

How to get to the second: interviews with contemporary Spanish filmmakers

Cómo llegar a la segunda: entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo

9

REVIEW



Marta Pérez Pereiro

University of Santiago de Compostela

Teacher and researcher at the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC). She holds a PhD from the same university and teaches classes in the area of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising. Pérez Pereiro is a member of the Grupo de Estudios Audiovisuais (GEA) and the Interdisciplinary Center for Feminist Research and Gender Studies (CIFEX), both at USC, where she also coordinates the Office of Gender Equality. Her main lines of research are small cinematographies, particularly Galician cinema, gender studies in audiovisual communication, humor in the media and social networks, and accountability in the media.

marta.perez.pereiro@usc.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5260-4485>

RECEIVED: 2022-12-21 / ACCEPTED: 2023-01-10

DATOS DEL LIBRO RESEÑADO:

Scholz, A., Álvarez, M., Binimelis Adell, M., Oroz, E. (Eds.) (2021). *Entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo. Millones de cosas por hacer*. Peter Lang.

The 2022 survey of Sight & Sound magazine of more than 1600 filmmakers and critics generated as much buzz and controversy as the World Cup in Qatar, which was being played on the same dates the survey results were published. For the first time, and surprisingly for the film world, a film directed by a woman, Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, appeared at the top of the list. In 1975, with a

tiny, mostly female crew, Chantal Akerman sought to portray the repetitive and monotonous experience of the life of a housewife who worked as a prostitute to support her teenage son. Films by filmmakers such as Claire Denis, Agnès Varda, or the more recent work of directors such as Céline Sciamma also made it to the top of the Sight & Sound list. The analyses of the results, refuted, supported and amplified in the social networks, made evident a decentring of the canon and the regret that central figures of this canon such as Howard Hawks or Ernst Lubitsch had been left by the wayside. Some critics and filmmakers, in chat rooms and podcasts,

boasted of not having seen Jeanne Dielman or even of being unaware of the film's existence until the publication of a ranking that they considered to be ominous and detrimental to cinema.

The ignorance, feigned or not, of Akerman's work evidenced, in any case, a situation that is confirmed by the data on the production and reception of films made by women, who are an overwhelming minority in directing. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory, in its report *Female professionals in European film production* (2022), women only occupy a quarter of the directing positions in European films, it is a profession in which very marked gender roles persist. Thus, women continue to occupy production tasks or are interpreters, while their presence in more technologically mediated profiles such as photography or sound is scarce.

In addition to the low number of women in directorial positions, a number that has been growing in recent decades, spurred on by affirmative action policies, their works remain invisible. These are generally low-budget and are made in so-called minor genres; these films end up being seen in alternative circuits and sometimes become cult works. Some of the consequences of the lack of visibility of films made by women are the absence of references and the lack of generational transmission, which makes it difficult to create a tradition. Thus, it is not possible to produce what Ruby Rich (1978) called an instant canon of feminist film theory, in the manner of the outbursts of manifestations of subalternity studied by Gramsci (1999). Film production by women is therefore, in conventional historiography, a collection of atomized films that seem to emerge out of nowhere at specific moments and that do not show continuity between projects. Feminist research has, therefore, the obligation to map and connect

the dots between experiences so that an effective transmission can take place for women directors to come. Thus, in the compilation of experiences *Women of vision: histories in feminist film and video* (2001), Alexandra Juhasz collected the voices of different generations of video artists in order to avoid the disappearance of their works and to create bridges between the different artists.

The transmission and creation of references for future filmmakers are part of the main ideas of *Entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo. Millones de cosas por hacer* (Interviews with female creators of contemporary Spanish cinema. Millions of things to do), the volume of interviews edited by the researchers Annette Scholz, Marta Álvarez, Mar Binimelis Adell and Elena Oroz. The publication is one of the results of the funded research projects "Articulaciones del género en el documental español contemporáneo: Una perspectiva interseccional" (Gender Articulations in Contemporary Spanish Documentary Film: An Intersectional Perspective) and "Cartografías del cine de movilidad en el Hispánico Atlántico" (Cartographies of mobility cinema in the Hispanic Atlantic). These are part of the initiatives within the academy to analyze the work of women in film, from historical or contemporary perspectives. This volume, edited with the meticulous photographs of Óscar Fernández Orengo, presents, from its very title, an approach to contemporary cinema made by women in Spain from a perspective that questions the idea inherited from the politics of authorship, in which authorship falls almost exclusively to the directors. In this sense, the volume presents the experience of mostly women directors, but also of producers, such as Belí Martínez or María Zamora, directors of photography, represented by Neus Ollé, editors such as Ana Pfaff, or sound designers such as Alejandra Molina. This compilation

of voices from different fields, some of them profoundly masculinized, seeks, as the editors state in the introduction, to take a “polyhedral and decentered look” (2022, p. 16) at the profession. The choice of voices also questions the politics of authorship, inherited from the European avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, by claiming that creativity is not exclusive to the directorial role, but that film, as a collective work, presents this authorship in many other phases and activities of film projects. This loss of the centrality of the eminently male director-author figure goes hand in hand with the network of essential support within and outside the team. From the conversations, a map of relationships between the filmmakers can be traced, insofar as many of the interviews are in dialogue with each other through common projects. Thus, in this sense, a central point can be marked on the map that functions as a network in Barcelona, where relations are articulated through the training centres, particularly the ESCAC, the Master’s in Creative Documentary at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the Master’s in Theory and Practice at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. In addition, there are several nodes in Madrid, Galicia and the Basque Country, where other informal networks are developed. In this sense, certain imbalances persist between center and periphery, which affects the creation of these links and generates, together with work on the periphery of industry, a double exclusion that is not explicitly addressed in the volume.

The conversations, intelligently guided by researchers, not only address the existence of these networks and their circuits, but also revolve around issues such as affirmative action policies, ascriptions to explicitly feminist positions or the difficulties not only of making a project, but also of reaching the next ones. Although the policies are generally celebrated,

not all the authors are forceful when it comes to invoking feminism as a driving force or working methodology. In this sense, the words of Agnès Varda resonate when, interviewed in the 1980s by fellow filmmaker Margarita Ledo, she maintained that she did not want to be “a feminist woman who makes films only about women” (Martínez, 2022). The female creators in conversation in the book express their legitimate desire to be able to make any form of film, any genre, under the same conditions as their professional peers. It is precisely at this point where they all point out the main imbalance: there is an increasing number of films made by women, but this is a low-budget, often experimental cinema, which struggles on the margins to perpetuate itself. The second film is thus invoked in a large number of interviews as a symbol of continuity, beyond the flash of a first work, made, in most cases, with precariousness and extraordinary effort. This effort is especially emphasised in those women who try to survive in the profession by being mothers, another of the issues that appears in many of the dialogues.

The interviewees also talk about film, in the abstract, as the panelists who reject the irruption of the material in their evaluations, not only through their own work, but also through their references. The creative processes are explored in depth, in such a way that the book can become a good manual that functions as a complement to the viewing of their film works. Precisely, the invisibility of women’s work in film is another important issue when looking for references for the classroom, as many of the creators interviewed are also teachers. The editors of the volume mention, in fact, the idea of a triangle between film, research and teaching, which is constituted as the confluence where support networks are woven and transmission takes place. This book, as the result of several

solid investigations, can therefore be used for teaching, in classrooms where the future voices of cinema will be able to listen to those of their predecessors, who found it more difficult to find role models in the spaces of formal education, governed by that canon, which is faltering, and which we mentioned at the beginning of this review. In this sense, works such as the one presented here can contribute to the creation of a genealogy between the works of the pioneers, who are undergoing a process of necessary recovery, and the contemporary ones, who are aware of the importance of their example for those who follow them. Following this chain of transmission of knowledge, we hope that, like the happy promise of the second film, this book may give way to others in which more and

more voices of women creators are progressively collected.

REFERENCIAS

- Gramsci, A. (1999). *Cuadernos de la cárcel*. Tomo 2. Biblioteca Era.
- Juhász, A. (2001). *Women of vision. Histories in feminist film and video*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Martínez, B. (2022). "A nivel de contidos e a nivel temático coído que faltan territorios por atravesar. Entrevista de Beli Martínez a Margarita Ledo Andión". *Galicia 21. Journal of Contemporary Galician Studies* (Issue K), pp. 104-116. https://www.galicia21journal.org/K/pdf/Galicia21_K_06_Martinez_Ledo.pdf
- Rich, R. (1978). The crisis of naming in feminist film criticism. *Jump cut*, (19). <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC19folder/RichCrisisOfNaming.html>
- Scholz, A., Álvarez, M., Binimelis Adell, M., Oroz, E. (Eds.) (2021). *Entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo. Millones de cosas por hacer*. Peter Lang.