for emancipation, becomes an instrument of control (Podvoyskiy, 2021). Paraphrasing Adorno in his analysis of the culture industry (2005 [1951]), modern entertainment is presented as an escape mechanism that anesthetises the audience, evading any possibility of critical reflection. Cultural products thus reproduce dominant ideologies and create an illusion of freedom and satisfaction that perpetuates alienation. This phenomenon limits individuals' ability to recognise their own subordinate status within a system that exploits them. There are also emotional consequences of alienation, understood as an internal separation in which the person feels alienated from their own emotions, experiencing a loss of personal meaning and difficulty integrating their feelings into their worldview (Szanto, 2017).

Another key concept in critical theory is instrumental rationality. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that as modern societies advance technologically, rationality becomes a tool for domination or social control. Instead of being oriented toward the emancipation sought by Marxism or toward human development, reason is subordinated to utilitarian ends and productivity, where what matters is efficiency and control, not the liberation of the individual.

The aforementioned thinkers argue that this type of rationality, far from bringing real progress, reinforces the oppressive structures of capitalism. Marcuse, in *One-Dimensional Man* (2024 [1964]), takes up this argument by pointing out that instrumental rationality leads to a society in which alternatives to the dominant system are almost unthinkable. According to Marcuse, advanced capitalism manages to integrate even those forces that should oppose it, creating an illusion of freedom and plurality that in reality reinforces conformity and control. The individual's critical capacity is reduced, and alienation becomes a permanent condition. However, for Blau (2020), attacking capitalist instrumental rationality is a mistaken approach because the fundamental problem is capitalism, not instrumental rationality.

Therefore, although the thinkers of the Frankfurt School differ on certain points, it is possible to affirm that they agree that true reason should be emancipatory, oriented toward liberating the individual and overcoming the conditions that oppress them. The contemporary relevance of these theories is evident in current resistance movements such as alter-globalisation, which calls for a radical reorganisation of economic and political life (Masquelier, 2014). Alienation and ideology seem to work in unison to maintain the individual in a state of conformism and entertainment in which radical critique is devalued.

The relationship between ideology and culture is another central aspect of the Frankfurt School's critique. In their essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (2007 [1947]), Adorno and Horkheimer argue that mass culture has ceased to be a space for the expression of diverse ideas and has instead become a mechanism of ideological control. The culture industry, organised in a manner similar to mass production, standardises the content it produces and distributes, eliminating any disruptive potential (Horkheimer, 2013 [1947]). The function of this industry is not so much to educate or encourage critical reflection as to perpetuate the status quo through the reproduction of narratives that reinforce the dominant ideologies. This is most palpable in war films that reinforce the nation of the victors or in the construction of the American action hero of the 1980s. For Marcuse, this ideological integration goes even deeper, as reflected in *One-Dimensional Man* when he argues that advanced capitalism has managed to neutralise even those forces that might oppose it. Resistance movements, cultural critiques and countercultural movements are absorbed by the system and turned into products rather than real threats. The individual's ability to imagine radical alternatives to their current situation is compromised by the pervasiveness of the dominant ideology, which shapes their desires, needs and beliefs.

AN ADAPTATION OF HERMENEUTIC INTERMEDIAL ANALYSIS

This study uses a qualitative methodology based on a narrative and textual analysis of *Disco Elysium*, understanding video games as ergodic texts (Aarseth, 1997), that is, cultural products that require interpretive effort beyond passive reading. This methodology is combined with hermeneutic analysis, which seeks to understand the deeper meaning of a text, phenomenon or experience by considering its context and the author's intentions, and with interpretive analysis, supported in this case by the critical theories of the Frankfurt School. The hermeneutic intermedial analysis proposed by Kłosiński (2022) allows us to unravel the ideological and narrative layers in the interaction between mechanics, dialogues and visual design. This analysis is complemented by Jauss's critical reception theory (1982), adapted to the interactive context to examine how player choices trigger political and existential meanings in *Disco Elysium*. Also taken into account are the theoretical precepts of Sicart (2014), who also explores the ethics of gaming and how players negotiate moral

meanings. Through this methodology, the objective is to examine how the game reflects themes of alienation, ideology and failed rationality, and how these are articulated through its narrative, characters and gameplay mechanics.

The narrative analysis of the game focuses on the dialogue, characters and moral decisions the player faces throughout it. The discursive and narrative choices that reveal the philosophical approaches characterising the post-revolutionary world of *Disco Elysium* are analysed. This includes an examination of how the protagonist, an amnesiac and emotionally devastated detective, embodies the ideas of alienation and personal crisis that are central to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Particular attention is paid to moments in the game when dominant ideologies, a sense of hopelessness and a loss of faith in rationality are evident.

This textual analysis is complemented by a theoretical approach based on the ideas of Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. While the Frankfurt School's critical theory has been applied in numerous disciplines, its presence in game studies and the analysis of video games remains limited. Research on video games has rarely used Frankfurt School theories to examine video games as instruments of ideological reproduction or critique. Research on how these ideas align or contrast with the theories of alienation and ideology of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse is also rare, although there are some recent studies that have offered new readings, including those by Flores Ledesma (2020), Sı̧ın (2022) and Grimes and Feenberg (2009), although none of these focuses on a case study. The theories of instrumental reason and alienation provide the interpretive framework for understanding how *Disco Elysium* critiques social and political structures in a fictional context that nonetheless reflects the anxieties of modern societies. In addition to the narrative, this study analyses how the visual design and gameplay mechanics contribute to the creation of a sense of alienation.

DYNAMICS OF EXPLOITATION, INEQUALITY AND HOPELESSNESS IN A POST-REVOLUTIONARY WORLD

In the opening moments of the game, the protagonist, Harry DuBois, wakes up in a state of complete physical, psychological and emotional helplessness. He has lost his memory, is unaware of his identity and begins to confront the consequences of his previous actions. This initial state represents the definitive expression of individual alienation, in which the subject is unable to recognise themself in their own actions and feels trapped in a system that reduces them to just another cog in the social structure. The detective has lost everything and in one of the first dialogues, as he looks at himself in the mirror, he reflects on his face destroyed by alcoholism and poverty, unable to recognise himself: "You cannot see yourself, just a vague impression of a man." This disconnection from his own identity reflects personal alienation, where the individual no longer has control over their own life or their relationship with the world around them—an echo of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of how modern societies fragment human beings, separating them from their sense of self. Returning to the moment when DuBois observes his reflection in the bathroom mirror, the player can choose whether to confront the reality of his physical deterioration or to avoid it. This simple act symbolises the subject's alienation from themself, while the mechanics reinforce this disconnection by giving the player the option to ignore the problem and the character's own condition.

DuBois also feels alienated from the rest of society, as we are constantly told that he has failed other people and therefore no longer has a place in the world. He is determined to feel depressed and alienated, as reflected in the following lines of dialogue: "Four point six billion people – and you failed every single one of them. You really fucked up", "a tremendous loneliness comes over you. Everybody in the world is doing something

without you" or "Brother, you should put me in front of a firing squad. I have no words for how I failed you."

One of the most innovative features of *Disco Elysium* is its Thought Cabinet, a system that allows the player to adopt various ideological thoughts throughout the game. These ideas, developed through choices and dialogue, shape the protagonist's perspective on the world and allow the player to choose how the protagonist defines himself ideologically, providing dialogue options that align his thoughts with different political worldviews such as communism, ultra-liberalism, fascism, or a more centrist or depolarised moralism. When the player adopts extreme ideological positions, these become narrative paths within the story but not real alternatives for changing the course of events, which underscores the futility of ideologies, according to the game. For example, if the player adopts the thought "Mazovian Socio-Economics", which is based on Marxism, the protagonist will begin to analyse the world's inequalities from a perspective that is critical of capitalism. This will affect the available dialogue and alter how the player interprets the game environment, highlighting the impact of ideologies on the subjective experience but not changing the actual story of the game. Consequently, none of these ideologies is presented as a viable solution to the problems in the video game's world and all are treated critically. For example, one line of dialogue states: "Democracy is a meaningless sham as long as the working class is under the boot-heel of Capital" Another optional line of dialogue states: "Capital has the ability to subsume all critiques into itself. Even those who would critique capital end up reinforcing it instead." These statements are examples of Marcuse's critique of how capitalism has neutralised society's capacity to imagine alternatives or achieve revolution against dominant structures. Through these dialogues and thoughts, far from providing answers, the game emphasises hopelessness in a fictional society where all revolutionary promises have failed.

WHEN THE PLAYER ADOPTS EXTREME IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS, THESE BECOME NARRATIVE PATHS WITHIN THE STORY BUT NOT REAL ALTERNATIVES FOR CHANGING THE COURSE OF EVENTS, WHICH UNDERSCORES THE FUTILITY OF IDEOLOGIES, ACCORDING TO THE GAME

The concept of instrumental rationality, fundamental to the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, is also reflected in the game's mechanics. Throughout the story, the detective uses a thinking engine, a system that allows the player to process the character's ideas and deduce facts about the cases he is investigating. However, these mental processes often lead to absurd or irrational conclusions, illustrating how reason, when subordinated to instrumental ends, does not always lead to progress or truth. For example, in one case, the detective may theorise that a victim's cause of death is a paranormal conspiracy; while possible within the game's fictional world, this line of reasoning is completely irrational and reflects the confusion that can be generated by the instrumentalisation of reason. The Wild Pines Corporation and its interests in Revachol, the city where the plot takes place, constitute a representative example of an economic system in which people are reduced to mere means to achieve economic ends. This is reflected in the labour conflicts and systematic oppression faced by the dock workers. For example, the player can interact with Joyce Messier, a representative of Wild Pines, who defends the corporation's practices by describing Revachol's situation in cold, utilitarian terms. Her dialogue is filled with euphemisms for labour exploitation, such as when she talks about the inevitability of corporate control as part of the natural order or how demoralising and humiliating work is: "Time to go to work in the shit factory!"

The fictional world of Revachol is, in short, a representation of a disintegrated society in which institutions have collapsed and the ideologies that once guided sociopolitical life have lost their purpose. Its citizens are trapped in a rut of despair and conformity, and any attempt to resist the oppressive structures is fruitless. This aligns with Marcuse's critique of how advanced capitalism has managed to absorb any form of resistance, stripping all forms of rebellion of their subversive force and turning them into just another part of the system. In the game, the protagonist's attempts to solve the central mystery also seem futile, reinforcing the sense of powerlessness in the face of a system beyond his control. During the investigation of the central murder, the player may find that the case is not a priority for the authorities, reflecting a structure where justice is not an end in itself but a means determined by political and economic interests. Another example of this discrediting of institutions is Evrart Claire, the union leader, who uses political manipulation tactics to advance himself; despite appearing to advocate for workers' rights, his actions are corrupt. This shows how even movements that seek to combat alienation end up reproducing the very exploitative dynamics they criticise.

Revachol's visual design offers another example of the decline of ideologies. Its streets are filled with ruined buildings, political graffiti and abandoned factories, evidence of an idealised past destroyed by ideological conflicts. In Martinaise, the neighbourhood where much of the game takes place, the landscape includes an abandoned church, rusty cranes and a desolate harbour. These elements also reflect social and economic decay while acting as symbols of a system that has failed both its individuals and its communities. By requiring the player to make decisions about problems with no solution, the gaming system reinforces the idea that the individual, trapped in oppressive structures, has a limited capacity to change their destiny—a key theme in Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of modern society.

A CRITIQUE OF EXPLOITATION AND INEQUALITY

Through the representation of alienation and instrumental reason, the video game critiques the dynamics of exploitation, inequality and hopelessness that shape the fictional world in which the plot unfolds, as well as the collapse of 20th-century ideologies and economic systems. Although these elements have many parallels with the theories of the Frankfurt School thinkers, it is important to consider whether they can be extrapolated to today's society. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2000), in contemporary societies, social institutions that previously provided structure and stability have dissolved, leaving individuals in a state of constant fluidity, without roots or security, navigating a life characterised in part by uncertainty and precariousness. This "liquid condition" is also reflected—albeit in an outlandish way—in the protagonist of *Disco Elysium*, who has lost his identity, his place in the world and any notion of stability. This is an extreme version of Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity", where the protagonist's decisions lead to no resolution, and ideological choices provide neither refuge nor hope but quite the opposite. The character's instability, and the city of Revachol as a whole, epitomises the state of flux in which social and personal structures no longer provide meaningful guidance.

THROUGH THE REPRESENTATION OF ALIENATION AND INSTRUMENTAL REASON, THE VIDEO GAME CRITIQUES THE DYNAMICS OF EXPLOITATION, INEQUALITY AND HOPELESSNESS THAT SHAPE THE FICTIONAL WORLD IN WHICH THE PLOT UNFOLDS, AS WELL AS THE COLLAPSE OF 20TH-CENTURY IDEOLOGIES AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

From the perspective of reception theory, Jauss (1982) argues that the significance of a work depends on the interaction between text and historical context. In *Disco Elysium*, this dialogue translates into a confrontation between the player's expectations (shaped by traditional narrative genres) and the systematic subversion of these norms. For example, the figure of the detective—an archetype associated with conflict resolution—blurs into a character incapable of even resolving the question of his own identity. This contrast between expectation and reality reflects Bauman's aforementioned "liquidity" but also questions the legitimacy of the redemptive narratives that have historically structured popular culture. While Jauss stresses that literary criticism must consider how a work transforms the audience's horizon of expectations, we can seemingly expect little to nothing from the video game's protagonist, who seems doomed to anthropological pessimism.

The ideological fragmentation experienced by the player in *Disco Elysium* can also be related to Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernism (1984), with its suggestion that in the postmodern era, metanarratives—the great narratives that once explained the meaning of history and provided frames of reference—have lost their legitimacy. In *Disco Elysium*, this distrust of metanarratives is expressed in its representation of political ideologies, as none of the ideological options is a response to the world's problems; rather, they are presented as fragments of worn-out narratives that are no longer capable of providing coherent reasoning for political or social action.

The sense of hopelessness and alienation in *Disco Elysium* also aligns with Mark Fisher's 2009 contemporary concept of "capitalist realism", which describes a condition in which capitalism has come to be perceived as the only possible reality, blocking or mitigating any political or socio-economic models that might offer real alternatives. In the game, the city of Revachol is trapped in an eternal cycle of decay and stagnation and any attempts to change the system through ideological or moral decisions prove fruitless. Kłosiński (2022) argues that video games, by combining text, image and interactive action, are particularly suited to depicting social contradictions. This perspective connects Frankfurt's theories with Fisher's capitalist realism, as the game critiques capitalism while embodying its logic of control and hopelessness. It is, in fact, a more extreme view but based on very similar ideas to Fisher's.

Ergodicity, a property that establishes that over time a system or process will be subject to all possible states or at least a representation of them, as proposed in the work of Espen Aarseth (1997), is manifested in the structure of the interactive game, where every decision (psychological skills and branching dialogues) involves a constant negotiation between the subject-player and the algorithmic system that encodes the narrative possibilities. This dynamism reflects the alienation described by the Frankfurt School, but with a particular twist: instead of the homogenising passivity encouraged by the traditional cultural industry, the player is forced to act within predefined limits, in an implicit critique of the neoliberal freedom that Byung-Chul Han links to burnout. Extrapolating some of the precepts of Han's *The Burnout Society* (2012), it becomes apparent that individuals in neoliberal society have been transformed from obedient subjects into subjects of performance, exploiting themselves in their endless quest for productivity, optimisation and success. However, this quest inevitably leads to a feeling of exhaustion, depression and self-collapse. In *Disco Elysium*, the protagonist is the ultimate embodiment of this collapse: his alcohol addiction, amnesia and complete inability to perform his job effectively are symptoms of a life destroyed by the weight of impossible expectations. He believes he has failed everyone and that therefore the only thing he deserves is death. Instead of being an active, productive agent, he

has become a worn-out, empty figure, unable to live up to the expectations imposed on him by society. The player must contend with a character unable to make coherent decisions or achieve real progress due to his amnesia, which finds parallels in Han's description of a society whose obsession with performance, productivity and appearance has led to a widespread state of exhaustion and collapse.

Finally, the concept of fragmented identity and the quest for authenticity in *Disco Elysium* can be compared with Charles Taylor's conception of modernity (1989). Taylor argues that in modern societies, people search for an authentic identity amid the multiple options offered by the contemporary world. Koenitz (2015) highlights that in interactive environments, identity is constructed collectively between the game design and the designers, the system and the player. In this case, this construction is doomed to failure, reflecting a pessimistic view of the possibility of authenticity in liquid societies, since in *Disco Elysium* the protagonist seems to be on a failed quest for authenticity, as evident in his amnesia, his inability to remember who he is or what he stands for, and his constant doubting about his decisions. Throughout the game, any attempt to reconstruct the protagonist's identity is doomed to fail, reflecting a pessimistic anthropological view of the quest for authenticity in contemporary societies in which traditional frames of reference have disappeared.

IS IT EASIER TO IMAGINE THE END OF THE WORLD THAN THE END OF CAPITALISM?

Sığın (2022) highlights how video games, as products of the cultural industry, provide easy pleasures and fantastic fictional worlds that divert attention from the real problems of society. However, in *Disco Elysium* this dynamic is reversed, as the video game explores the ruinous state of reality with a mix of parody, satire and acerbic, sarcastic criticism. This article demonstrates how a video game—in this case *Disco Elysium*—can overstep the boundaries of interactive entertainment to allow those who wish to delve into its narrative to establish philosophical connections with the problems it poses and a number of current social issues. Analysing *Disco Elysium* through the multifaceted lens of the Frankfurt School also reveals how the game critically develops or exposes key concepts in the work of philosophers such as Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer, such as alienation, the decline of ideologies and the failure of rationality.

Through its immersive narrative, moral choices and the impossibility of achieving meaningful change within its world, the video game effectively conveys the idea that modern social structures, far from liberating people, keep us trapped in a cycle of alienation and socioeconomic control. This is in keeping with the ludo-narrative interactive design of video games which, according to Roth van Nuenen and Koenitz (2018), is based on a procedural system in which the game mechanics convey values and criticisms through their operation; as such, they are not neutral. To a certain extent, they also keep the video directed at players who do not have the ability to effect real change, as despite the different paths offered by the plot choices, all options correspond to pre-programmed algorithms that provide an artificial sense of freedom.

Disco Elysium also reflects the powerlessness that Marcuse describes in *One-Dimensional Man*, where political ideologies—whether communism, fascism or liberalism—have lost their capacity to generate revolutionary change, and capitalism has also ended up mitigating any chance of social transformation or revolution. This analysis of the game thus raises the question of whether it is possible to imagine a real alternative to the capitalist system when all ideologies seem to be mere variants of the same oppressive system. Perhaps, as Fisher would say, it is easier to imagine the end

DISCO ELYSIUM ALIGNS WITH THE CRITICAL CONCERNS OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND DEMONSTRATES ITS RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ADVANCED CAPITALISM, THE IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE EXCESSIVE DEMANDS FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND OPTIMISATION THAT SOCIETY EXPECTS OF CITIZENS OR THE DEMANDS THEY PLACE ON THEMSELVES

of the world than the end of capitalism. In this regard, *Disco Elysium* aligns with the critical concerns of the Frankfurt School and demonstrates its relevance to contemporary discussions about advanced capitalism, the identity crisis and the excessive demands for productivity and optimisation that society expects of citizens or the demands they place on themselves.

On the question of art, Flores Ledesma suggests that "Adorno's criticism of the work of art, of culture and society, follows a non-definitive death of art through a discreet iconoclasm" (2020: 71). It is therefore possible to argue that Adorno rejects the reduction of art to propaganda but sees in its autonomy a latent resistance to capitalist instrumentalisation. In *Disco Elysium*, the protagonist's amnesia and fragmented identity reflect the conflict between autonomy and sociality (the natural inclination of human beings to associate with and relate to others) that Adorno describes. Just as true art is not intended to be a tool of instrumental rationality, the detective protagonist we operate does not want to be a productive agent in a meaningless world. His physical and moral collapse is a metaphor for alienation in neoliberal society and his failing abilities symbolise the impossibility of resolving social contradictions under capitalism, foreshadowing an end to art where criticism is exhausted by its own representation.

This analysis of the video game raises a number of questions for future research. One relates to whether the instrumental rationality derived from the video game is reflected in aspects of contemporary life. Another is whether citizens' decisions really are reduced to pragmatic calculations as they are in the game analysed or, in other words, whether individuals are depersonalised by the expectations of productivity and compliance with certain established social requirements.

This research suffers from certain limitations that are inherent to the subjectivity of the gaming experience itself (where the player's decisions influence the development of the narrative), which may lead to results and interpretations that vary significantly from one gameplay experience to another. The game also features thousands of lines of dialogue and countless combinations, making an exhaustive analysis of its text practically impossible. This constitutes a significant limitation of the analysis, as the conclusions drawn here are based on a particular interpretation of the game, even if the core mechanics and key themes are consistent.

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ALIENATION, CRITIQUE AND THE FAILURE OF RATIONALITY IN THE ANALYSIS OF *DISCO ELYSIUM* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of *Disco Elysium*, one of the most acclaimed video games of recent years, based on the theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School and the concepts of alienation, critical theory and the failure of rationality in a post-revolutionary context. *Disco Elysium* depicts a desolate world in which the player's moral decisions and dialogues are intrinsic to the existential tensions that characterise individual and collective alienation. The research examines how the game reflects the concerns of critical theory regarding social and political disintegration in capitalist societies. From the perspective of the visual arts, and more specifically of game studies, the study analyses the game's narrative and textual content through its dialogues, characters and moral decisions, complemented by a philosophical interpretation based on the works of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. To contextualise the analysis, the findings are discussed in relation to postmodernist theories such as Byung-Chul Han's burnout society, Bauman's liquid modernity and Fisher's capitalist realism. The analysis finds that *Disco Elysium* reflects an explicit critique of contemporary ideologies, pushing players to experience alienation through the decisions and narrative paths presented. *Disco Elysium* is therefore understood as a self-reflexive work whose interactive and narrative mechanics provide a critical perspective on the social tensions and ideological failures of the so-called hypermodern society.

Key words

Alienation; Frankfurt School; Instrumental rationality; Game studies; Hypermodernity.

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ALIENACIÓN, CRÍTICA Y FRACASO DE LA RACIONALIDAD EN EL ANÁLISIS DE *DISCO ELYSIUM* DESDE LA ESCUELA DE FRANKFURT

Resumen

En este manuscrito se analiza *Disco Elysium*, uno de los videojuegos más premiados de los últimos años, a través del marco teórico de la Escuela de Frankfurt y los conceptos de alienación, teoría crítica y fracaso de la racionalidad en un contexto posrevolucionario. *Disco Elysium* presenta un mundo desolado donde las decisiones morales y los diálogos del jugador están intrínsecamente ligados a las tensiones existenciales que caracterizan la alienación individual y colectiva. La investigación examina cómo el juego refleja las preocupaciones de la teoría crítica sobre la desintegración social y política en sociedades capitalistas. Desde el ámbito de las *visual arts* y, más específicamente, los *games studies*, el análisis discute el contenido narrativo y textual del título a través de los diálogos, personajes y decisiones morales, complementado por una interpretación filosófica basada en los textos de Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer y Herbert Marcuse. Para contextualizar el análisis, los resultados se discuten con teorías postmodernistas como la sociedad del cansancio de Byung-Chul Han, la modernidad líquida de Bauman y el realismo capitalista de Fisher. Entre los hallazgos se destaca que *Disco Elysium* refleja una crítica explícita a las ideologías contemporáneas, que empujan a los videojugadores a experimentar la alienación a través de las decisiones y caminos narrativos que se plantean. Se considera, por ende, que *Disco Elysium* actúa como una obra autorreflexiva que, mediante sus mecánicas interactivas y narrativas, ofrece una visión crítica sobre las tensiones sociales y los fracasos ideológicos de la denominada sociedad hipermoderna.

Palabras clave

Alienación; Escuela de Frankfurt; Racionalidad instrumental; *Games studies*; Hipermodernidad.

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