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THE *STAR SYSTEM* IN EUROPE: *STAR STUDIES* TODAY

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Presentation

Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema is a biannual publication founded in 2012. It is edited by Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA) at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), and focuses on comparative cinema and the reception and interpretation of film in different social and political contexts. Each issue investigates the conceptual and formal relationships between films, material processes and production and exhibition practices, the history of ideas and film criticism.

Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema addresses an original area of research, developing a series of methodologies for a comparative study of cinema. With this aim, it also explores the relationship between cinema and comparative literature as well as other contemporary arts such as painting, photography, music or dance, and audio-visual media.

Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema is published in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English. The journal is biannual and the numbers are published in summer and winter. The journal is peer-reviewed and uses internal and external evaluation committees. The journal will also accept visual essays on the topic raised in the issue, both as part of a written article or as an autonomous work.

Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema is an open access scientific journal recognized by international indexes such as DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and Latindex (Regional Information System for Online Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal).

Finally, each issue of the journal is complemented by documentary materials and texts published online, which facilitate and enrich the topics studied in each volume, thus establishing links between longer research projects and monographic focuses throughout this process.

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The star system in Europe. Star studies today

Núria Bou and Xavier Pérez

In the interview with Axelle Ropert included in this monographic issue, the French filmmaker and critic reveals a childhood experience that many of us will be able to identify with:

'I ended up in cinema because of the power of actors and actresses. During summers in the countryside with my grandparents, the only way to watch movies was on television. That's how I discovered *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) at age ten. It was an aesthetic revelation: the discovery of a universe of extraordinary actors and actresses. During this initiation period, the director's name was the last thing I was interested in.'

That Edenic phase — when the childhood of the viewer first surrendered to the captivating power of the star system — established some revealing rituals that were imbued with an encyclopedic zeal. Throughout the years, the photograph and program collections, the collectible cards, the TV series about actors, the filmographic lists of the stars which came to compose our first atlas of cinematographic memory — these were all replaced by the authorial canon based on the role of directors. And the performers were relegated to the background of analytical territory.

As a reaction to this central importance of the agents of *mise-en-scène*, which came to be known as *politique des auteurs*, a trend began to develop in cinematographic bibliography — almost in parallel, but much less visibly — which defended a hypothetical *politique des acteurs*. From Edgar Morin's pioneering contributions to the incomparable works of Richard Dyer, the study of performers as essential agents of cinematographic creation has become consolidated as the methodological approach we now call 'star studies.'

Christian Viviani, in his article 'To Capture the Ephemeral' (which we have included in this monographic work), wonders

whether actor studies 'will ever succeed in achieving scientific objectivity', given that this still-incipient field has a tendency towards the irrational and the unexpected. Indeed, stars vary from film to film and they adopt different techniques according to their characters: they are polysemic images, difficult to pin down. But even if they *live* in different scenarios, wear clothes from past centuries or portray, from one movie to the next, different nationalities and ideologies, star studies theorists and historians encourage us to study them as texts. Tytti Soila, in the introduction to the book *Stellar Encounters: Stardom in Popular European Cinema*, paraphrases Judith Butler by suggesting that 'stardom is not one but many, and to understand the phenomenon in this sense, we need to know its genealogies, its variations, its differences and its constructions on palimpsests.'

That child-like fascination for movie stars that Axelle Ropert recalls in the aforementioned interview was rooted, completely and utterly, in the story that emerged from classical Hollywood's 'dream factory'. The problem of the star system in Europe is that it is full of singularities, edges and shadows. The Hollywood model, meanwhile, based on flawless machinery, functions impeccably. This problem encourages comparison and the investigation of those singularities. The ambiguous and diverse landscape of European acting has not only generated a dialectic field within the films themselves (ever since Rossellini summoned Ingrid Bergman to his country, Italy, to change the history of cinema once and for all), it has also stirred up a critical, varied thinking towards the question of stardom. This issue of *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* emphasizes the different methodological contributions that have emerged from Europe regarding star studies (often linked to gender studies), both from the perspective of national cinema and from the transversal approach which considers the relation between acting and staging. In the end, it's all about furnishing ourselves with new tools in order to carry on exploring, in all its complexity and vastness, the (fortunately) inexhaustible world of cinema history.

Star Studies in Europe

Martin Shingler

ABSTRACT

This essay provides a succinct consideration of some of the key constituents of what might be called 'European Star Studies.' Rather than a comprehensive survey of the academic literature on European stars and stardom originating across Europe, it is limited to a relatively small sample of influential studies published in English. Divided into three main sections –pre-*Stars*, *Stars* and post-*Stars*– the essay examines the following: European studies of stardom that pre-dated the publication of Richard Dyer's *Stars* in 1979; the key concepts and methods used by Dyer in *Stars*; and a range of star studies published in the twenty-first century by European film scholars, some of which have advanced Dyer's work while others have departed significantly from it in order to address a different set of topics and use alternative methodologies for exploring these. Even an examination limited to studies that have been published in English indicates that Star Studies has spread across many European nations, large and small, and that important work on film stars and stardom has been conducted, particularly since 2000. All of which has been instrumental in sustaining the vitality and diversity of this rich branch of film studies.

KEYWORDS

Star Studies, stars, stardom, Europe, European, internationalism, embodiment, transnational, transmediality.

Introduction

Star Studies is a thriving sub-disciplinary field within Film Studies, one that is chiefly concerned with the semiotic, cultural, economic, industrial, legal and historical aspects of stardom. Its roots, moreover, lie firmly in Europe. Indeed, many of the pioneering and most influential theorists associated with this branch of film scholarship were based in Europe; namely, Edgar Morin (France in the 1950s), Francesco Alberoni (Italy in the 1960s) and Richard Dyer (Britain in the 1970s and '80s). Before Film Studies became established as a major academic subject taught at universities worldwide, these scholars lay the foundations for what was to become one of the richest and most stimulating areas of film research. It is generally accepted that the publication in Britain of Richard Dyer's *Stars* in 1979 constituted the beginning of what is now known as Star Studies. The impact of this work has been far-reaching and since the 1980s studies of film stardom and individual stars have become the focus of considerable academic interest and activity, attracting a wide range of theoretical approaches and methodologies (SHINGLER, 2012: 8-36). Much of this activity in the 1980s and '90s was dominated by American scholars and publications, along with studies of Hollywood stars and stardom by British-based academics, such as Christine Gledhill, Jackie Stacey and Barry King.¹ However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been an increasing amount of academic activity on European film stardom by academics based in Europe.

There is little scope to provide a comprehensive survey of the academic literature on European stars and stardom originating across Europe in this short essay. Consequently, what follows is a brief consideration of some of the key constituents of what might be called 'European Star Studies,' focused on a small sample of influential studies. This essay, furthermore, is divided up into three main sections, pre-*Stars*, *Stars* and post-*Stars*. These examine the following; European studies of stardom that pre-dated the publication of Dyer's *Stars* in 1979; the key concepts and methods used by Dyer in *Stars*; and a range of star studies published in the twenty-first century by European film scholars.

1. See Christine Gledhill's *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (1991), Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994) and Barry King's 'The Star as the Commodity: Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Stardom' (1987).

1. Pre-Stars

That France has produced some of the biggest stars on the planet (Sarah Bernhardt, Brigitte Bardot and Gérard Depardieu) is not entirely surprising given that, as John Gaffney and Diana Holmes have written, 'France, perhaps more than other comparable countries, has a very strong tradition of personalisation in all aspects of social and political life' (GAFFNEY and HOLMES, 2007: 9). Moreover, as they go on to state, 'The dramatic expression of many social, political or cultural moments in the form of a person is a quintessentially French characteristic' (ibid.). With film stars playing a key role in the popular negotiation of various ideological contradictions resulting from the clash and co-existence of modernity and tradition in a turbulent post-war France, French academics became some of the first to study stardom (GAFFNEY and HOLMES, 2007: 8). Informed by anthropology as well as Marxist theory, Edgar Morin's *Les Stars* (1957) focused on how stars operate as myths within modern technological and urban societies, as quasi-religious beings that straddle 'both sacred and profane, divine and real, aesthetic and magic' (MORIN, 2005: 84).² Using the term 'superpersonality,' he highlighted the way that stars typically combine extraordinary qualities with ordinariness (MORIN, 2005: 38). Arguing that stars 'divinize themselves' both to attract publicity and to become more like their ideal self, Morin discussed how stars operate as 'patterns of culture' for their public, giving 'shape to the total human process that has produced them,' being role models for all kinds of people (MORIN, 2005: 147).

Edgar Morin was also one of the first academics to discuss the behaviour of fans and to use British, American and French fan mail and star-fan correspondence as part of his methodology. He was also one of the first to declare his own position as a fan rather than maintaining the usual critical distance between the analyst and the analysed (WERNER, 2007: 35). This may have damaged Morin's credibility and authority for some academics at the time and, indeed, as Susan Werner has observed, *Les Stars* made little impression on Film Studies until the 1990s, by which time the growth of Media and Cultural Studies had made Morin's work much more acceptable within the academy (WERNER, 2007: 27).

Francesco Alberoni's 1962 essay 'L'Élite irresponsable'

2. Edgar Morin's *Les Stars*, published originally in French in 1957, was translated into English by Richard Howard for the University of Minnesota Press in 2005.

proved more influential than Morin's book in the 1970s and '80s, partly due to being available in an English-language translation from 1972.³ It was here that stars were seen to fulfil a variety of socio-political functions in large-scale industrial and urbanized societies, such as distracting public scrutiny away from the power elite, such as government ministers, aristocracy, monarchy, religious leaders and business tycoons. Less interested in stars as role models than Morin, Alberoni concentrated on how stars become a focus for public debates about morality. For him, stars typically operate as an elite group in society but one that has no real power despite their wealth and fame. Meanwhile, in return for their elevated social status, stars are subjected to unprecedented levels of public attention and scrutiny, being 'members of the community whom all can evaluate, love or criticize' (ALBERONI, 1962/2006: 115). Evaluation notably takes a variety of forms, often concerned with issues of moral, social and sexual deviance.

Many of Alberoni's ideas were taken up and developed by other scholars; most notably, P. David Marshall in *Celebrity and Power* (1997). This has included the nature of star power and autonomy, media scrutiny of stars, the exposure and control of scandal and gossip, stars as symbols of morality (involving ideological contradictions being negotiated and resolved), the role of the audience in an individual's attainment and retention of star status and the significance of charisma. Many of these issues resonated through Richard Dyer's *Stars*, particularly the notion of the symbolic value of film stars. Yet Dyer also drew heavily on Morin's *Les Stars*. Among the many Morin-like or Morin-inspired themes of *Stars* is the importance of publicity and merchandizing, the prominence of the star's face and the importance of beauty and youth, the various levels of identification, and the distinctions between stars and the characters they play on-screen, as well as the different categories of stars (involving distinctions between stars and lead actors but also pin-ups and starlets).⁴

3. Francesco Alberoni's essay 'L'Élite irresponsable: théorie et recherche sociologique sur le *divismo*' was originally published in the journal *Ikon* in 1962 and was subsequently translated into English and reprinted under the title of 'The Powerless Elite: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of Stars' in Denis McQuail's anthology *Sociology of Mass Communications* (1972) and, later, in P. David Marshall's edited collection *The Celebrity Culture Reader* (2006).

4. Once taken up by Richard Dyer, many of Morin's methods and themes were subsequently adopted by other scholars in Britain;

2 Stars

The single most important academic publication on film stardom was written by Richard Dyer and published by the British Film Institute in 1979. *Stars* not only brought together previous sociological and semiotic work on stars and stardom but also substantially laid the groundwork for a more wide-ranging debate on the subject, doing so in an accessible way. Emerging directly out of British Cultural Studies, this book approached stars not only as texts to be read (in terms of their films and their publicity) but also as social products with significant symbolic value and meaning; in other words, operating as social symbols. Indeed, the most fundamental concept underpinning *Stars* is ideology, stars being perceived as conveyers of social and cultural values, representing the views, attitudes and beliefs of a society (or even specific social groups) at particular historical moments. This, Dyer argued, involved a number of ideological contradictions given that many of the most successful and popular stars embody apparently contradictory meanings and/or attributes; such as, their ordinary and special qualities, their typicality and their uniqueness. One of Dyer's most important and influential ideas emerged directly from this; namely, that 'stars – as images existing in films and other media texts – stress their structured polysemy, that is, the finite multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody' (DYER, 1979: 3). In this regard, Dyer was less concerned to 'determine the correct meaning and affect' of particular stars than 'to determine what meanings and affects can legitimately be read in them' (*ibid.*).⁵

After setting out the social, institutional and economic conditions of stardom in the first part of his book, Dyer considered how stars operate as images, being made out of an array of 'media texts that can be grouped together as promotion, publicity, films and criticisms and commentaries' (DYER, 1979: 60). In so doing, he made analysis of extra-cinematic materials a critical part of the study of film stars, with analysis of

most notably Jackie Stacey who examined the responses of British female film fans to Hollywood's leading female stars of the 1940s and '50s in *Star Gazing* (1994). In so doing, she built substantially on Morin's earlier investigation into audience-star relations, identification and *fandom*.

5. Influenced by Cultural Studies, Dyer understood audiences and fans to be more active and empowered than Morin. While Morin and Dyer reveal a similar interest in audiences, Dyer places more emphasis in his work on the role of audiences (and different kinds of audiences) in making stars meaningful.

promotional, publicity and critical materials being as important for film scholars as textual analysis of films. Subsequently, the analysis of extra-cinematic materials became an increasingly important aspect of film scholarship more generally.⁶

It is in the later sections of *Stars* that Dyer advances many of Morin's themes, particularly about identification and the relationships pertaining between audiences and stars. Yet while Dyer's *Stars* was 'a survey of what has been done in the study of stars' and a refinement and advancement of this work, it also identified areas for future research (DYER, 1979: 160). This included more empirical work on audiences, particularly for the purposes of better understanding the use of mainstream stars by marginal groups, including working-class women, blacks and gays. This was something that Dyer later developed in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (1987), a book that proved inspirational for many film and cultural scholars, including myself.

Yet much of the work that emerged in the wake of Dyer's publications (like Dyer's and Morin's books) focused on Hollywood stars and stardom to the point that numerous scholars expressed concern about a Hollywood-bias at the start of the twenty-first century. In 2000, for instance, British-based French film scholar Ginette Vincendeau observed in the 'Preface' to her book *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* that most of the academic studies of stardom had been 'devoted overwhelmingly to Hollywood' (VINCENDEAU, 2000: vii). The following year, Bruce Babington noted in his introduction to *British Stars and Stardom* that 'dominant star theory, even when British in origin, was almost wholly Hollywood-oriented', reflecting 'Hollywood's unquestionable status as the paradigmatic site of stardom' (BABINGTON, 2001: 3). He also noted an underlying assumption that the characteristics of the Hollywood star system pertain equally in other national contexts. This was something that both Vincendeau's study of French film stardom and Babington's anthology on British stardom set out to challenge, as did several other publications that appeared around this time, as discussed in the following section.

3 Post-Stars

Ginette Vincendeau's *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*

was one of several publications in the early 2000s to extend the borderlines of Star Studies to include Europe. Here, Vincendeau's case study chapters on stars such as Jean Gabin, Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu, among others, established the importance of these stars within French cinema but also how different they have been, both from each other and, more importantly, from Hollywood stars. One of the most important contributions of Vincendeau's book was to delineate a European alternative to the Hollywood model of stardom, one that recognised the ways in which France's leading film actors have operated differently to their Hollywood counterparts, both within the film industry and the wider culture. So in France, for instance, film stars not only maintain closer links with theatre and engage in more artisanal modes of production than in America but also retain greater levels of autonomy and creative freedom. To illustrate this, Vincendeau observed that French stars are notoriously reluctant to engage in promotional tours and interviews for their films, some even criticising their own films, something that would be virtually unthinkable in Hollywood due to various clauses in the contractual arrangements between studios and stars. Noting that French stars are seldom tied to long-term contracts, Vincendeau stressed throughout her book the extent to which French star contracts typically grant studio's limited jurisdiction over a star's image and activities. In this and other ways, Vincendeau's socio-cultural study of stars and stardom in France throughout the twentieth century added significantly to Star Studies in general and set the trend for a more diverse range of national studies from around the world during the twenty-first century.

At the same time, *Heroines without Heroes: Reconstructing Female and National Identities in European Cinema, 1945-51*, edited by the British-based German film scholar Ulrike Sieglöhr, deployed Dyer's notion of stars as social embodiments to female stars of Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Comprising eleven essays on the films and images of major female stars from these five countries during a seven year period after the end of the Second World War, this book combined a commitment to feminist film theory with a Dyerian preoccupation with how female stars embody aspects of national femininity. This involved highlighting significant national differences, notably between Britain and 'the cinemas of defeated or politically compromised nations' such as Germany, Italy and France

6. The analysis of film reviews, criticisms and publicity materials became a primary feature of the New Film History from the mid-1980s, while scholars associated with Reception Studies, most notably Janet Staiger, drew heavily on these as a means for understanding what

films meant for audiences historically. See Staiger's *Interpreting Films* (1992) and Chapman, Glancy and Harper's *Introduction to The New Film History* (2007).

(SIEGLOHR, 2000: 10). Yet this book, while contributing significantly to the increasing internationalism of Star Studies, was still limited to five of the largest and most powerful Western European countries, as the editor herself acknowledged, with no representation in terms of Eastern Europe or Scandinavian countries (SIEGLOHR, 2000: 5).

Sieglohr's implicit call for greater national representation was taken up in 2003 when Stockholm hosted the fourth Popular European Cinema conference, entitled 'Methods and Stars.' This not only aimed to reclaim some forgotten or neglected stars of Europe but also to redress the Anglo-American bias of Film Studies. Twenty-two of the papers given at this event were subsequently developed into essays for *Stella Encounters: Stardom in Popular European Cinema* (2009), edited by Tytti Soila. This anthology brought together one of the richest and most diverse collections of essays on European film stars to date, with stars included not only from Germany, Britain, Italy and France but also Norway, Sweden, Holland, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Greece. Authors, meanwhile, were drawn from Belgium, Holland, Britain, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Italy and the USA.

Stella Encounters, as the book's editor declared in her introduction, set out to question the notion both of Hollywood as the originator of the star system and European cinemas as being essentially adaptors or imitators of that system. The distinctive qualities of Europe's various star systems examined by the book's authors reveal a multitude of stardoms and star practices. Yet the major issue here remained the relationship between stars and notions of nationhood.⁷ As Soila writes,

'In many European countries, then, the typical feature of a national cinema culture is the emergence of stars whose qualities were informed by what has been perceived as national characteristics. The stars either confirm them –embodying a number of alleged national qualities in a positive o[r] negative way– or deviate from them by embodying the "other" of a presumed national stereotype' (SOILA, 2009: 9).

Many of the contributors to Soila's book discuss stars in relation not just to national contexts but also to historical moments and, in so doing, reveal the influence of Dyer's work. In *Heavenly Bodies*, Dyer argued that stars represent 'typical ways of

behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed' (DYER, 1987: 17). He also described stars as 'embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives, [...] categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on' (DYER, 1987: 18). This prompted many star scholars, European scholars especially, to investigate the ambiguous and often contradictory ideologies embodied by stars. So, for instance, in the introduction to *Stardom in Postwar France*, John Gaffney and Diana Holmes write that,

'Stardom may be read as a symbolic portal into the nature of a culture, stars as that culture's ultimate expression. At the same time, stars, by their very nature, are what most people are not, are symbolic negations of a given culture' (GAFFNEY and HOLMES, 2007: 1).

The authors go on to explain that stars frequently offer audiences something new, something more exciting and aspirational, more glamorous than the reality of life in the culture to which they belong. This idea, which harks back to Edgar Morin's work as much as Dyer's, embraces both the glamour and the inherent contradictions of stardom. Simultaneously, stars are held to reveal something fundamental about a society at a particular historical moment and yet also defy, challenge or seek to transform it. This is illustrated in a chapter of *Stardom in Postwar France* devoted to Brigitte Bardot by Diana Holmes, which examines the French star in terms of zeitgeist. Here, Holmes situates Bardot's fame within the context of the rapid social changes in 1950s' France and, in particular, the growth of youth culture. This involves an exploration of the ways in which the actress 'incarnated' the values of a young generation in the mid to late fifties (HOLMES, 2007: 46).

Studies that seek to establish the various ways in which a film star embodies or incarnates a particular set of social values or a specific and identifiable period within a culture's history run the risk of being deemed reductionist and over-simplified. This was something that Richard Dyer was at pains to avoid in his own work. In the 'Preface' to *Heavenly Bodies*, for instance, he declared that his objective was 'to find a way of understanding the social significance of stars which fully respects the way they function as media texts, yet does not fall into a view of

7. Another common theme of *Stella Encounters* concerns the legacy of stars, many authors exploring why certain stars have been quickly and thoroughly forgotten after their period of stardom. This theme was subsequently taken up by authors compiled in the anthology *Lasting*

Screen Stars (2016), edited by Lucy Bolton and Julie Labalzo Wright. This contains chapters on Italy's Sophia Loren, Hungary's Pál Jávör, France's Jean-Louis Trintignant and Emmanuelle Riva, and Britain's James Mason, Margaret Rutherford and Diana Dors.

a given star as simply reflecting some aspect of social reality that the analyst cared to name' (DYER, 1987: ix). To avoid oversimplifying the ways in which stars reflect national cultures at historical moments, Dyer focused on the role of audiences (and various different types of audience) and how they interpret and make use of star discourses. Many star scholars have heeded Dyer's cautionary note, exploring how stars incarnate social groups and ideologies at historical moments in ways that avoid the pitfalls of a 'reflectionism'. One of these has been to examine the work of stars across different national contexts, while another has been to examine the work of a particular star across various decades of his or her career.

During the twenty-first century, a considerable amount of star scholarship has focused on transnational dimensions of stardom and, in particular, what happens when a star moves from their country of origin to Hollywood. This, for instance, lies at the heart of Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau's anthology *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* (2006). One of the things to merge from this is the way that many European actors working in Hollywood have been typecast in roles that conform closely to national stereotypes; for instance, with German and English male actors being used to play villains, while French and Italian actresses have been cast as sex sirens much more often than British actresses (PHILLIPS and VINCENDEAU, 2006: 14). On the other hand, some European stars have been able to expand their repertoire of roles by moving from one national film industry to another.⁸

Lisa Downing and Sue Harris' *From Perversion to Purity: The Stardom of Catherine Deneuve* (2007) demonstrates the advantages of studying the films and images of a star across different countries over several decades. In this anthology of essays, one of France's most glamorous film stars is removed from a specifically national context, her work being examined across several national film industries, including Italy. Meanwhile, audience readings of Deneuve's star text are used to highlight the paradoxes and contradictions of her stardom; including within her films, across her films, and between her on- and off-screen star persona. Here, the book's editors advocate an approach to stardom that looks beyond a star's work and significance within a specifically national context (DOWNING and HARRIS, 2007: 7). This would seem to be a particularly fruitful approach for scholars of European stardom

given that so many European stars have to work in various countries to sustain a financially viable film career. Downing and Harris not only provide a compelling justification for the single star case study in the introduction to their book but they also draw attention to some of the disadvantages of the national star study (in which a star is read as emblematic of a specific national culture). 'The model which considers stars only in the context of a national cinema risks perpetuating a hermetic idea of "the nation" within and through which the star is uniquely understandable' (DOWNING and HARRIS, 2007: 8).

When *From Perversion to Purity* was published, single star case studies were relatively rare. However, many more have since been published, partly due to the fine example set by Downing and Harris's book, but also in part due to the launch of the British Film Institute's *Film Stars* series. Since 2012, the BFI has published numerous single star studies, including books on France's Brigitte Bardot by Ginette Vincendeau (2013), Germany's Hanna Schygulla by Ulrike Sieglöhr (2014) and Spain's Penélope Cruz by Ann Davies (2014). All of these, moreover, examine films made beyond the star's country of origin, noting the ways in which the star's image and nationality have been utilized in a variety of ways at different stages of her career by different kinds of audience. Like many recent star studies, these also engage with other aspects of stardom, such as transmediality (comparing a star's work in film with their television and/or theatre work) and celebrity (comparing a star's film persona to the image of them that circulates more generally within celebrity cultures). In so doing, these respond to many current debates within Star Studies. Yet, at the same time, they also represent the culmination of the aims, methods and ideas provoked by the pioneering work of the scholars discussed above.

Conclusion

If anything, this account demonstrates that scholars in Europe have conducted much of the world-leading academic research on film stars and stardom since the 1950s. There have undoubtedly been many more insightful and original star studies produced across Europe than those discussed here; particularly ones published in languages other than English. As an Anglophone scholar with very limited linguistic ability,

8. This is illustrated in some of the essays compiled in Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael's *Transnational Stardom: International Celebrity in Film and Popular Culture* (2013). See, for instance, Miguel Fernández Labayen and Vicente Rodríguez Ortega's essay on Javier Bardem,

which compares the critical reception of his film performances in Spain and the USA and considers how Spanish and American audiences have been presented with quite diverse impressions of this leading Spanish film actor.

I am not well placed to conduct a comprehensive survey that includes a wide-ranging review of published academic literature on stars from across Europe. Yet such an enterprise would be hugely instructive and most welcome. It is clear that Star Studies has spread across many European nations, large and small, and important work on film stars and stardom has been, and is being, conducted. It is also clear that such work deserves a wider reception across the international academic community. Here, surely, lies the future of Star Studies. For in this way, the vitality and diversity of this rich branch of film studies will be sustained.

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To capture the ephemeral

Christian Viviani

ABSTRACT

For a long time the actor's performance (and more especially the specific nature of the film actor's performance) have been considered to be peripheral and insignificant by film criticism and analysis. In fact, studies on performance are based on the paradox of adopting a normative approach in an area that seems to be averse to scientific objectivity: the actor has traditionally been considered as ephemeral, and our relationship with him or her is based essentially on affect. For this reason, the analysis of performance is fundamentally different from that of *mise-en-scène*, even if it is also developed using a rationale of observation, description and comment. In line with these premises, in this article I will examine three gestural registers of the actor, which are juggled simultaneously and are also administered or favored according to their nature or to the specific moment in the film: the credible, which relates to the ordinary and the real and is concerned with the character; the theatrical, which includes conventions and mannerisms and is concerned with the performer, and the ornamental, which includes everything associated with the non-natural (and choreography) and is concerned with the creator, who may be the actor or the director, or may even arise from a combination of both.

KEYWORDS

Star studies, actor, performance, gesture, theatricality, character, credibility, *mise-en-scène*.

In periodicals dedicated to cinema, any reference to the actor appears as a parenthetical comment or conclusion to the film review (and rarely as part of the analysis), as if to compensate for an oversight. Michel Chion captured this phenomenon with a noteworthy remark: 'The actor is [...] what shames the critic, exposing the limits of his comprehension and reduces it to the commonplace, vague, intuitive sensibility of the ordinary spectator' (CHION, 1988). In the work of researchers like James Naremore, Foster Hirsch, Roberta Pearson, Patrick McGilligan, Alain Bergala, Luc Moullet, Jacqueline Nacache, Geneviève Sellier, Vincent Amiel, Nicole Brenez, Michel Cieutat, Christophe Damour and others, we can see the emergence of a desire to reflect on something that for a long time was viewed as peripheral, insignificant, if not outright disheartening: the actor's performance and, more precisely, the specific nature of the film actor's performance.

Will actor studies ever be able to achieve scientific objectivity, considering the room this still new field of study leaves for irrational and impulsive responses? Is such an achievement desirable in any case? For many years, the actor was the ephemeral: it is not possible to suddenly begin studying a subject that we have always believed to be fleeting using the criteria of the enduring. Moreover, our relationship as spectators with the film actor is to a large extent associated with emotion; that is, with our mood, our state of mind at the time of watching the film, or even our age, and our attraction or aversion to the actor in question. It would seem indispensable to preserve this variable, even if it means that more rigorous minds must agree to suspend their scientific demands for a moment, just as the fiction spectator tacitly accepts the rule of the 'willing suspension of disbelief' described by Coleridge back in the early nineteenth century (COLERIDGE, 1817).

On the other hand, the desire for a framework is also justifiable. To this end, an analysis can be conducted in three stages: observation, description, and comment. Of course, the development and relative importance of each stage is not the same for studying the work of the *mise-en-scène* (as is so often done) as for examinations of the actor's performance. While observing what a filmmaker places on the screen is reasonably comparable to observing what an actor displays on the screen, the description stage is clearly different in the two cases. Describing what we perceive of the *mise-en-scène* is a practice that often borders on paraphrase, and to avoid this, elements of speculation may

be mixed into the description. Describing what we perceive in the actor's performance often entails transferring to the conscious level a procedure of which previously only the effect was considered; to ensure that the credibility of the effect remains intact, the process of its creation should not be perceptible. But when the spectator becomes an observer, identifying the effect produced is no longer enough: the observer examines how it has been produced. The British researcher Richard Dyer, a figure of primordial importance in 'star studies', offers an excellent summary of what actors leave of themselves on the screen:

Performance is what the actor does in addition to the actions/functions she or he performs in the plot and the lines she or he is given to say. Performance is how the action/function is done, how the lines are said.

The signs of performance are: facial expression; voice; gestures (principally of hands and arms, but also of any limb, e.g. neck, leg); body posture (how someone is standing or sitting); body movement (movement of the whole body, including how someone stands up or sits down, how they walk, run, etc.). (DYER, 1979, p. 151)

The performance places these components in the perspective of a wider system, of the *persona* (in the case of leading actors) and/or the technique (in the case of character actors): recurring gestures, idiosyncrasies, mannerisms or, conversely, breaks with usual habits, surprise effects.

We can observe that the film actor simultaneously juggles three gestural registers, which he or she doses out or privileges according to their nature or the moment of the film: the credible, the theatrical, and the ornamental. The gestures of the credible cover all gestures associated with the ordinary, the practical, the functional, the real, and are concerned with the character. The gestures of the theatrical group together the existing conventions and codes, but also recognisable idiosyncrasies and mannerisms: they are concerned with the performer who, on the one hand, uses the existing codes and, on the other, employs gestures that already identify that performer in the eyes of the spectator, placed at the service of the character that is to be portrayed. Finally, the gestures of the ornamental register include everything associated with the non-natural, body posture, choreography, even acrobatics, and are concerned with the creator. This creator may be the actor or the director, or may even arise out of a combination of both.

1. The credible and the character

Gestures associated with the credible are often so obvious that they can be ignored. Characters in theatre had a long history of being shown engaging in strictly conventional activities (writing, sitting at a desk, sewing, arranging flowers, holding a glass or a cup), and early cinema basically continued this tendency, to such an extent that any exception stands out starkly: the gestures of workers on the land in Griffith's films in the United States (*A Corner in Wheat*, 1909), or in Victorien Jasset's work in France (*The Great Mine Disaster* [*Au pays des ténèbres*, 1912]), or even at sea in André Antoine's *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange* (1919).

However, in sound films, the gestures of the credible strike the spectator's gaze as trivial or avant-garde details, as filmmakers then sought to establish a contrast between the intimate or solemn nature of the words and the banality of the gesture performed. In American cinema, Gregory La Cava thus experiments with different elements linked to the direction of the actor; for example, in the classic comedy *My Man Godfrey* (1936), Carole Lombard and William Powell discuss the

problematic nature of their future as a couple (he is a domestic servant, she is his boss) while washing the dishes. Some years later, a famous scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, 1942) proposed a more dramatic balance: Tim Holt obstinately goes on eating his strawberry tart (gesture of the credible) while Agnes Moorehead, at his side, progressively abandons the attentive gestures typical of a thoughtful aunt as she descends into complete and utter hysteria (now exhibiting gestures of the theatrical).

In France, sound films, and particularly the poetic realist trend, seemed to bring credibility to the dialogue. In the films of Renoir or Duvivier in the 1930s, the screenplays of Jacques Prévert, Henri Jeanson or Charles Spaak, despite their claims to poetry, approach the credible through the use of familiar language that often frees the gesture from its illustrative function (consider the purely conventional bustle in the kitchen in *Bizarre, Bizarre* [*Drôle de drame*, Marcel Carné, 1937] or the manual work of Jean Gabin, more evident in the dialogue than in the images in *Daybreak* [*Le Jour se lève*, Marcel Carné, 1939])¹. An heir to Renoir, Jacques Becker was also open to the behaviourism of 'American-style' acting; from his first films, in the 1940s, he



Osessione, Visconti, 1943

accorded the gestures of the credible a new importance: for example, Raymond Rouleau holding a pin cushion in *Paris Frills* (*Falbalas*, 1945), or, later, Serge Reggiani using a plane (*Casque d'or*, 1951), finally culminating in the almost Bressonian austerity of *The Hole* (*Le Trou*, 1959). This credibility borders on meticulousness in the numerous depictions of the man at work present in the films of Claude Sautet, Becker's true successor (Daniel Auteuil's work as a luthier in *A Heart in Winter* [*Un cœur en hiver*, 1992]). The realm of the character prepares the arrival of the realm of the performer and, in this specific case, minimises the realm of the creator.

Neorealism also played a decisive role. This was not so much the case in the gestures of non-professional actors, often chosen precisely for the credibility of their appearance; the fishermen (*La terra trema*, Luchino Visconti, 1948), Lamberto Maggiorani (*Bicycle Thieves* [*Ladri di biciclette*, Vittorio De Sica, 1948]) and Maria Pia Casilio in her activities as a domestic servant (*Umberto D.*, De Sica, 1950): grinding the coffee, stretching out her foot to close a wardrobe without getting up, aiming the water from the tap at the wall to drown a line of ants and then lifting it to her mouth to drink. In the case of professional actors, whose performance was more codified than it is now, the appearance of gestures like these is even more striking: Clara Calamai at the stoves in *Obsession* (*Ossessione*, Visconti, 1943), or Massimo Girotti sticking two fingers into the frying pan to take hold of a piece of meat, in the same film.

The appearance of such gestures is associated with a marked change in narrative style that characterises the post-war period: either the narration is stripped of anecdotal deviations to adopt a linearity deemed more realistic (the 'neorealisms': in Italy, but also in the UK, in Japan, and even in the United States), or it is filled out to bring it closer to the richness of the novelesque (Welles, Visconti, Max Ophüls). Certain more distant film traditions, like the Japanese, did not wait so long to bring the register of the credible into the foreground: in the films of Ozu, Mizoguchi or Naruse, for reasons no doubt rooted in their culture and philosophy, the gestures of the credible (activities associated with tea, rice, dressing and make-up) serve as a screen to cover the expression of emotions deemed too indecent. Conversely, other film traditions like the Indian, often omit it

even today: this is not the case of Satyajit Ray, of course, who on the whole is more 'Western', but it can be said of Mehboob Khan or Guru Dutt, the great novelesque filmmakers, in whose work the credible is naturally dissolved in the ornamental. Even in a social film like *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957), working on the land serves more to "compose" an allegorical tableau than to put together a documentary record.

The frenzied conciseness that dominated the first half of the classical era of American cinema (1930-1945), along with the emphasis placed on the star, accorded vital importance to the almost direct recourse to the realm of the performer, at the expense of gestures of the credible.² The slowing down of the pace, associated with the emergence of a new generation of actors more concerned with gestural variation, would make this change essential. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946) is symptomatic of this evolution: not only is the film itself twice as long (three hours) as the traditional fiction films of the 1930s, but the emphasis on daily life is essential to its dramatic structure. The character of the soldier who has had both hands amputated at the forearm (Harold Russell, an actor, former combatant, and genuine amputee) takes on meaning only in the difficulty he faces in carrying out certain everyday actions, culminating in that magnificent moment at bedtime when his father helps him remove his prosthetic limbs and puts him to bed. As a complement to a subtle system of mise-en-scène based on perspective, the gestures of the credible can thus be brought into the foreground, as if to dramatise, by antiphrasis or understatement, the gestures of the theatrical, which are relegated to the background: as in the famous scene in which the image is dominated by Fredric March, Harold Russell and Hoagy Carmichael playing piano and singing, while in a phone booth in the background, we can discern, by his gestures and expression, Dana Andrews breaking up with Teresa Wright.

In each of these cases, the aim is to recreate the mundane, the non-significant, the non-expressive. Whether this recreation is realised through an exhaustive mimicry (Robert De Niro obtaining a taxi licence in preparation for his role in *Taxi Driver* [Martin Scorsese, 1976]), a convincing imitation (Cate Blanchett portraying Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* [Todd Haynes, 2008]), or even a superficial impersonation, it is in

1. A notable exception, also with Gabin: the gestures of the train employee in Jean Renoir's *The Human Beast* (*La Bête humaine*, 1938).

2. For example, James Cagney's famous gesture of squashing half a grapefruit on the cheek of a girlfriend who is irritating him (*Public Enemy*, William A. Wellman, 1931) falls in the category of the theatrical, its originality sidestepping the purely credible use that could have been made of the grapefruit up to the angry outburst.

this stage that the pact is established between the actor and spectator: it is the moment when the latter agrees (or not) to believe that which the actor shows him or her, thereby allowing the actor to lead the spectator into more intimate or openly metaphorical realms. It is not so much a question of forgetting the actor behind the character as accepting the creation of the character while at the same time recognising the actor. Because the spectator's pleasure (we are dealing, after all, with a logic of pleasure, it must be remembered) can never be released from its basic contradiction of wanting both to recognise and to be amazed. This brings us back to the principle of the 'willing suspension of disbelief'.

2. The theatrical and the performer

Suspending the recognition of the actor is more a wish than a reality. To fully satisfy the spectator's pleasure, the actor should always be 'divinable' behind the character. Diderot viewed it in the following terms:

Reflect a little as to what, in the language of the theatre, is *being true*. Is it showing things as they are in nature? Certainly not. Were it so, the true would be the commonplace. What then is truth for stage purposes? It is the conforming of action, diction, face, voice, movement, and gesture, to an ideal type invented by the poet, and frequently enhanced by the player. (DIDEROT, 1883, p. 22)

This is expressed in a more secret realm: the realm of the performer. This realm makes use of a gestural register that does not involve the reconstituted naturalness of the character, but the fusion of codes and conventions with the non-simulated naturalness of the performer, thereby serving to express the character from within: the gestures of the theatrical. The paradox of the process is that the intimate and, in a certain sense, "natural" part of this realm, that which is constituted by the recognisable traits or "mannerisms" of the actor, will not appear continuously, but will break in sporadically through cracks in the credible. These cracks are fissures found not in the reconstituted naturalness, but rather in the concurrence between the naturalness of the character and that of the

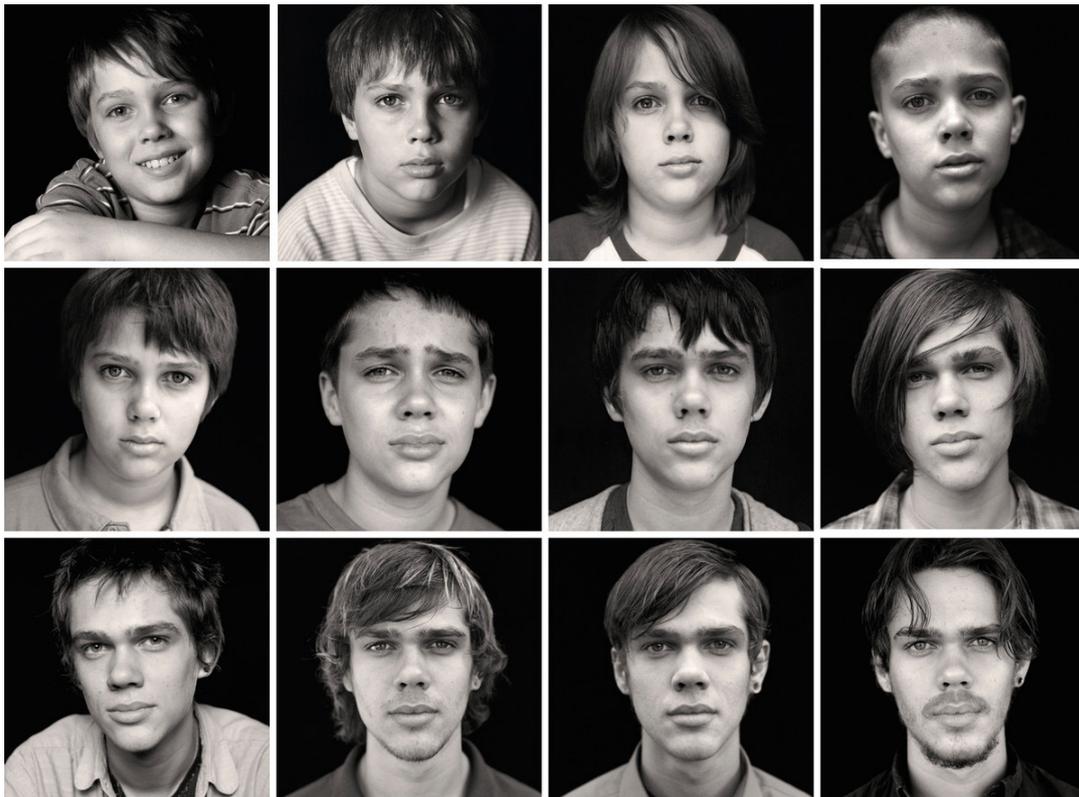
actor. The gestures of the theatrical pre-exist the film: either because the gestures of the famous actor are familiar to us, or because the gestures of the unknown actor are predictable or identifiable and are perceived as "performed" in that they are codified. In such situations, even in spite of ourselves, we find ourselves waiting to see the appearance of a reaction of anger, a threatening look or the hint of a tear. The gestures of the theatrical also include Gabin biting his lip when he is tense (not to mention his famous outbursts of rage), Marlene Dietrich's haughty walk, James Stewart's tremulous voice, Audrey Hepburn's stiffened and slightly diagonal neck (generally accompanied by a frozen expression), the eruption of the 'Pacino blast'³ or Maria Pia Casilio's stifled tear in *Umberto D.* These gestures, whether the idiosyncrasies of a well-known star or a codified episode in an unknown actor (subjectively perceived as such by the spectator), establish the feeling of the performance.

The theatrical has not always been framed in this way in the credible. In the 1920s and 1930s, the gestures of the theatrical predominated (which does not mean that actors' performances in that era were mostly theatrical). The indispensable foundations of credibility were often aimed only at sustaining the power of the image, and later of the sound, perceived, in an era in which they still amazed the spectator, as irrefutable guarantors of realism. The actor could thus reduce the credible to a minimal expression and move on at once to the register of the theatrical. It is difficult to isolate instances of famous silent film actors in their credible register, and so what remains in our memories is the theatrical (or the ornamental), synthesised in the eccentric quality of a Greta Garbo or the physical elegance of a Chaplin, a Keaton or a Douglas Fairbanks. However, *Mannequin* (Frank Borzage, 1937), even though it was directed by a filmmaker who always remained faithful to the principles of silent film, reveals how, with sound, a new demand for credibility emerged. Specifically, the moment when Joan Crawford, a movie star par excellence, drains the potatoes, begins peeling them and, exasperated by the men of the house, tips them all onto a plate suggesting that they should peel them themselves, a predictable reaction of impatience accompanied by a gesture that we naturally associate with her.

3. This refers to scenes of attacks of rage by Pacino, in which his voice is significantly amplified and his sweeping gestures underscore the vocal effect.



Boyhood, Richard Linklater, 2014



Boyhood, Richard Linklater, 2014

If the identification of an actor with a film character occurs harmoniously, the gestures of the theatrical lend even greater authenticity than a gesture of the credible, doing so from within. When James Stewart bites his fist, whether in a Frank Capra comedy, an Alfred Hitchcock suspense film or one of Anthony Mann's westerns, the truth of the emotion strikes the spectator with full force, while making it impossible to distinguish between that which belongs to the actor and that which belongs to the character. Cinema, insofar as it captures the work of the actor, allows us to measure the recurrence of gestures and attitudes characteristic of the performer and their coincidence with the character portrayed. This personal background can sometimes be surprising, when it does not conform to convention. A counter-example of this can be found in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954): in the scene in the car, at the critical point in the confrontation, Rod Steiger points a gun at Marlon Brando, his younger brother. It would be expected that the latter would react with fear or at least with tension, followed by a violent gesture aimed to wrestle the gun from his brother; however, Brando responds with gentleness, taking the barrel of the pistol with a graceful sadness. There is no fear, no threat, no violence, but only despondence in the face of a gesture that he appears to judge more childish than dangerous. Despite this surprise effect and this break with the expressive codes, we have not left the realm of the character and the gestures of the theatrical.

Recent cinema has offered us a particularly fascinating experiment. *Boyhood* (Richard Linklater, 2014) was made in fragments over the course of 12 years, with the aim of fully capturing the physical evolution of the actors/characters over the course of time, including both professionals (Patricia Arquette, Ethan Hawke) and amateurs (Ellar Coltrane, or the filmmaker's daughter Lorelei Linklater). These physical changes become the dramatic matter of a film which, furthermore, adopts a narrative development that could be quite mundane (moving house, weddings, divorces, studying, cooking, family life). It is in the case of the young Ellar Coltrane that the spectacle is especially remarkable: the absence of any actor's premeditation in the eight-year-old boy is progressively replaced with the consciousness of the performer. For example, the child's involuntary furrowing of the brow turns, as the film progresses, into a performative procedure that belongs to the realm of the theatrical.

3. The ornamental and the *persona*

Once the emotion in its immediate nature has been expressed, the opera singer modulates it, stretches it out, embellishes it with vocal arabesques, as if to extract its full substance. An analogous search for the 'beautiful' through the gesture and the posture is mentioned more than once in the writings of Stanislavski, and of Vsevolod Meyerhold, who himself '... until around 1919, advocated slow and measured gestures, almost like "freeze frames", evoking a stain-glassed window or a fresco' (BANNOUR, 1996).⁴ Just like musical theatre, cinema contains moments like this, veritable acting arias resulting from the synergy between two creators: the filmmaker and the actor. In *The Godfather Part III* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1990), crying over his daughter's corpse, Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) expresses his pain in close-up. The actor displays the emotion on his face, where we see a mouth open and at the same time distorted by the pain and intensity of the cry it emits. The beauty of the actor's work could be diminished, or even erased, if the *mise-en-scène* did not work to support it, to render it visible and vest it with a density in which, totally or partly, the specificity of cinema resides: obviously, the theatre would be technically incapable of bringing about what the camera does in this moment. The close-up of Al Pacino is soundless. It is slightly slowed down, making it possible to better capture the ornamental dimension of the performance. The hands conceal the face, rise to the eyes and reveal the distorted mouth, which will become the point to which the spectator's gaze is inexorably drawn. This mouth twisted in pain is no longer a fleeting moment, but engraved upon a strip of eternity, like certain faces of Michelangelo or Caravaggio, frozen in their tension. The unrealistic duration of the facial expression then allows the spectator's attention to leave the focal point of the distorted mouth to take in the surrounding view: that is, essentially, the gaze. We then bear witness, in accordance with the tiny alterations in the size of the eyes and the direction of the pupils, to a series of nuances that would otherwise have been lost: shock, disbelief, realisation, pain in the true sense, anger, outrage perhaps, the devastation of the unavoidable blow. In a final expressive arabesque, the sound comes back slowly; the cry, at first unreal, takes its place in the realist apparatus of the story; to allow the breakdown, the face once again finds its usual mobility and speed. We are now in the realm of the creator: Pacino has created something that goes beyond our everyday perception and Coppola has

4. The author continues: 'Enamoured with the Italian painters of the pre-Renaissance, he made his actors adopt poses similar to those of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, or Pontormo.'

created the form that facilitates that expressive perception that is unique to cinema. This form has an ornamental dimension, although if only because it evokes painting and sculpture. But it is also ornamental in the sense that it adds to the real. This characteristic is typical of Pacino who, perhaps unconsciously stumbling upon the technique of the *kabuki* (notably the *mie* pose that freezes emotion forcefully in order to make it visible), revels in a performance that is naturally convulsive and filled with spectacular interruptions, powerfully evoking pictorial and sculptural attitudes of the Italian Renaissance: arms drawn apart from the body, executing twirls and arabesques, imploring facial expressions directed upwards, lifeless bodies. In this specific case, the creation of the actor takes on a fully monumental dimension thanks to the director's intervention; if it had not been so, we would probably have remained in the realm of the character and the gestures of the theatrical.

This same observation is made by Nicole Brenez, in different terms and on a matter not at all monumental, in her landmark essay on *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959):

The work of *Shadows* is decidedly non-naturalistic: the first time that Ben crosses the main road is presented in staccato and in a discretely stroboscopic manner; Hugh's sprints to the station track the hops in his run, in an effort to capture the pulse, the beat, in the ordinary movement of transforming the most mundane gesture into a visual event. With this rhythmic examination as a background, the gesture becomes an affective hypothesis, facilitating often unexpected and subtle innovations. Greeting and at the same time attacking the pigeons (Marlon Brando in *On The Waterfront* was content just to stroke them); embracing around a gloomy metal pipe (an invention that recalls the way that James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* could metamorphose the simple action of lying on a couch into a metaphysical childbirth), transforming anything, a sign, a boundary, something on the threshold of existence into an existential moment. (BRENEZ, 1995)

The absence of naturalism brings together the spontaneity apparently preserved by Cassavetes in *Shadows* and the operatic breadth consciously pursued by Coppola in *The Godfather Part III*. The realm of the creator is the virtual space where 'the most mundane gesture' is transformed into a 'visual event', whether because the actor takes the initiative through the gestures of the ornamental or because the *mise-en-scène* transmutes the

gestures of the credible recreated by the actor into gestures of the ornamental. This transmutation is particularly palpable in the films of Cassavetes, but it is suggested by a vision that is not merely admiring of but veritably fascinated with the performance the actor gives when the camera is rolling.

It is rare for the ornamental realm of an actor to take over an entire film. It is more common for it to appear sporadically, in a pact between actor and director. A well-known moment in *Sunset Blvd.* (Billy Wilder, 1950) can illustrate this point. At the end of her violent diatribe on contemporary cinema, Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), who was seated until then, rises to her feet swiftly, turns around and, slowing down her movements, pauses in a profile shot; her raised and tensed hand then abandons the realm of the character to acquire a metonymic meaning, becoming a symbol of a time when the film actor's performance disdained the credible to privilege the theatrical and the ornamental. The *mise-en-scène*, essentially through the hyperbolic music and the light,⁵ will dramatise this embellishment that originates with the actor. Wilder openly acknowledged Gloria Swanson's role as a creator in this scene, as well as the scene of the final descent down the stairway, another emblematically "ornamental" moment.

The gestures of the ornamental, while they may have a value in terms of posture (*Sunset Blvd.*) or of modulation (*The Godfather Part III*), may not always break away completely from the gestures of the credible: Becker blends or superimposes the different registers, but never isolates them. Michael Chekhov, a rebellious spirit, at once a respecter and a dissenter of the teachings of Stanislavski from which he benefited, who had an important career as an actor and teacher in the United States and who dedicated his final years to film, believed that:

The actor cannot deny form, as in any case he must always manage the form of his own body. [...] To produce a strong and harmonious impression, our feelings and our voluntary impulses must be formulated on the stage at the same time as the moving, changing forms of our body. (CHEKHOV, 1995)

A way of not dissociating the ornamental from the theatrical and the credible.

Although the concept of film analysis itself has appeared only occasionally in this paper, the practice thereof has been

5. Black background, and a beam of blinding light from the movie projector. Norma's face is located in this stream of light, creating a spectacular backlit effect that transfers the spectator's imagination

to the lighting conventions of silent films and that underscores (and complements) the tensing of the hand, raised dramatically to the height of the face.

fundamental to support the proposition contained in these pages. It is thus understood that film analysis is indeed an essential tool, even the privileged tool, for actor studies. It not only makes possible the exploration of the actor's behaviour on the screen, but also operates as a safeguard which, in the absence of a guarantee of absolute objectivity, at least prevents the kind of interpretative excesses that the unstable terrain of acting performance can engender. An interpretative element is not only inevitable but desirable; however, it should be compared regularly against what can be observed in the image. If the desire to understand how an actor performs on the screen comes from a fascination at once accepted and experienced by the spectator, that fascination needs to be suspended temporarily through the practice of film analysis. And even if, once this comparison with the image is completed, the fascination resumes, it will have been enriched through its subjection to the test of observation of the mechanisms. The examination of an admired scene

reveals its almost musical modulation and eliminates the suspicions of those who shun film analysis out of fear that it may destroy the illusion. Examining the development of a scene, its cadence, its real architecture, is not like disassembling a mechanism to see how it works; rather, it would be almost like confirming one's own inability to repeat the miracle, once the disassembly is complete. The element of randomness is not reduced to nothing, but remains more rock-solid than ever. By approaching the mystery, we delay its solution even longer.



The Godfather, Francis Ford Coppola, 1972

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Types of stardom during the Franco regime: some dominant formulas

Vicente J. Benet

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a methodology for studying the phenomenon of film stardom during Francoism from a historical perspective. Starting with the idea that the Spanish phenomenon, in spite of the context of dictatorship, cannot be understood outside of transnational tendencies in the configuration of the industry, we offer three fundamental models. The first can be defined as the hybridization of cinema with other forms of popular entertainment, particularly those from song and variety shows, in the consolidation of sound film. The iconography developed by these figures combines features from different forms of entertainment, and it would continue during the dictatorship in the *españolada* genre or in films starring singers. The second is a consolidated industrial model, the company Cifesa being the crucial representative here, where stars were the fundamental mainstay of company policy. In this way, stars become an object of experimentation in various narrative genres and also in iconographic terms, in order to constantly renew and innovate their image in the eyes of the public. The third model refers to figures with a powerful, unmalleable iconographic appearance that would characterize film productions just after the fall of the big studios in the 1950s. The cohesive strength this brings to the project requires the maximum expression of its iconic value and its eroticism. To illustrate each of these models, we offer three case studies which examine in greater detail the careers of Imperio Argentina, Amparo Rivelles and Sara Montiel, each being the highest representative of one of the proposed models.

KEYWORDS

Film stars, Spanish cinema during the Francoism, Imperio Argentina, Amparo Rivelles, Sara Montiel.

Some brief methodological issues

Any study of the characteristics of stardom during Francoism must start by examining the ways in which the industry, the film style and the reception given to movies all form part of this historical context. However, in cinema, national contexts are always affected by transnational trends and by the influence of the most powerful cinema industries, mainly Hollywood. In addition, the public's relationship with the stars is more complex than the relationship created by specific social, economic or political issues. Stars penetrate the social fabric, the mentalities and the everyday lives of people to transcend both the films in which they appear and the specific social contexts. In fact, as studies on film reception have revealed for decades, they take on a deeper dimension. They define such things as types of sociability and relationships between subjects, models of understanding reality and patterns of behaviour in life. Thus, they grow in the indeterminate space of cultural memory, which expands the limits of cinema as a social, aesthetic or economic phenomenon (KUHN, 2002: 5).

When one considers, for example, the success of *Locura de amor* (Juan de Orduña, 1948), the most widely-seen Spanish film of the 1940s, it is clear that an explanation based on the public's apparent communion with the ideological values reflected in the film would be clearly insufficient. Thousands of people did not fill the largest cinemas in Spain's cities for weeks simply to receive Franco's historical indoctrination. Nor did an instant star, Aurora Bautista, emerge from it in order to awaken the values of the totalitarian state through her physical body and her character. There are elements that seem more plausible to help us find the reasons that drove the public *en masse* to go out and see this film. Very briefly, as far as cinematic style is concerned, the film skillfully combined various classic genre formulas (melodrama, prestige film, historical drama, swashbuckling movies, etc.) to pique the interest of a heterogeneous audience. It also had an unusual production packaging for the Spanish cinema of those years. But in addition to all this, the film offered a kind of story that aroused the interest of female audiences more than any other. Subjugated by the oppressive daily lives that they endured during the dictatorship, women saw in these strong protagonists who became agents of history (LABANYI, 2002) a compensatory sublimation in cinemas of the scarce social projection of their lives. Aurora Bautista's body, her performing technique and her gestures all managed to channel these tensions consistently. In this way, we can understand, in part, the success of this cycle of films in which Francoist stardom was crystallized in a particularly effective

way. The great star of the decade, Amparo Rivelles, would end up playing a varied range of characters in line with *Locura de amor*, such as *La duquesa de Benamejí* (Luis Lucia, 1949), *La leona de Castilla* (Juan de Orduña, 1951) and *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951). Needless to say, Aurora Bautista also continued with the career that launched her to fame with two other great Cifesa productions: *Pequeñeces* (Juan de Orduña, 1950) and *Agustina de Aragón* (Juan de Orduña, 1950). As we can see, the bolstering of the initial phase of the Franco regime by two of the most important movie stars was consolidated by means of a formula that became effectively exhausted in just three years, but which left an unforgettable impact on the cultural memory of Spanish cinema.

Another aspect worth bearing in mind: the totalitarian regime coincided in time with the zenith of classical cinema. During this period, and with the studio system in Hollywood as its greatest exponent, the production of stars was planned according to a compartmentalized, specialized production model. Usually, both its imaginary construction and its adaptation to the various types of characters were rehearsed by following different generic formulas that were adapted to a model that had proven to be effective for audiences. Stars of classical cinema were therefore defined by their malleability, searching for a constant renovation of their image. The experimentation I am talking about involved altering their photogenic characteristics, switching between genres, and different ways of understanding their presence on screen in terms of make-up, costumes, hairstyle, etc. It meant enriching and constantly renewing their image, even though their work in narrative formulas that had proved effective among audiences was also exploited to the full. Differences aside, Cifesa carried out this policy of managing its stars in a constant balance between archetype and renovation (FANÉS, 1989: 193).

Aside from that specific moment of overlapping between a stylistic model and a type of organization of the industry that is characteristic of classical cinema, we must examine the temporal thresholds that frame the classical period, since they help us to understand other stardom construction formulas, at the same time as they coexist with the classical one. Focusing on Spain, the process prior to this industrial configuration during the 1930s and the period after Cifesa's decline as a major producer in the 1950s enable us to understand the emergence of complementary models.

A proposal of periodization and three stardom construction formulas

Francoism possessed a unique feature. It survived the collapse of fascism after the Second World War, and it also survived the end of the classical model and the monopoly of the great Hollywood studios that took place in the late 1940s. It was able to adapt to the new political situation of the Cold War, breaking its isolation and gradually incorporating the country into the international scene in the 1950s. This led to co-productions, foreign stars for whom Spain was a party, prizes at international festivals and even the export of a few Spanish stars to Latin America, especially at the peak of Suevia Films and the expansive policies of Cesáreo González. Due to the survival of the Franco regime, therefore, talking about the stars during the Franco dictatorship forces us to reflect on the profound transformations that took place in the industry and cinematic style for four decades.

Given the complexity of this process, my proposal is to offer a simplified method that highlights three star construction formulas in the cinema of Francoism that should not be conceived as stagnant compartments. Rather, they are alternative models which, as I said earlier, can coexist and respond to the transnational trends of the cinematographic industry and style. However, the prevalence of each of these models can be linked with different moments in the development of film production. In addition, the approach of these formulas gives us the opportunity to reflect on the way in which the film industry, in turn, fits into the general historical context.

The first model for the configuration of stars arises from what we might call *hybridization formulas*. In our country, this is identified primarily with the earliest industrial cinema that appeared after the incorporation of sound. It corresponds in its origin with the stars that emerged during the Republican age, and around the first production companies to be conceived as studios, that is to say, with a modern, industrial vision: Cifesa and Filmófono. The stars that correspond to these hybridization formulas are derived mainly from forms of popular entertainment, and especially from song. They link their on-screen image to their success on the stage, though the characters they play are often distanced from the folk or *copla* stereotype. The emblematic star of this formula is Imperio Argentina. She was the most important figure of the 1930s, especially after the success of *Nobleza baturra* (Florián Rey, 1935) and *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey 1936). Without a doubt, her attributes as a star possess concomitances during Francoism with other

figures like Concha Piquer, Estrellita Castro and, later on, Lola Flores, Carmen Sevilla, Juanita Reina and child stars such as Joselito or Marisol. The idea of hybridization is marked by the dual artistic projection of stardom in the cinema and on stage. Conditioned by this duality, the construction of this type of stars is associated within cinema to a more restricted generic and iconographic repertoire: musical comedy, melodrama or *españolada*.

The second model is based on *mutation and experimentation formulas*. It corresponds to the mature phase of classical Spanish cinema, and mainly to Cifesa productions during the 1940s. The star policy was fundamental to the way the Valencian company conceived this business. By attempting to mirror the American production model, Cifesa offered a compartmentalized conception of genres (in which comedy in all its different variants was predominant) as a place for trying out and establishing its star projects. This model involved (as it did in Hollywood) not only promotional work that sought to expand the prominence and influence of the stars beyond the screen (and especially in illustrated magazines and social events), it also implied a constant negotiation of its image with the audience, by adapting it to different formats and establishing patterns of transformation to expand the register of expectations. In short, it was a question of creating consistent but also malleable figures, which were open to constant renewal. The paradigmatic case for this formula is Amparo Rivelles. Her career represents, as we shall see, an emblematic example of the way in which Cifesa functioned as a studio. In any event, this type of treatment can be extended to other important figures of the period, including Conchita Montenegro, Luchy Soto, Ana Mariscal, Maruchi Fresno and Alfredo Mayo.

The third case is that of *stable iconic formulas*. In this example, the star's iconic features take precedence over the variety of roles or generic models to which the actor can adapt, and rely fundamentally on the consistency of the body and its photogenic qualities. A typical model following the decline of the studio system, it can be noted in productions conceived as specific projects in which the figure of the star represents the cohesive agent of the production. The success or failure of each cinematographic project hinges on the magnetism of the star and the way he or she operates. The central importance of the physical body in this model brings to mind a typology of stars that flourished during the 1950s (for example, Ava Gardner, Sophia Loren and Marilyn Monroe), who were characterized by their photogenic power, their exuberant appearance and a more explicit eroticism, as Edgar Morin notes (2015: 30). In

this respect, the emblematic example in the Spanish cinema under the Franco regime was the emergence of Sara Montiel, who went from being a malleable figure under Cifesa during the 1940s to the undisputed iconic star of the 1950s after *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957). A panoply of Latin American actresses such as María Félix, Silvia Pinal and Analía Gadé also formed part of this trend in their adaptation to Spanish cinema.

Hybridization formulas

By the mid-1930s, sound cinema had become consolidated on an international scale, along with the exponential growth of the record industry and radio from the 1920s onwards. Together with this, in the 1910s, variety shows and musicals in theaters began to experience an unprecedented growth. Popular music expanded from singing cafes, dance and variety halls to the big theaters. The power of this new aural landscape and of a solid entertainment industry explains to some extent why sound cinema became so rapidly established. The big names in the world of song adapted to this new medium, which they found redoubled their impact. In a way, they had already been creating, on stage, certain features that would be essential for the movie star. On the one hand, there was the imaginary dimension, an iconography that was developed through stage presence, costumes and make-up, gestures, kinesics and the interpretive technique that each song required, while on the other there was the narrative dimension that was linked to the organization of the show, the concept that articulated the sequence of songs, the stories told by their lyrics and the actual staging. The different musical styles such as *cuplé*, *copla* and tango became genres in themselves which defined a range of expectations for the public, both in the image of the artist and in the way they were staged. Based on all these conventions, the transformation of the leading figures of song into movie stars was a logical consequence.

The process also involved tensions deriving from the two great forces that define the modern-day cultural industries. On one hand, audiences recognized a linkage between these stars and traditions that they recognized as their own—in other words, national motifs. This aspect served to identify the star with cultural values and autochthonous physical features. This phenomenon had already begun in the period of silent films, when names such as Raquel Meller, Concha Piquer and Imperio Argentina made their entrances into cinema (GARCÍA CARRIÓN, 2016: 123 et seq.). The other aspect, which complements the previous one, is that these autochthonous

features had to appear suitably modernized, comprehensible and shared by a transnational public. Sometimes the hybrid star would even completely renounce national traits, to be inspired by purely filmic points of reference. Concha Piquer's appearance in the first scene of *El negro que tenía el alma blanca* (Benito Perojo, 1927) imitates the construction of a Chaplinesque gamine, far removed from the artist's on-stage persona.

Imperio Argentina, paradigmatically, engages this dual facet. Her success in Spain as a singer of *coplas* and songs from the Argentine and Spanish folk traditions in the 1920s generated coverage of her performances in magazines and promotional brochures in which her national features were under constant discussion. In one of the earliest pamphlets on cinematographic stars of sound cinema in Spain, she is described as follows:

'The bride of Spain, the beautiful girl into which the most outstanding characteristics of the race are condensed, with her huge black, Moorish eyes, her golden skin, small and graceful, vibrant and passionate, was born in Buenos Aires in 1908, to Spanish parents [and] ... was presented to audiences as a Spanish artiste—Spanish, in the end, is her blood and her soul and her feeling' (pamphlet *Las estrellas del cine*, 1930)

However, Imperio Argentina's consolidation as a cinema star had to assimilate a more cosmopolitan iconography, which was mainly achieved through her work in Joinville in the first sound films. This phase led to the emergence of a photographic and promotional repertoire that presented the star stripped of her folk costumes and dressed in the sophisticated wardrobe of a modern, fashionable woman. The roles she played in her Joinville films, including *El amor solfeando* (Armand Guerra and Robert Florey, 1930) and *Su noche de bodas* (Louis Mercanton, 1931) (Photo 1), as well as her films with Carlos Gardel, transported her into an urban, cosmopolitan and transnational imaginary that would enable her to redirect her career a little later, on her return to Spain. Of course, *Morena Clara*, Imperio Argentina's best-known film, begins with an *españolada* and ends by deploying resources that link her with international trends of musical cinema performance (CAMPORESI, 2016: 25). Just think, for example, of the dance scene for the party of *cruces de mayo*, where the *bailaoras* are filmed from a great height, reminiscent of the kaleidoscopic effects of Busby Berkeley (Photo 2). But even the visual evocation of the star is developed along these lines, combining the usual Andalusian dress (Photo 3) with more modern, fashionable clothes (Photo 4).



Photo 1. *Su noche de bodas* (Louis Mercanton, 1931)

Imperio Argentina's screen image was given a fresh adaptation within a folkloric, exotic context in the films made in Nazi Germany by Hispano Film Produktion, such as *Carmen la de Triana* (1938) and *La canción de Aixa* (1939), both directed by Florián Rey. The star's absolute centrality to these films was enhanced by her photogenic presentation, with special emphasis placed on her treatment as a glamour icon. *Carmen la de Triana* represented the adaptation of the folkloric musical to a few evocative, kitsch aesthetic canons that sought to dignify a genre which had originated on the popular music stage. To some extent, this approach was echoed by some of the later Francoist films, such as *La Dolores* (Florián Rey, 1940), starring Concha Piquer. But the attempt to turn the *españolada* genre into some kind of prestige film proved ephemeral. After the end of the war, Imperio Argentina, who was already over 30, played different roles that combined the uncertain form of the prestigious film (as in *Goyescas*, by Benito Perojo, 1942) with that of exoticism (*Bambú*, José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1945), but her cinematographic career had begun to decline. However, her tours as a singer in Latin America continued to bring her success.

Experimentation and mutation formulas

After the war, Cifesa reorganized its structure to mirror the patterns of the American studios: the search for mass production, defining projects around generic formulas (with comedy being dominant) and establishing a star policy, which was duly promoted in illustrated magazines and, of course, through activities such as premieres, releases and social events. The company sought to incorporate the most outstanding actresses into its signature and to establish their careers according to a process of renovation that would offer versions of formulas that had already proven successful.

The most representative example is Amparo Rivelles. The daughter of renowned actors, she made her first film *Mari Juana* (Armando Vidal, 1941) at the age of 16. Almost immediately after that she moved to Cifesa, which took her from the traditional, *costumbrismo* dramas of *Alma de Dios* (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1941) and *Malvaloca* (Luis Marquina, 1942) to the crazy comedy of *Los ladrones somos gente honrada* (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1942). Because of the ductile nature of the actress and her photogenic qualities, Cifesa made her its most important investment in 1942 by offering her an exclusive contract of 10,000 pesetas a week, whether she worked or not, in addition to giving her the power to choose her director and leading man (statement by Rivelles in FANÉS, 1989: 194). These conditions

show a new conception of the movie business in which investment in stars becomes an essential part of the image and development of the company.

Since Cifesa was committed to comedy as the most profitable genre of the postwar period and the closest form to Hollywood benchmarks that audiences preferred, the company decided to experiment with their main star along these lines. In *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* (Rafael Gil, 1943), based on Jardiel Poncela, they created a comedic plot combined with elements of fantasy that seemed particularly suitable for demonstrating the actress' versatility. The photogenic nature of the star served to drive and hold together a plot that was sometimes disconcerting for audiences (Photo 5). That same year she was subjected to another test of the formula when she was cast alongside Alfredo Mayo, with whom she had starred in *Malvaloca* and another melodrama: *Un caballero famoso* (José Buchs, 1943). In this example, the pair (who were also subject to critiques of their alleged romance in the illustrated magazines) were transported into the uncharted territory of the screwball comedy in *Deliciosamente tontos* (Juan de Orduña, 1943). The film presented audiences with cosmopolitan environments, sophisticated characters and a plot that was based on misunderstandings. Most of the film takes place on a transatlantic liner, with its elegant dances, romantic nights and music that evocatively mixed Cuban rhythms with modern jazz forms. It is also interesting to note what this film meant as a process of experimentation with the male star. Alfredo Mayo had only recently come to fame by portraying heroic military characters. Identified as the ultimate example of virility and gallantry, in this film the producer attempted to give him a new register which, incidentally, would not be repeated for a long time. They attempted to present him as a refined and at the same time crazy character that clearly had Cary Grant as its model. The result was not very convincing in Mayo's case, though it was for Amparo Rivelles (Photo 6).

The culmination of Amparo Rivelles' first phase with Cifesa was *El clavo* (Rafael Gil, 1944). In this example, she appeared in a grand costume melodrama combined with a crime plot that was based on a story by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón. She had previously made a costume film with *Un caballero famoso*, but *El clavo* was without any doubt a new process of experimentation and renovation of the image of the star, leading her into a romantic drama that was very different from her previous films. Her character, imbued with duplicity and mystery, was based on a highly sophisticated photogenic treatment by Alfredo Fraile (Photo 7). The film was a great success, and to some to focus on melodramas and costume dramas, and to gradually

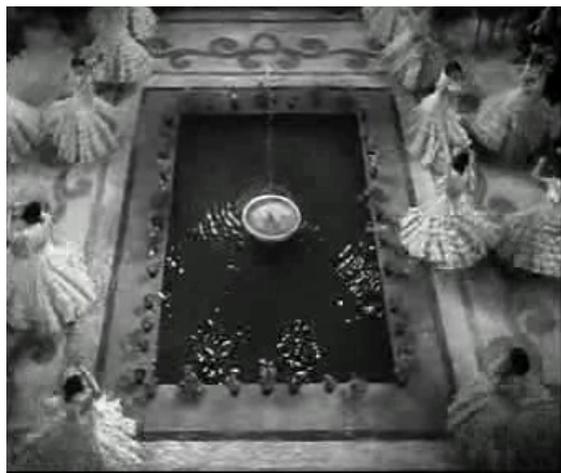


Photo 2. *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey, 1936)



Photo 3. *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey, 1936)



Photo 4. *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey, 1936)



Photo 5. *Eloisa está debajo de un almendro* (Rafael Gil, 1943)



Photo 6. *Deliciosamente tontos* (Juan de Orduña, 1943)



Photo 7. *El clavo* (Rafael Gil, 1944)

extent it determined the future of Amparo Rivelles, who began move away from comedy, which had been fundamental for her initial promotion. There is one more factor: *El clavo* coincided with Cifesa's serious financial crisis which lasted throughout 1945 and 1946, and which caused the Valencian company to radically restructure its production system (FANÉS, 1989: 223 et seq.). Meanwhile, Amparo Rivelles appeared in films by other producers (including the rival company Suevia Films) which exploited her success in romantic costume drama: *Eugenia de Montijo* (José López Rubio, 1944), *Espronceda* (Fernando Alonso Casares, 1945), *La fe* (Rafael Gil, 1947) and *Fuenteovejuna* (Antonio Román, 1947).

Amparo Rivelles' return to Cifesa occurred after the production company had overcome its crisis and in the wake of the success of her historical dramas, as we have seen. But Cifesa was no longer a studio that followed the line that stars had to be subjected to constant tests and renovations. Opting for the safest route, they type-cast Amparo Rivelles in historical dramatic roles until her iconic stagnation, as in her special collaboration in *Alba de América* (Photo 8). A few years after Cifesa's second and definitive crisis in 1952, Amparo Rivelles left Spain to continue her career as an actress—with very different characteristics—in Mexico.

Static iconic formulas

The decline of the studio system in 1948 did not only affect Hollywood. From the early 1950s onwards, the big companies that had been created for the mass production of films adapted to generic models and linked to a production design and a repertoire of stars that configured each company's signature, all began to disappear. This heralded the dawn of the modern mode of production (BORDWELL, STAIGER and THOMPSON, 1985: 330 et seq.), in which work is organized around each specific project. Each film, therefore, had to gather together technical, artistic and production teams all planned *ad hoc*, and thus the star came to play a fundamental role as a cohesive production element and a device for audiences. The rise of the casting agencies in those years and the fact that they became the fundamental element that helps us to understand the development and the iconography of stars is the logical consequence of this process. As a result, the stars maintained a less malleable, more conservative iconographic coherence than the one produced by the studio system. If a formula worked, the possibilities of typecasting increased. We saw earlier that Edgar Morin spoke of stars experiencing a rebirth during these years. In Spain, the most representative figure was undoubtedly Sara

Montiel, following her appearance in *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957).

Sara Montiel had, since the mid-1940s, been a malleable Cifesa starlet who had proven her worth in iconographies and roles of many different characteristics, as we can see from some of the films already mentioned, such as *Bambú*, *Pequeñeces* and *Locura de amor*. Later on she moved to America, where she made some impact in Hollywood as an incipient Hispanic star. At the age of 28, she was persuaded by Juan de Orduña to embark on a project that sought to echo the success of certain successful films set in the Belle Époque, in which music was combined with the splendor of the color techniques that were emerging at that time. The most notable examples were films such as *Lola Montès* (Max Ophüls, 1955), *French Cancan* (Jean Renoir, 1954) and *Moulin Rouge* (John Huston, 1952). The camera operator José F. Aguayo used a bright color range in Eastmancolor to exploit both Sara Montiel's photogenic qualities and the idealized recreation of the era with a particular brilliance.

The central element of the film was the star's body, which ceased to be a mere vehicle for the character to become an iconic vector that drew in the gaze of the audiences, in an iconic condensing that mainly occurred in the musical numbers. In this respect, Sara Montiel's performance in the film established a path which, to some extent, is independent from the story, independent to the extent that, rather than seeking any dependence on the incidents of the character, it is modulated as a path that grows in intensity in the strictly imaginary field. The dresses, the make-up and the complexity of the treatment of the body in the scenic area become more sophisticated, from the Vaudevillesque frames at the beginning (Photo 9) to the theatrical halls and luxurious settings in the central part of the film (Photo 10). This movement, in addition, covers up the erotic and provocative dimension of the singer's body, moving towards an increasingly hypertrophied elaboration of stereotypes that reach their peak in the performance of 'La Madelon' in Paris. The versatility of the *cuplé* leads, in the second part of the film (in which the love story with the bullfighter is developed), to a recovery of the imaginary of the *españolada* and of the songs of a more flamenco tone and, paradoxically, to a certain de-erotization of the star, to turn her into a grieving melodramatic heroine. Perhaps the culmination of this iconicity is the performance of 'El relicario'. In mourning after the death of the bullfighter, adorned with a hair comb and a mantilla, the iconography of the singer María Luján is beginning to turn black, just like the fate that awaits her (Photo 11).



Photo 8. *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951)

Another element that was also crucial to this process has to do with a physical element that has not yet been mentioned: the voice. In her memoirs, Sara Montiel claims that initially she was going to be dubbed for the songs, but the singer chosen to do the dubbing refused to work unless she was paid in advance. And so Juan de Orduña was finally forced to agree to the idea that Sara Montiel would sing the songs herself. The film thus became a resounding success that was not limited to the cinema, it also led to the sale of recordings of her songs (MONTIEL and VÍLLORA, 2000: 243-251). Obviously, the public realized she was not a great, conventional singer, but her warmth, her eroticism and the evocative way she modulated her voice have all proved to be crucial to our understanding of the film's success. These features also help to explain her role as a star in different fields of the entertainment industry that Sara Montiel established from then on. The most-seen Spanish film of the 1950s, *El último cuplé* was a phenomenon that brought about a revival of the musical genre until the early 1960s, and which was reflected in a series of films with clear narrative and iconographic echoes, almost all of which were focused on an idealized, nostalgic vision of the past in which the songs of the *cuplé*, revue shows and the *zarzuela* were central features. Some of the most outstanding of these films are *La violetera* (Luis César Amadori, 1958), again starring Sara Montiel, and *Charleston* (Tulio Demicheli, 1959), featuring the Mexican actress Silvia Pinal.

As we can see, the three theoretical models I have proposed take place in different historical periods, though they sometimes coexist and overlap. In any case, the construction of cinematographic stars during the Franco regime shared the



Photo 9. *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957)



Photo 10. *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957)



Photo 11. *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957)

trends of international cinema, while adapting them to the specific characteristics of Spanish industry and society. Like many other fields of our cinema, it is one that has yet to be explored by future historians.

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Perspectives, models and figures of the study of Italian *divismo*

Marga Carnicé Mur

ABSTRACT

The privileged position that the actor has historically taken in the transmission of popular culture in Italy, a melting point of *commedia dell'arte* and of the scenic methods that flourished in Europe's modern theatre, allows a figurative tradition that is rich in models and deep in culture. Cinema perpetuates this circumstance and owes some of the most essential moments of the history of Italian film to the expressive capacity of the actors and actresses, from the primitive diva cinema of the 1910s to the impact of Italian transnational stars in the 1950s and 1960s.

Because of these essential reasons, Italy is a particularly interesting context for an approach to star studies, as the impact of its stars seems to motivate a debate on the actor before the splendour of American classical cinema fostered the development of a solid methodology. Guided by an interest on certain figurative models, this article attempts to elaborate an essential cartography to Italian star studies, from its origins, its first solid expressions in the 1950s, until today, and considering its essential perspectives, its more frequent models and the discourses that the current perspectives suggest.

KEYWORDS

Star studies, *divismo*, actor, performer, star, stardom, Italian cinema, cultural studies.

Although *star system* was a term coined in Hollywood, film stardom as an artistic and aesthetic phenomenon and attraction show has one of its first historical appearances in Italy. In fact, the Italian industry was one of the first European industries founded around the expansion of the Lumière brothers' cinematograph, which grew during the first years of the 20th century. The so-called "diva cinema," of a powerful cultural importance during the brief period between the invention of cinema and the outbreak of World War I, was a cinema in which different popular leading actresses played dramatic and theatrical figures, typical of the *fin de siècle* aesthetics, which would significantly influence the intercultural archetype of the vamp or *femme fatale*, eventually represented by Theda Bara as one of the first ambassadors of the American star system¹. In her study on the early film divas, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (2008), Angela Dalle Vacche explains how spectators went to the cinema to consume plots about passions and love, but also to enjoy the spectacle experience in itself, which in this case was based on the fascination exerted by the on-screen gestures and physical movement of actresses such as Francesca Bertini, Pina Menichelli or Lyda Borelli. Thanks to the conserved copies of these first films, today we can deduce how these figures managed to exert on celluloid the type of fascination that the last great theatrical divas such as Eleonora Duse or Sarah Bernhardt had in Europe's culture of the end of the century, and even that which led decadent literature authors to write about the mystery that the artificial body of the actresses generated from stage, immersed in the plasticity of their paradox. Dalle Vacche explains to what extent the impact of these presences determined the morphology of newly coined terms for an invention. While in the United States the public called these recent inventions *movies*, because of the constant flickering that the still precarious technology of moving images produced, in Italy the public of these first projections gave them a female name, *le film*, because the films represented women's bodies operated by famous actresses. Thus, the Italian early cinema managed to join two decisive experiences for the later settlement of film in modern culture: the visual pleasure and the miracle of stopping time or making the instant of the body in movement eternal. In other words, it linked filmic technology to the capacity of immortalising the actor's *photogénie* in a permanent and non-ephemeral show, until then limited to the theatre's static full shot and the time of a live show.

The fact that the Italian early film industry is one of the first to be rooted in the actor's gesture has a lot to do with the importance of the performer as a channel for popular culture. In a nation strongly marked by linguistic diversity and territorial segmentation (Italy's political unification is indeed late), everything that happens around the live scene has a great deal of importance until well into the 20th century. Thus, the same culture that generated the seed of modern theatre with the ancient and rich tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* is the one that enters its modernity bringing into the century of cinema the essential value of the actor's mask as mediator between history and culture, screen and society. As accurate carrier of the ways of being and feeling of a society strongly rooted in the ritual and oral transmission of culture and word, the Italian cinema actor will participate in more or less industrial models without losing an essence based on the importance of what is human, in the identitarian supremacy of the gesture and the eloquence of his performance.



Eleonora Duse's scene photography

1. Although in this *femme fatale* tradition we must include relevant figures of European cinema such as Asta Nielsen, the importance of Italian diva cinema as a cultural model doesn't seem to find a match in the period.



Sarah Bernhardt characterized by Pierrot
and photographed by Nadar

Historical perspectives up to the 1950s

Perhaps by this importance of the actor as a medium in the culture previous to cinema, the term that substitutes the English *stardom* in Italy is *divismo*, word that presents the performer as a cultural phenomenon previous to the birth of the star and its modern semiotics. The study of the art of the actor in Italy, which could be traced back to the *canovacci* and the self-direction manuals of the *dell'arte* comedians, persists in the cultural criticism and the encyclopaedic gloss during the 19th and 20th centuries, and knows an important diversification during the international expansion of cinematic culture,

2. An example of this tradition is Silvio D'Amico's famous *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, editorial project published between 1954 and 1965, which covered different fields of the performance in Italy and included notable features of the actors' style and scenic presence in the articles dedicated to them. It should be noted that Silvio D'Amico is a referential figure in the training and study of the actor in Italy. During the 1920s he founded the Regia Scuola di Recitazione Eleonora Duse, to which, in a way, the modernisation of the Italian actor is due. Currently this institution is known as Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica Silvio D'Amico and it continues to be a benchmark in Italy for the many generations of Italian film and theatre actors who have been formed in its midst.

around the 1950s, moment from which we could start talking about *divismo* as a proper field of study³. The foundations for these modern star studies could start at this point, in which the internationalisation of the local product and the diversification of the media and consumer platforms pave the way for the reception and study of the film star not as a local phenomenon but as a cultural sign open to the exchange and permeability of global models. The 50s crossroads is especially rich in different aspects that are worth mentioning. Firstly, at the end of the 1940s Italy standardises the neorealism model, which in its aesthetic essence supposes a gateway to modernity, especially in what refers to the cinema as producer of figures and human models. The culture of the authentic (*vero*) gesture, the non-professional face and the real settings provoke the classic stars to be unusually out of place and to lose their gestures and comfort masks, a loss that will not only influence the models of production and consumption but also those of performance and direction. Regarding the models of production and consumption, there are interesting connections between vernacular figurative models and global archetypes. For example, the influence of the heroic female character, from Anna Magnani's post-war era mother to the *maggiorate* generation, on an archetype such as the unruly woman (REICH, 2004), directly connected to the exchanges that gender roles were going through after World War II (SIEGLOHR, 2000). With regard to the models of performance and direction of actors, and more aesthetically speaking than semiotically, an important figurative reform arises as replica of the free body language of European realisms. The erratic body language, either spontaneous or artificial, of natural although mechanic appearance, will influence modern cinema establishing fruitful and long-standing dialogues in what would be a modern genealogy of performance. And this would not only cross Europe via the cinema of Rossellini, Renoir and all their disciples, but would also reach Hollywood and the American studios' yearning for possessing a model of modernisation of the classical star such as Actors Studio, of declared European roots⁴.

The cultural crossroads of the 1950s in Italy can be synthesised in this organic crossing between the concrete and the global,

3. As we have mentioned, the Italian term *divismo*, that integrates the study of the actor and the star, can be considered as analogous to the English term *star studies*. In this sense, the use of both words in this article will refer to the same field of study, at the same time that it will reference its own cultural frame. In general, *divismo* is to be understood as an Italian phenomenon, while *star studies* refer to the field from its academic and international perspective.

4. As Robert H. Hethmon explains in *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* (1972), along with Stanislavski's theories, the founders considered crucial some European theatre figures (specifically Italian) such as Eleonora Duse.

between a cultural movement profoundly vernacular such as neorealism, freed from the Hollywood canon, and another one with international interest such as modernity, that flourishes in different lines of interest pointed out by Cristina Jandelli in *Breve storia del divismo cinematografico* (2007), an essential book for this field of study. In line with this discourse, Jandelli observes how breaking the barriers of the classic narrative that established neorealism and its expansive wave creates unusable rhizomes, from Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini's cinema, based on the extreme dislocation of the star, to the later interest of the American industry to produce unique scenic bodies, distanced from the classical serial model and able to embody the genuine and the memorable, from James Dean to Montgomery Clift, creating in the spectator's mind a desire of fascination towards the future actor of independent cinema. Thus, there is a harmony between both movements, between the accidental gesture of neorealism and the rebellious gesture of Hollywood's new bodies, which from a stardom point of view seems to trespass the limits of the classical canon and that is consolidated in the actors' bodies, together with the industry's intuitive need for the spectator to keep a specific memory of them.

As a field of study that pays attention to the reception of films, star studies exceptionally understand the dialogue of the spectator with the actor's ability to mediate between screen and society⁵. The 1950s are a decade full of possibilities in this sense. While research on the nature of stardom came mainly from scholars like Edgar Morin (*Les Stars*, 1957) or Alexander Walker (*Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon*, 1970), whose works plant an intuition that would be later expanded by Richard Dyer (the multiple lectures of the stardom as text, as sign, and as symbol), other Italian cultural studies of these years reach out to cinema in order to decipher the social change. In *L'italiana in Italia* (1956), a document of the era on the sexual emancipation of women, cultural journalist Anna Garofalo writes about the decisive role of divas as models of behaviour, anticipating in a way one of the interests of feminist film theory of the 70s and its cohesion with some of the points shared by star studies and gender studies.

From this movement between global and local, and the connection between the actor and society, the dialogue



Totò by Guy Bourdin, 1955

between cinema and cultural analysis in Italy shows, during the first five decades of the 20th century, the emergence of a triple theoretical line which is still nowadays maintained as an authentic legacy destined to confluence in modern star studies: the monographic or historiographical model, either of specific figures or of figurative models, cultural studies, and gender and feminist studies.

Monographic and genealogical model

During the 80s, Guido Aristarco wrote *Il mito dell'attore. Come l'industria della star produce il sex symbol* (1983), an essay that was contemporary to the formation of star studies as a field of study and that concluded some of the tendencies examined in the theoretic historiographical model of Italian *divismo*. By carrying out a comparison between Hollywood's *star system* and a hypothetical Mediterranean *star system*, and the possibly interchangeable features between the figures of both systems, the author ponders on the standardisation process of the actors' singular presence. This is a canonical discourse within the historiography of stardom, focused not only in the industrial processes but also in the spontaneous traits that are enabled by the performer's individual charisma. This dichotomy between the singular and the generic, which clearly exemplifies the

5. Perhaps one of the less appreciated lines by the tradition of European film studies that had prioritised the study of the *mise-en-scène* and the dialogue between filmmakers. As an example, the canon established by the French school in the 50s comes to mind, where the synergy between analysis, criticism, and directing determined the theoretical line of the authors of *Cahiers du cinéma*.



Ingrid Bergman at the *Stromboli* set, 1949

existing tension between the figure and the system, between the genuine singularity of the actor and his or her permeability to the archetype or serialisation of his or her presence, could converge in the French terminology of genealogies (VALMARY *et al.*, 2011). Used by some scholars on French contemporary star studies, genealogies enable us to think of the capacity of certain charismatic, esteemed, and recognisable actors to come together under familiar or semantic groups. Thus, once surpassed the border of their individuality, they are able to converge under a general meaning. In other words, the study of actors through genealogies would allow an appreciation not only of their singularity but also of their connection to a cultural sign or a global meaning, which would ease the comprehension of its permanent importance despite the passing of time or the disappearance of its contemporary spectators, therefore securing the traits that differ a theatre actor from a cinema actor; its timelessness, its persistence or, using a term that is more faithful to its original aura, its eternity.

6. The figure of Volonté was, in the 90s, object of an exemplary monographic study by Fabrizio Deriu: *Gian Maria Volonté. Il lavoro dell'attore* (1997).

7. La *Trümmerfrau*, or rubble woman, is a historical archetype based on the anonymous women who cleared the rubble after the attacks of World War II. It exemplifies the widespread notion, in the Europe of the time, of the active woman in times of war. Her image has impacted popular culture through archival documentation.

8. The prize to best female interpretation was given to all the actresses in *Volver* (2006): Carmen Maura, Chus Lampreave, Penélope Cruz, Blanca Portillo, Lola Dueñas and Yohana Cobo. It is interesting to note how the film echoes in many ways the Italian genealogical tradition that

The monographic study in Italy, which has many uses and which, as we will see, is nowadays the focus of some academic research groups, has deepened into this cohesion between the singular and the universal, or between the ordinary and the extraordinary (DYER, 2001), applying the painless and complementary union offered by the French genealogies. It is this versatility of embodying the singular and the universal what some scholars consider the actual support of an actor's identity, a free and final pathway towards his or her universality or his or her classical condition. In 2014, the Centro Ricerche su Attore e Divismo (CRAD) of the Università di Torino organised an exemplary conference on Marcello Mastroianni. The conference's main papers revolved around the duality of the Italian star: the unrepeatable singularity of his presence and his capacity of embodying the ambiguity of a collective and modern masculinity, divided between the fortress of the seducer's mask and the fragility of the human expression. This quality opens Mastroianni's brand to different semantic connections: the *latin lover* one which goes back to Rodolfo Valentino, or the melancholic seducer one, from Marlon Brando's Tennessee Williams-like males, to other branches of Italy's figurative tradition, such as the coetaneous Gian Maria Volonté⁶ or later figures such as Sergio Castellitto. Another analytical monographic example, although out of the reigns of academia, can be found in the revisions of Anna Magnani that appeared in the multiple publications following the hundredth anniversary of her birth in 2008, from which similar conclusions can be extracted. The interpretation of Magnani's charismatic style, typical of an icon of free manner, would *a priori* make difficult her adhesion to any serial model or tradition. However, there is a complete tradition of Western female figures with whom her model would allow different connections that are analysable from different points of view; from the German *Trümmerfrau*⁷, to the tradition of the *maggiorata* and of the 'unruly women,' to finally authorial figurative tendencies, such as those from Spanish Pedro Almodóvar, whose aesthetic and poetic echoes created years ago at Cannes Film Festival an

has been discussed. The main character Raimunda could be compared to the referent Sophia Loren in Vittorio De Sica's *La Ciociara* (1960), a character initially assigned to Anna Magnani, who also is alluded by Almodóvar at the end of the film in dialogue with Carmen Maura's character, Irene, who is watching a scene from Luchino Visconti's *Bellissima* (1961) on TV. Such a title doesn't seem banal choice since the film led Magnani to her internationalisation and the integration of her style (uncombed hair, black lingerie, and an absence of beautifying make-up) in the icon of female Latin beauty of her time, which would later be imported by fashion brands such as Dolce & Gabbana, which would include contemporary figures such as Monica Bellucci, and which would also be frequently referenced in Pedro Almodóvar's cinema.



Marlon Brando and Marilyn Monroe at the *The Rose Tattoo* film premiere, 1954

out of ordinary prize to a collective interpretation⁸. It is worth mentioning here the transcendence that, in my point of view, the concept of genealogy offers above others such as influence or reminiscence. Although all three refer to the condition of cinema as creator of shared memories, of a collective memory, while the last two refer to the most superficial layer of this phenomenon, to the free circulation of the expression and sensorial memories between filmmakers, the first deepens its roots, settling down not only in the capacity of cinema to create memories, but also of feeding itself from them, establishing itself in the reception process of the filmic text and addressing the spectator, the true transmitter of cinema's memory and the great forgotten figure of traditional film studies. In 1974, Italo Calvino condensed this idea in his text *Autobiografia di uno spettatore*, giving the spectator's memory the importance of a testimony and of documentation of the exchange process

9. It is worth mentioning that, sometimes, these works think of the actor also as a filmmaker. The looseness of the industrial structures and the privileged position of the performer in the popular culture of the early century helped that, in many occasions, figures such as Francesca



Anna Magnani at the *Mamma Roma* costume test, 1962

between reality and fiction, society and screen, of which it has always been both partly the leading character and the reverse-shot of all human expression imprinted on the cinematographic image.

Cultural studies and feminist perspective

This hypothesis, which supports a sociologic reading of the actor within Italian studies, organically takes us to the junction between historiography studies and cultural studies that have tended to analyse the impact of stars and actors by separating them from the works where they performed, either this being the filmic text or the director's filmography. In order to appreciate the autonomy—or even authorship—of the performer as a subject, these studies understand the relation of the actor's work with its period or its cultural context, stripping it from its traditional aura of instrument for the *mise-en-scène* or the director. An example in this line of thought is the research that recovers the works of women pioneers of cinema, by authors already mentioned such as Angela Dalle Vacche, or the publications from the conference “Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano,” hosted by the Università di Bologna in 2007 and coordinated by scholar Monica Dall'Asta. By creating a dialogue between the study of women film pioneers and the cultural context of their period, together with the hierarchical and power structures in which they were located, these authors and researchers follow the theoretical path of critical studies to

Bertini would take over the direction and the management of their own careers, founding a model of production with a short lifespan as it disappeared with the implementation of industrial circuits and the North American star system.

defend the transformative capacity of actresses like Francesca Bertini in the cultural frame of the 1910s, which was decisive in the settlement of the early industries. Thus, the case of Italy offers through these examples an approximation to thinking the star from a theoretical model that privileges the study of the creator within the cultural context, and, as such, it is used more frequently in the study of women filmmakers⁹. In this sense, and in order to specify the theory that we are using, it is necessary to emphasise that the expansion of cultural studies has enriched the visibility of subjects whose information about them has traditionally been distorted due to biographical interpretation or from the manipulation of cross-media narratives. The proliferation of this model, which has primarily occurred in the last decades, has counteracted the fact that, until recently, a big percentage of the writings on stars and their nature came almost exclusively from a hagiography based on memories (rarely produced by the own star), from a biographic narrative or from consumer platforms and advertising industries parallel to the industry of cinema, where the figure's visibility would be limited to the partly manipulated reproduction of his or her more stellar and profitable attributes.

The fracture between a traditional model of analysis mostly adopted by film criticism, and generally altered by understanding the actor as an instrument for the filmmaker or as a part of an industrial chain, and a more analytical model, expanded to the study of the cultural context of production, could find an inflection point in the 70s, where the convergence of critical theory and of the social movements of emancipation gave place to new theories such as feminist film theory. Although the latter was developed in an English-speaking context and doesn't get to Italy immediately, some studies of this time seem to be waiting for feminist film theory to come. By the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, there is an increase in the works that call for a revision of the cultural production related to the involvement of women in cinema (BELLUMORI, 1972; CARRANO, 1977; MANGIACAPRE, 1980), together with an aim to recover some figures with the intention of redefining the continuation of their legacy and the conservation of their political value (PISTAGNESI, 1988; ACHILLI, 1984)¹⁰. These are favourable decades for anything that has to do with the delimitation of the subject in the cultural context, particularly if it has been traditionally understood as a minority within the global hierarchy, which in some way also concerns actors and

stars as pieces of the filmic text that have been underestimated by theoretical and critical canons. These years, in which the great poststructuralist thinkers reform academic models, are the same years in which Serge Daney reclaims the role of the actor with an enlightening and famous quote about the importance of the interpreter for the dialogue between filmmakers¹¹; Richard Dyer publishes *Heavenly Bodies: Stars and Society* (1986/2004), possibly his most essayistic work and also the most aware of demarcating the actor's subjective traits; and Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, and Mary Ann Doane, amongst others, set up the foundations of feminist film theory, which will be decisive for the study of actresses in cinema and would reach Italy thanks to contemporary academic research.

Current situation: models and groups

Universities embrace the modernisation of the historical models examined in this text, through the consolidation of gender studies, cultural studies, and feminist film theory as theories present in Italian postgraduate programs in film studies. An example for this is the diversity of theoretical models and methodologies from which authors, academic figures, and contemporary research groups study the performer in recent projects and publications on this topic. From these, the semiotic model of a work as *Attore/Divo* (2011) stands out, in which Francesco Pitassio deals with the structure of the actor as a cultural sign and symbol or, in other words, as an interpreter and maker of his own stardom. The semiotic model is, perhaps, the one that more profoundly investigates the conflict that commonly appears when analysing an actor: his multiple essence and, thus, the unstable condition of his image. The tension generated by the fact that actor and work are one self, concentric spheres with a validity given by physical appearance, could be the cause to the confusion that comes when trying to understand an actor's work from the coincidences and contradictions between life and work, authorship and mask. Contemporary studies like Pitassio's take a different direction than, for example, the traditional hagiographic model. It is not about controlling the impurities or contradictions between mask and performer but about assuming its cohesion in order to study it. It is, therefore, an epistemological solution to the disturbing paradox of the actor dealt by Denis Diderot in the 18th century, which can create inaccessible confusions by

10. In the international context, it is relevant to highlight *Offscreen: Women and Film in Italy* (1988), edited by Giuliana Bruno and Maria Nadotti.

11. "Actors are essential to the dialogue between filmmakers. The body of the actor traverses cinema to such an extent that it creates its true story. A story that has never been told because it is always intimate, erotic, made out of pity and rivalry, of vampirism and respect. But as cinema ages, it is of that story that films are testimonies" (1983: 201). Quote translated by author.



Sequence of the diva Pina Menichelli in *Tigre Reale*, 1916

thinking of the performer as a monolithic figure, in the same way we have learnt to approach the entity of the author.

Together with the semiotic model, I would highlight Veronica Pravadelli's methodology. Pravadelli is a relevant figure in Italy of the junction between film studies and gender studies, and her research topics could come together in her most recent work *Le donne del cinema: Dive, registe, spettatrici* (2015). Here, Pravadelli surveys the historiographic model of female representation in cinema applying notions from film analysis, feminist film theory, and gender studies, giving a fair importance to the different places occupied by women in the operation of the filmic text. Perhaps, the most interesting point of her proposal is this innovative and transversal perspective that, as her book's title states, embraces the active role of the female subject in the *mise-en-scène* (directors) and in the reception (spectators) but also in the performance (actresses). These positions are efficiently equalled thanks to the validity of a rich theoretical model that is aware of the potentiality of the filmic phenomenon beyond its textual nature and, in consequence, is able to pay attention to the star in an uncommon and very rich way in order to establish its comprehension as a fundamental axis of filmic production and its impact in popular culture.

As far as research groups are concerned, the activity of CRAD (Centro Ricerche su Attore e Divismo) of de Università di Torino stands out. Guided by Giulia Carluccio, the group defines itself as a permanent observatory of social, historical, and industrial aspects of stardom. The main trait of CRAD is the confluence between cultural traditions and new theoretical models that is expressed by their collective activity, mainly based in research projects, seminars, and conferences that

work as a meeting point for researchers of the field. Examples of their activity are the international conference already mentioned in this text "Marcello Mastroianni. Stile italiano, icona internazionale" (2014), and others around icons such as Marilyn Monroe ("Miti d'oggi. L'immagine di Marilyn", 2012) or Rodolfo Valentino ("Rodolfo Valentino. La seduzione del mito", 2009).

Another academic collective that has research topics related to *divismo* is FAScina (Forum Annuale delle Studiose di Cinema e Audiovisivi), linked to the Università di Sassari. Dedicated to the confluence of audiovisual popular culture and gender studies, it is characterised by a plurality of theoretical approaches and for its transversality in the study of feminism in culture. It is currently working on a future edition on the work and the representation of actresses in Italian film¹². In a similar way, CAMPS (Centro Arti Musica e Spettacolo) of Università della Calabria has recently organised the international conference "Pensare l'attore. Tra la scena e lo schermo", dedicated to the convergence of theoretical movements and methodologies that revolve around the study of *divismo* in Italy. The programme brought together many of the figures that are currently researching the field in Italy, either in studies on cinema or theatre, and that are part of research groups or institutions, or work autonomously.

As a way of finishing our journey, and once seen the diverse models—monographic, transversal, or semiotic—and the different perspectives—in relation to a historiographical discourse (either local or global), to cultural studies or gender studies—, I would like to highlight the importance of the current state of the study of Italian *divismo*, which as we have

12. The conference "Vaghe Stelle. Attrici del/nel cinema italiano" will take place in Sassari between the 5th and the 7th of October, 2017.



Marcello Mastroianni at the dressing room

seen perfectly unites a cultural and historical tradition with deep roots with contemporary and current theoretical models in academia, and whose relevance is based, in my opinion, in its diversity and communicability. The fact that these studies converge in teaching, research and international gatherings that add to the publications and social influence, eases a transversal delivery of the model within academia that will undoubtedly benefit the expansion of the field. Furthermore, it will benefit the study of actors and stars, who find in the researcher a mediator between two forces that have traditionally possessed their aura: the film industry and its platforms as a structure of contention of their significance beyond the filmic text and the dialogue between filmmakers; and the spectators' memory, as a keeper of their sense that, from the vague and true fascination of mythification, would perhaps miss the possible discourse that we have here tried to name.

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MARGA CARNICÉ MUR

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d'Or. She did a research stay in the Università degli Studi di Roma Tre (Italy) and has participated in many international conferences with papers related to star studies. Currently, her research combines the impact of the female performer in the aesthetics and politics of audiovisual media and the role of women in popular culture.

White Gypsies: An interview with Eva Woods Peiró

María Adell

ABSTRACT

This interview with Eva Woods Peiró, a scholar specializing in Hispanic Studies, mainly addresses the issues present in her book *White Gypsies: Race and Stardom in Spanish Musicals*. The book studies some of the most important female stars of Spanish 'folkloric' musical cinema from the 1920s to the 1940s, using a transversal perspective that deals with themes of stardom, gender and, above all, race. Woods Peiró analyzes *folklórica* stars like Raquel Meller and Imperio Argentina, white female stars who gained huge popularity performing female Roma characters on screen. Studying these 'white gypsies' allows Woods Peiró to approach issues rarely addressed in the historiography of Spanish cinema: from the filmic representation of race and gender to the idea of stardom as a narrative of social ascent. The author concludes that these figures, while favoring a national discourse of non-problematic racial assimilation, also contained within them a transgressive component by the fact that they portrayed mestizo characters in extremely popular films.

KEYWORDS

Spanish Cinema, actress, star, stardom, *folklórica*, musical film, gender, race, Imperio Argentina, Raquel Meller.

Eva Woods Peiró is an Hispanist from Valencian descent based in New York whose interest in popular Spanish *folklóricas* such as Raquel Meller, Imperio Argentina or Concha Piquer focuses in the way in which these stars channeled the racial identity of the female and male spectators of the Spanish cinema between the decade of the twenties and the fifties.

In her extensive academic production¹, therefore, predominates the study of such popular stars as Juanita Reina, Carmen Sevilla or the aforementioned Imperio Argentina; white female stars who achieved their greatest successes performing ‘Gypsy’ characters in their films or, in Woods Peiró own words, performing ‘in Gypsy face’. The analysis of the influence, the performance and the characters played by these *folklóricas*—these ‘white gypsies’—in their most representative films allows us to approach issues not very usual in the study of Spanish cinema: from the stardom as a narrative of social uplift to the way in which Spanish stars and popular cinema helped to shape a modern national identity and to channel anxieties related to racial conflicts.

The following interview with Eva Woods Peiró revolves, in large part, around the book that condenses most of her articles on these subjects, *White Gypsies: Race and Stardom in Spanish Musicals*, published in 2012 by University of Minnesota Press. We talked with her about *folklóricas*, stardom, race and also about the use of extrafilmic material, especially film magazines, to know in depth the film culture of any period.

The first thing that is surprising about your book, *White Gypsies: Race and Stardom in Spanish Musicals*, is the focus on race, something unusual in the academic production about Spanish film history (at least in Spain). Your vision of race and the racialized subject comprises not only ‘Gypsy’ characters but also characters from African-Caribbean ancestors, as is the case of Peter Wald in *El negro que tenía el alma blanca* (Benito Perojo, 1927). When and how did you become interested in the race approach to Spanish film history?

That is the thematic anchor for the book and essentially its reason for being. When I first started this project, in the mid-to late 90s, with the exception of some references in Román Gubern and Agustín Sánchez Vidal work, there were only short plot descriptions of Andalusian *folklórica* films. And certainly nothing existed that explained the phenomenon or the popularity of white Spanish women like Imperio Argentina or Juanita Reina who acted in ‘Gypsy face’ in films as successful as *Morena clara* (Florián Rey, 1936) or *Canelita*

en rama (Eduardo García Maroto, 1943).

Some years ago, along with another colleagues I started a project of Oral History of the Spanish Cinema² of the 40s and 50s. When, during the interviews, I asked participants—male and female cinema spectators of that age—about this particular issue, they also couldn’t explain it, and it’s possible they didn’t understand why the question was important. It was a contradiction for sure, but one which neither spectators nor historians seemed to think needed resolution. From my point of view, it was a contradiction that Spanish white actresses became stars by interpreting, precisely, members of an ethnicity as unjustly scorned as the Roma; but also that in these films the miscegenation was approached as a non-conflicting issue, because many of them finished with the marriage between the ‘Gypsy’ woman and a white man, usually from an upper class.

A friend and fellow postgraduate student, however, encouraged me to get to the bottom of this dilemma, and I owe her a debt of gratitude, for this project has formed the basis of my academic career. Personally speaking, my intellectual training and my personal and professional circumstances, meant that scoping Spanish culture through the lens of racial politics was unavoidable, and even also urgent. In addition to critical race theory, as graduate students we soaked up the writings of Hall, Gilroy, Bhabha, Spivak, Davis, West, Fanon and the subsequent elaborations of the cultural and postcolonial studies ‘turn’ which questioned the narrative of modernity from a white, Anglo-European perspective. It was only logical that we wanted our scholarship to matter, to be politically relevant, and to transform ourselves and our students, if possible. Where I teach (Vassar College, NY), we have prioritized ethnic-racial diversity—I am surrounded by colleagues and friends who are people of color—and my son is bi-racial. A neutral position on the issue of race was an impossibility. Nor would I want it otherwise.

On two different occasions during which I presented this book, an individual of Roma descent was among those in the audience. In both instances the individual was deeply offended by the use of the word ‘Gypsy’ even though my talk and slide presentation specifically noted the term in quotations. As scholars we need to be cognizant that when we look at racialized representations we are doing sensitive work, work that has historically had real effects on real people. These films, for example, revolved directly or indirectly around the figure of the imaginary ‘Gypsy’ or ‘gitano.’ This word must necessarily be in quotes as it denotes the representation of people of Roma descent, and not in any way their actual, real, lived condition.

Finally, we have seen an important shift take place in the analysis and theorization of race and racialization in several important texts on cinema and culture (Susan Martín Márquez, Jo Labanyi, Lou Charnon Deutsch, Isabel Santaolalla, Daniela Flesler, Isolina Ballesteros, Rosi Song, Yeon-Soo Kim, Núria Triana Toribio, Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego, Marina López Díaz, Mar Binimelis, to name a mere few). I think that what hails us now is the turn to texts that have been produced by ‘Others,’ that is, those films produced by people of Roma descent, produced by migrants themselves, displaced or incarcerated individuals.

Each chapter of the book is dedicated to the exhaustive analysis of a particular film as well as the *folklórica* who stars in it: from Raquel Meller in *La gitana blanca* (Ricardo de Baños, 1923) to Imperio Argentina in *Carmen, la de Triana* (Florián Rey, 1938). The chapter which talks about *El negro que tenía el alma blanca* works as an excellent transition between the silent and the sound film periods and is also the only one in which the female star (Concha Piquer) is evidently white while the male character (Peter Wald) is the racialized subject. Could you talk about the selection of films and the decision to include the film of Perojo as a transitional work?

El negro que tenía el alma blanca is in many ways transitional. It seems to be the Spanish answer to the *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), hailed as a foundational sound and race film. But also, quite simply, it was a star vehicle for Concha Piquer, a quintessential ‘Spanish’ star whom many never knew had been involved in such a cosmopolitan, ‘racy’ film. It was produced amidst the twenties craze for African American and Afro-Caribbean sounds and performances. And it comes on the heels of the Spanish conflict in North Africa. But it also marks the beginning of the ascent of the female singing/performing star as the most central component of the Spanish star system. Of course we would have male stars—Antonio Moreno, Angelillo...—but female stars would predominate. I have always regretted the incomplete nature of this book, but I hope other scholars will take up the issue of the heteronormative bias implicit in the development of the star system as not just an issue of placing the symbolic burden upon female stars and by extension, Women, but the disciplinary nature of the star system, and the far-reaching mechanisms by which it oriented understandings of gender and race away from intersectionality. And, concurrently, how intersectional performances nevertheless survived and became archived, and whether these latter either played into normative, nationalist discourses and will to power or whether they subverted them (along the lines of Hiram Pérez in *A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire* (2015).

In terms of selection of texts, one of the main issues is the amount of available films. As for films of the twenties, the extant archive is in crisis and deteriorating nowadays. I watched everything I could get my hands on and scoured it for racial or racialized content. Despite the few available films, the ones I saw were so significant to understanding how folkloric films developed that I couldn’t avoid them. In the end, the whole first half of the book is about this silent period.

Another issue that convinced me to expand analysis on the twenties was that so much attention has been paid to vanguard films and art of the twenties—who hasn’t heard of Buñuel?—but until recently, few scholars were looking at popular films that nevertheless incorporated vanguard, experimental, or quite simply sophisticated and magisterial cinematography or riveting thematic content. Across the board, in the twenties they were pushing the envelope—*El negro que tenía el alma blanca*, *La condesa María* (Benito Perojo, 1928), *Malvaloca* (Benito Perojo, 1926), *La Venenosa* (Roger Lion, 1928), *La gitana blanca* or *La aldea maldita* (Florián Rey, 1930), which I don’t analyze but highly recommend. Of course, troubling racialized representations or premises there were. And we have to understand that alongside their value; just as we have to probe deeper into the deplorably sexist and racist material of some of the more well-known vanguard filmmakers, and not excuse it as a product of the era, but confront them to better understand the continuities between thinking and representing the world then versus now.

The number of films rises in the 30s, and in the 40s and 50s, the amount of folkloric films were simply overwhelming. So at the risk of disappointing many who rightly wanted more analysis of Lola Flores, Carmen Amaya or others, again, I chose specific texts that allowed me to pursue topics such as the question of discipline or nostalgia. Fortunately other scholars, such as Marina Díaz López, have since produced excellent readings that compare and contrast *folklóricas* such as Lola Flores and Carmen Amaya.

Finally, in terms of selection, I had considered the possibility of organizing the book according to the ‘Carmen’ angle. But that didn’t explain the way in which the folkloric musical comedy film was a hybrid product that merged the Carmen narrative with the other musical performance and theatrical traditions such as the *cuplé* and its trajectory, or the cosmopolitan aspirations of Spanish filmmakers and audiences (nurtured by the booming cinema/fan magazine industry). Moreover, framing the book around the Carmen narrative simply replicated the problem of representation. I wanted to show how even issues that seemed remote from *folklórica* films—African-

Caribbean performance or the Spanish colonial wars in North Africa—were haunting these films and the conditions in which spectators consumed them.

One of the main thesis of the book is how Spanish folkloric musical helped to build a modern national identity apparently free of racial problems through their female stars: these ‘Gypsy-faced’ but White-skinned *folklóricas*. Or, in other words, White female stars performing ‘Gypsy’ characters happily assimilated by hegemonic culture. But, at the same time, these films, using your own words, ‘map the national community along racial criteria.’ Does this mean that, on one hand, they seem to reinforce the idea of a modern, capitalist and unproblematic and non-racialized nation but, on the other hand, this modern idea of nation is profoundly based on racial segregation and in the superiority of white race over other races?

Yes, that’s well put. In the popular films I look at racialized representations were certainly more varied before 1936: we have different types of race, almost a condoned consumerism of race, allusions to if not outright affirmation of mixing as culturally affirmative, bold displays of difference are treated as titillating and the exotic is sexy, albeit most often kept at a safe distance. Yet race before 1936 was still a troubled and troubling issue, the assumption being that in capitalist modernity, the backdrop of much popular film in the 20s and 30s, racial subjects ultimately can’t compete with white subjects. For example, the ending of *María de la O* (Francisco Elías, 1936) harbors reactionary residues in contrast to the rest of the film that is in many ways progressive, critical, and modernist. But the re-establishment of the social order, in this case through marriage, signals the end of María’s career as a dancer, and her acquiescence to traditional gender roles. It’s also a classic romance ending in which the woman is ‘saved’ by the intervention of men of her own race offering her marriage, which symbolized protection but also oppression and safeguarding against miscegenation.

Another point to be made in terms of films that seemingly condone racial mixing is how they imply that a woman of Roma descent would be better off with a non-Roma male. In a later film, *Los Tarantos* (Francisco Rovira-Beleta, 1963), with Carmen Amaya, we see her scripted through her abusive and torturous relationship with Antonio (a ‘gitano’), which reinforces an oppressive honor code that blames Roma women for their oppression, and in the process, further stigmatizes the Roma community at large. Yet this situation is not specific to the Roma community but is rather pervasive in Spanish [and Western capitalist] society historically and at large, inscribed

into law, and affecting all women, regardless of race. That the ‘Gitano’ community is blamed as holding primitive attitudes toward their women is hypocrisy of the highest order. This is what Slavoj Žižek warns us of: blaming the racialized other is a form of denial, a fantasy. The nation, Spain, not just the Roma community, is tied down by these ideologies of honor and subjugation of women. But the critique is diverted onto the racial scapegoat.

In the texts produced after Spanish Civil War, as in *Morena Clara* from ’54, with Lola Flores, and directed by Luis Lucía, this ambiguity about miscegenation can still exist, but because leakage due to repression and the romantic moments can veer on the overtly comic. What I needed resolving was how the first issue of ambiguous content, existed simultaneously with second issue of a troubling racialization, that continually vexed any clean analysis of these films and their context of spectatorship. By which I mean, we may find narratives of uplift in the aspirations to stardom or a better life through marriage and assimilation told by some of these films (*Mariquilla Terremoto* [Benito Perojo, 1940], *Morena Clara*), but their management of race, and the memory or allusion to racial/racialized subjects, persisted in a troubling relationship to their framework of hope. What I concluded was that such filmic narratives were of course always produced on the assumption that only certain subjects were of value or worth. As with many analyses that we scholars of cinema culture develop, the texts lead us to deeper sociological and philosophical questions.

We can find narratives of social uplift linked to stardom in many of the films you analyze in your book. The success of the *folklórica* is, moreover, almost always linked to a process—inside the film, as a character, but also outside the film, as a star—of ‘whitening’ or ‘assimilation’ to the modern, capitalist order. Or, in your own words: ‘the *folklórica* performed *whiteness*, showing filmgoers *how to be white*.’ This is obvious in the cases of Imperio Argentina, Concha Piquer or Carmen Sevilla... but what does happen with true ‘Gypsy’ stars as Carmen Amaya and Lola Flores, with their characteristic facial traits and darker skin? Do you see any difference between them and the white *folklóricas*?

Certainly, yes. In terms of Amaya, as many have noted, she was different, anomalous, not like the other *folklóricas*. In fact, many of the people that we interviewed for our Oral History project would have never associated her as a *folklórica* mainly because of her race. Amaya didn’t have to perform ‘Gypsy face’ as she was fixed as a ‘gitana.’ White *folklóricas* put on and took off ‘Gypsy face,’ much like the 19th century bohemians

A DOLORES DEL RÍO LE HABRÍA GUSTADO NACER GITANA

DOLORES DEL RÍO es una de esas mujeres que han nacido con buena estrella.

Ante su belleza, morena y picante, se han rendido los dioses. Cupido, dispara sus flechas oculto tras los ojos negros y ardientes de esta mejicana.

«Quiero—le dice Dolores al diosецillo del amor—que cobres para mí ese corazón; es buena pieza.»

Y Cupido, obediente, prepara su arco, saca

por

JUAN
DE
ESPAÑA



la flecha más aguda de su carcaj, afirma la puntería y la lanza veloz al espacio. La flecha se clava en el corazón designado por Dolores del Río, y Dolores del Río, después de jugar con él, de hacer añicos aquel juguete humano, lo deja olvidado en un rincón, o, hastiada, lo arroja a la calle con desprecio.

La Fama se ha rendido también a esta extraña mujer.

«¿Qué deseas?», le pregunta la diosa.

«Que tus trompas lleven el eco de mi nombre por todos los rincones de la tierra, que no haya ciudad, pueblo, aldea, cortijo, cabaña, donde mi nombre no sea conocido», responde,

imperativa, la voz de Dolores del Río.

Y este nombre se esparce por el mundo, y es por todos admirado.

Y se le rinde la riqueza con la misma facilidad que el amor y la fama; pero Dolores del Río, insaciable, pide más y más a su buena estrella.

¿Qué puede apetecer ya esta mujer bella y extraña?



Esta pregunta me asaltaba siempre que veía a Dolores del Río. Notaba en ella una tristeza, una protesta, inexplicables para mí.

Como soy curioso, de una curiosidad insatisfecha siempre, me decidí un día a preguntarle a Dolores:

—¿Qué te pasa, mi linda amiga; qué te niega la vida, a ti que lo tienes y lo puedes todo, para que se tiña tu rostro de melancolía?

Y Dolores del Río, sonriendo amargamente, me ha contestado:

—Ay, amigo mío, qué equivocados estáis los que me creéis dichosa!

—¿Pero qué motivos serios tienes para considerarte desgraciada?

Dolores, me dice:

—Espera, ya te lo explicaré; pero antes quiero que pruebes, tú que eres un buen catador de vinos, una manzanilla de Sanlúcar.

Y mientras yo me asombro—¡es tan raro, aquí, poder saborear ese vino español!—Dolores se levanta y a poco vuelve seguida de su doncella, que coloca sobre el velador, en este patio, mezcla de estilo andaluz y castellano, dos vasos y una botella de auténtica manzanilla sanluqueña.

La descorcho yo mismo, emocionado; como los «chatos», le alargó uno a la gentil artista, y alzó el mío en este brindis:

«¡Por tus ojos y por España, Lolilla!»

«¡Por España y por nuestra amistad!», brinda ella.

Y luego, reanudamos la charla.

—Vamos a ver, ¿por qué no te sientes feliz?—insisto machacón.

Y Dolores, Lolilla como yo la llamo a veces, porque me autoriza al diminutivo cariñoso una amistad firme y antigua, me replica muy seria:

—Porque me habría gustado nacer gitana.

Esta súbita declaración, en este patio lleno de macetas con rojos claveles de Granada y ante esta botella de olorosa y dorada manzanilla, no me ha parecido tan sorprendente como en cualquier otro lugar. Sin embargo, como me resulta extravagante, a pesar de todo, le digo:

—Si hubiéramos bebido ya siquiera el tercer «chato», al oírte ahora habría creído que este vino inspiraba tu declaración o que dis-

razaba tus palabras en mi oído. Y bien, gitana, ya lo eres por el fuego de tus ojos, por el color de tu carne morena, por la gracia y por tu espíritu andariego y rebelde.

Dolores del Río, Lolilla, más Lolilla ahora que nunca, ríe gozosa, y observa aguda:

—Pues yo, oyéndote, escuchando en tu boca esos piropos de pura esencia cañí, creo que este primer trago te ha trastornado un poco. ¿Qué respondes a esto?

—Que apuremos otro «chato» y que me expliques por qué ese deseo de haber nacido gitana.

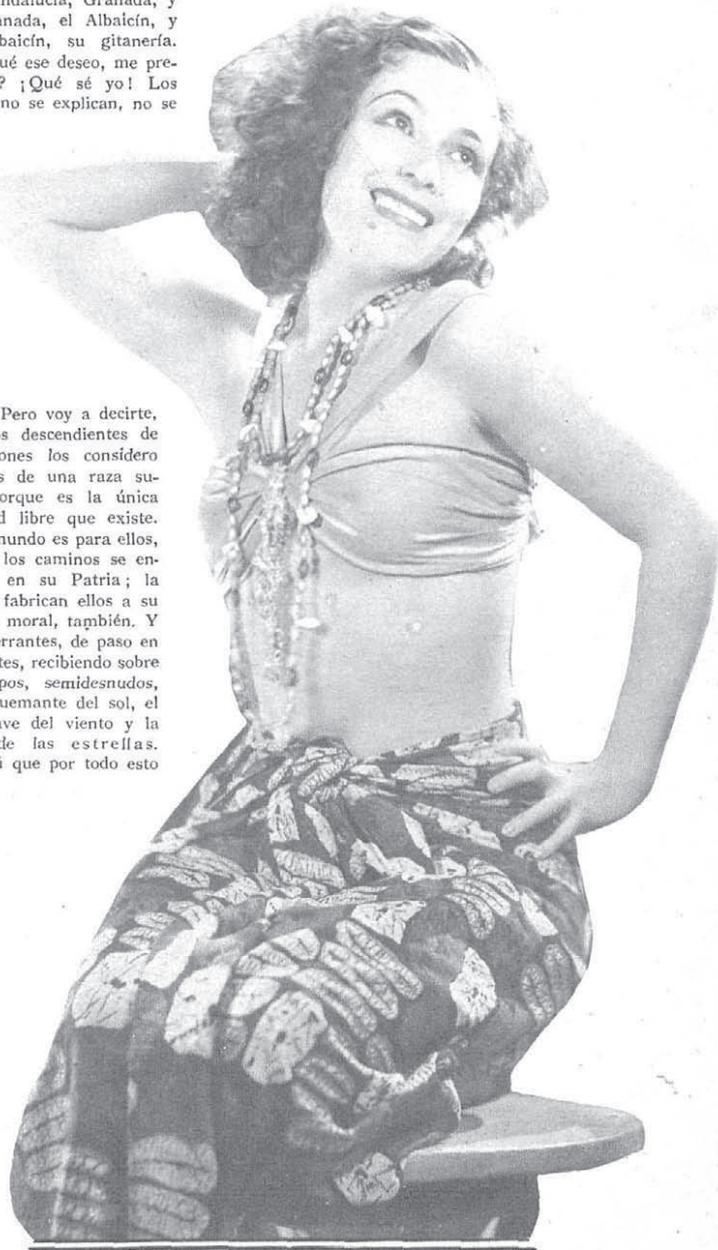
—Gitana y del Albaicín, precisamente —retruca Dolores—. Y no como recuerdo a cualquier cancioncilla cursi de esas que cantan las cupletistas baratas, sino porque de España lo que más me gusta es Andalucía, y de Andalucía, Granada, y de Granada, el Albaicín, y del Albaicín, su gitanería.

¿Por qué ese deseo, me preguntas? ¡Qué sé yo! Los deseos no se explican, no se

no se puede dar la fama, la riqueza y regalar, de paso, toda esa corte de falsos enamorados, de donjuanes pretenciosos, de ridículos Romeos que la siguen a una por todos lados, con la codicia de que nos rindamos a sus miradas? Te confieso, amigo mío, que estoy asqueada, que me subleva la esclavitud esta moderna, disfrazada de civilización, y que anhelo ser de veras libre para vivir una vida más limpia y más humana, en la que uno mismo se fabrica su moral y su ley.

¡Y ahora, otro «chato», por los nietos de los Faraones!

Hollywood, junio de 1932.



who could safely wander in and out of the *barrios bajos*. This was one reason I didn't include a discussion of *María de la O*. But there is also the issue of Amaya's performances in *María de la O*, which were far too sophisticated and ingenious to be understood within the formulaic genre of the Andalusian folkloric musical. She was ahead of her time and too exotic, too racial and too racialized. That said, I'm not sure that I would qualify her role as that of an agent in charge of her artistic expression as some have suggested. Her performance, and in particular, the reception of her performance, was mediated by the rules, history, and lenses of flamenco style. The image of her dancing does honor to the real community of Roma people, but it is embedded within a text that does violence to them. This is the first acknowledgement that must be made when working on representational content of this sort.

Just to give a sense of the power of this 'Gypsy face' on the concept of belonging: I recently came across an article in *Popular Film* published in the 30s on Dolores del Río and her visit to Spain. The entire article is about how she raves about how wishes she could be a 'gitana.' This is remarkable as she is clearly positioning herself as a white Mexican, which also complicates readings of her star image.

One of the chapters of your book is about Raquel Meller, the 'first Spanish cinema star construct.' I think the most interesting thing about her is, as you say, this 'blending of female purity and whiteness with the vamp and the Nueva Mujer Moderna,' which made her, as a star text, unknowable and difficult to define. Meller is unique, you don't find this mix in posterior *folklóricas* who follow her path as Concha Piquer or Imperio Argentina. Is it possible to see Meller as a more transgressive, menacing star than posterior *folklóricas* were?

Absolutely. And I hope others will do more work on her! There is so much material on stars like her in cinema magazines that is virtually untouched. Someone needs to tap into this vein of research... I would also add that there is a lot of information about Meller in various cinematographic contexts given that the height of her career was during the height of film magazine production in Spain (mid-twenties to mid-thirties) so that she was consumed in ways much more varied and in a way, uncontrolled, compared with the career of stars after 39 when film and film magazine discourse was under a wholly different regime of censorship. Meller, for example, was much closer to an exotic eroticism in many of her films, than later white *folklóricas* would ever be or would ever be allowed to be. But again, as I mention in the last question, Meller could still saunter in and out of roles. Whereas film agents, directors, and

producers, audiences etc. prevented Amaya and Flores from acquiring roles outside of the domain of the racial stereotype.

In my opinion, your use of extrafilmic material (newspapers, magazines, publicity stills) and transversal knowledge of Spanish popular culture and history is absolutely fantastic. It's vital to know about the origins, importance and social (and sexual) implications of *cuplé* to talk about Raquel Meller as a star text; or to know about the Spain of the 20's as a precocious consumerist era (and Meller as one of these 'consume goods'). Could you explain the importance you give to the extrafilmic material and the knowledge of Spanish popular culture of the time—beyond the movies: fashion, music, popular theatre and literature—for the analysis of a star?

It's essential to look at the cinema culture of that period, and not just the films. Actually for any period it's true. Films are media products that exist in a complex multi-media network that we can call cinema culture. More importantly, though, producers, filmmakers, and actors/stars, were consuming culture, watching other films, reading film magazines, the press and sometimes novels and closely observing audiences, (and this list could go on). And these different media forms circulated amongst historical, political, sociological events and discourses. Movies were thus inevitably products of that conversation between these different cultural interfaces. How can we avoid analyzing these other factors in our search to understand our relationship with cinema? For it's not cinema on its own that we are trying to understand, but our relationship with it, what it does to us, how it makes us feel, how it transforms us.

The most important cultural interface of the 20th century, as many theorists have pointed out, was cinema. What do we do, however, when so much of our cinema patrimony has been lost or disappeared? I would argue that a major phase of cinema research of the 1910s-30s should be on cinema magazines. Film magazines are a goldmine of information, images and discourses (very contradictory, extremely entertaining and problematic! And fabulously sophisticated at times...) and until we do them justice in our analyses of film culture of this period, we simply can't understand the film culture of this time in all its complexity. Finally, Spain in the mid-twenties to mid thirties was experiencing a veritable golden age of film magazines—upwards of 58 different film magazines existed when nationalists started shutting down presses or when presses were simply abandoned due to the conflict (see Aitor Hernández Eguiluz). Film magazines were like instruction manuals for understanding how stardom was produced, and how spectators should consume and integrate it into their daily life.

NOTES

1. A thorough list of her academic writing can be found at <https://evawoodspeiro.com>

2. This is a collaborative project that is still ongoing; its title is *Cinema and the Mediation of Everyday Life: An Oral History of Spanish Cinemagoing in the 1940s and 50s*.

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Studies, *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas*, *Letras Peninsulares* and in the collections *Performance and Spanish Film*, *The Blackwell Companion to Spanish Cinema*, *Burning Darkness: A Half Century of Spanish Cinema*, *Gender and Spanish Cinema*, and *Spanish Popular Cinema*.

A train that derails: does a European star system exist? A conversation with Axelle Ropert

Fernando Ganzo

ABSTRACT

Filmmaker and critic (former editor-in-chief at *La Lettre du Cinéma*) Axelle Ropert analyses the actor as star in European cinema in relation to the American star system. After giving her point of view on specific Hollywood stars (including Katharine Hepburn and Gene Tierney), the filmmaker goes on to address the following issues: does a European star system exist? What would its foundational gesture have been? Which filmmakers have created plastic methods to achieve the composition of the actor, particularly within French cinema? How should we react to feminist criticism of the American star system? As a French critic and filmmaker, Ropert has to deal with the possible ideological evolution that auteur theory may have imposed on the star, and the possibility that Nouvelle Vague might have modified the notion of 'star' in French cinema, by corrupting it with that of 'icon.' In the final part, the interview focuses on the major schools of actor direction in France: the Bressonian approach, the one that derives from Pialat, as well as the possible influence that painting might have had on the filmmaker's work, with the actor as the raw material.

KEYWORDS

Star System, Hollywood, Nouvelle Vague, Cinecittà, icon, performers, mise-en-scène.

As a French filmmaker and critic, what is your perception of the notion of the star system?

In the case of Hollywood, the notion of the star system never crosses my mind. In any case, I accept it 100%, and I have never felt the need to turn against this notion, nor have I ever thought that the star was a myth designed to deceive the people, by linking it with a capitalist message. I think Edgar Morin wrote something about it. To me, the star system is not a burden, but rather a miracle: the miracle of a dream granted to the people. American cinema is made by men, 90% of it, and these men basically filmed women. When we think of this cinema, we think of Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner, Greta Garbo. I think it's the most beautiful aesthetic system in the world, the equivalent of the Hellenic world. Feminist critics have at some point claimed that this system might be concealing something fraudulent, that women were used to convey a message that only suited men. I, however, believe that these men created sublime female characters and actresses, and that the female world is truly valued in American classic cinema thanks to the greatness of the female roles and the actresses that the male directors created.

In the opinion of Louis Skorecki, when the American star system was replaced, in the eyes of many viewers, by the auteur theory, a whole relationship with cinema was lost; one which he described as a couple of spectators who, when they went out of a movie and were talking about whether they had liked it, said: "the actress's eyes were beautiful". Given that we are all children of the auteur theory, how do you think that we today perceive the idea of the star?

I think that, as cinephiles, we have the chance to live twice over. At least, that's the case with me: I ended up in cinema because of the power of actors and actresses. During summers in the countryside with my grandparents, the only way to watch movies was on television. That's how I discovered *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) at age ten. It was an aesthetic revelation: the discovery of a universe of extraordinary actors and actresses. During this initiation period, the director's name was the last thing I was interested in. My grandparents bought *Télé Poche*, a magazine about all the movies broadcast on television, from which I cut out the photos of all the actors and actresses and then pasted them into a notebook, with their names next to them. I think that this kind of access to cinema through the actors is not an isolated case, and that I lived through what many other people have experienced. This relationship with cinema can be compared to childhood, in every way.



Singin' in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952)

The childhood of the individual spectator and of the spectator as a collective—the analogy in this case would be valid...

I think, simply, that *mise-en-scène* is a difficult notion to understand. It took me a long time to understand what it was, while understanding that what an actor is, is something immediate. Try to explain what *mise-en-scène* is to someone who doesn't know anything about cinema. It's really difficult. American classic cinema was forged by singular directors like Hawks, Donen and Minnelli, men who could conceal themselves behind the film and put the spotlight on the actor. It created a magical feeling: the actor created the film around him. This was something magnificent that has been lost, in a sense, in today's European cinema, where the actor is to some extent just a support for the author. The extraordinary thing about classic American cinema is that the directors felt a love for the actors and actresses that was not twisted, but rather, complete: an actor is there to be beautiful and to portray interesting things. That twofold program, magnificent, noble and profound, and which to me is not outdated at all, is what current cinema is losing in a sense. But cinema is still that: presenting a beautiful actor or actress and giving them interesting things to portray. And that is not incompatible with strong formal ambitions.

I think your interpretation also has to do with the actors of the American star system, who had a clear understanding of the *mise-en-scène*. Even the stars who worked with Hitchcock, the absolute *metteur en scène*, displayed (and we only need to see any shot of Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* [1959]) a true conception of the *mise-en-scène*: he is able to interpret the importance of his movements in a space, in a story and,



Nous ne vieillirons pas ensemble (Maurice Pialat, 1972)



The Birds (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963)

finally, in the world. As if the fact that the *mise-en-scène* revolved around the actor at that time was something that nurtured them.

I do not believe in the intellectual intelligence of actors. An actor can be very silly and then be great on a set. I believe in the actor's intuition. In some of my films, I have been able to experience it: that transformation that takes place when the actor hears the word 'action!'; when the actor knows that a camera is watching him and immediately understands, not exactly what the most favorable angle is, as that is not so interesting for him, but rather what the scene needs in terms of rhythm, camera position, space and light. It is something that has nothing to do with narcissism, but rather with the equation of light, camera and movement. I think that in Hollywood it is hard to measure the intelligence of an actor when watching a finished film. Modern cinema, however, has over-promoted the notion of 'conflict' between the actor and the director. For example, Pialat's cinema is built around the conflict between him and his actresses, Marlène Jobert, Sophie Marceau. That's what interests him in a scene. In my opinion, the conflict between actor and director, even when it is great (as it is in Pialat's films), is not really so interesting. And in the cinema of the American star system, what is most shocking is precisely that sense of harmony. An absolute understanding between the director and the actor which, when we discover the reality behind the shoots or some of their relationships, we realize that it's not true; that there were some terrible differences worthy of a Shakespearean plot. But that only makes this harmony, this combination of forces, more miraculous. I cannot think of a single American film in which we can feel that the actor is resisting the director. Not even in the aforementioned example

of Hitchcock: Tippi Hedren offers no resistance to a filmmaker who was nevertheless terrible to her. Why is harmony so important in American classical cinema? It is something that transcends simple aesthetics: it may have something to do with contracts, with the notion of career, with all the pressure that the studio could exert, and all this might have led to harmony. The idea that when you started a movie, everyone was on the same train, and that the journey had to be good, and you had to arrive comfortably at the station. Modern cinema is just the opposite: now you have to derail the train.

In your relationship with the American star system, Gene Tierney has a particularly important place, doesn't she?

Her case is a very particular one, within that system. In a way she's an E.T., an alien. She only acted in unknown masterpieces or big B-movies. She's not an actress who is known to most people. She's an actress who is not sexed. It's not that she is asexual, but that she seems to be forever virgin. However, and therein lies the genius of Hollywood, her beauty became inexhaustible through the work of cinema. This has now been replaced by a certain cruelty, and may have to do with the cinematography, which allows such a relationship today. The classic Hollywood directors of photography made the women's beauty indefatigable. I repeat, the American star system was feminist and elevated its actresses to the rank of goddesses. I can look at photos of Gene Tierney for hours, something I couldn't do with any of today's actresses. That being said, Tierney is a little the apple of my eye for B movies, something that's very personal. The great actresses of American cinema are Katharine Hepburn, Joan Fontaine—classic actresses. But in all those examples, Hollywood offered a lasting harmony. The idea we

have that 'the star system = disposable actresses' is completely false if we think of classic Hollywood and its actresses who were elevated to the firmament in a cinema that was made by men but, I'll say it again, was totally feminist. The vulgarity and cruelty of the star system arrived in the '60s and '70s.

Now that you mention Katharine Hepburn, her case is totally unique within the notion of the star system, confirming that the notion of the star is not exclusively tied to the idea of 'affection' from the public. Back in the day, it used to be said in fact that, according to several surveys, no other actor created such a disinclination to buy a ticket for a movie as Hepburn did. And yet, she represents and works perfectly within the star system.

Three things made her a great but not popular actress: 1) her androgynous figure, with no breasts or hips; 2) she played many roles as a capricious girl in high society, which was irritating to popular audiences; 3) she was an intellectual, and it showed. Over the years, these three things have been diluted in the eyes of today's viewers. But it is perfectly understandable that she sparked that kind of aversion in her time. We could say that actresses like Barbara Stanwyck and Joan Crawford shared many characteristics with her, but they also often played turbulent characters or *femmes fatales*, something that Hepburn didn't do, and they entertained the public with this 'bitchy' side of themselves that they could embody. And thanks to that, they both remained popular until the end of their careers, though when we see what they looked like when they were older, that seems to us rather inconceivable. Hepburn was something else. In today's European cinema, her equivalent would be Isabelle Huppert, a star who has never been a popular actress. Because of her androgyny, her overflowing intelligence and, in her case,



Whirlpool (Otto Preminger, 1950)

not so much as a result of roles as a spoiled girl but rather of a perverse woman.

Since you mention Huppert, French cinema has a very unique relationship with the star system. For some time, in the 1930s, it was virtually a factory for female stars. Michèle Morgan, Danielle Darrieux ...

I feel that French cinema has, nevertheless, been more effective and reliable in producing male stars, such as Belmondo and Delon. The female stars of French cinema are stars a little by accident. For example, Catherine Deneuve. Hers is a rather mysterious case. Did French cinema want, at any given moment, to make her into a star? I rather think that Deneuve and her exceptional beauty attracted certain great directors and that, thanks to this, she ended up developing an intuition



Bringing Up Baby (Howard Hawks, 1938)



Elle (Paul Verhoeven, 2016)



Pane, amore e fantasia (Luigi Comencini, 1953)

that allowed her to choose who to work with. However, French cinema expressed an explicit intention to make Belmondo and Delon stars. We should also mention Bourvil and Louis De Funès, since it's the same phenomenon for comic stars. Apart from Simone Signoret and Danielle Darrieux, the only true female star of French cinema since 1945 has been Brigitte Bardot, until she retired, prematurely and violently, from that same star system, possibly out of a certain boredom with that desire to turn her into an erotic object. With the exception of Bardot, the French female star system is rather non-existent. Anyway, there were no studios in France, it was very different. There were powerful producers, such as Toscan du Plantier, who could push a certain actress, but there were no studios capable of making stars, everything was much more chaotic.

The European or modern cinema 'star', according to Daney, came into being, in fact, with Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1953): 'Modernity begins when the cinematography in Bergman's *Monika* made an entire generation of moviegoers shiver, without Harriet Anderson becoming a star'.

I think that in Europe, the only country that has something more similar to the American star system is Italy, with actresses like Anna Magnani, Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren. In the case of the latter two, they were actresses who were not at all intellectual, they might have even seemed somewhat simple, but with magnificent bodies; great actresses who had a production machinery behind them to launch them, to get them roles, and so on. I think it's something that has to do with the popular value of Italian cinema and, above all, with Cinecittà. For a star system to exist, a system of studios together

with great, popular producers is required. In France, the former does not exist and the latter are rather atypical, like Jean-Pierre Rissam in the 1970s.

I think *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950) greatly altered the Italian star system for the simple reason that an Italian film could have the biggest star on the planet. Something was born there, sort of like a model. A model very different from the one that emerged in France shortly after, the one of Anna Karina and Anne Wiazemsky—with their moulded bodies and almost conceived by the hands of a director in whom the work of seduction resides.

The cases you mention in French cinema are beautiful because they reveal the vulnerability of the actor, which is quite frightening as I see it. Karina was a brilliant actress in Jacques Rivette's *The Nun* (*La religieuse*, 1966). It seems that in theater she was even more brilliant. And yet, when an actress is linked with one director for a long time, moving on after that is really difficult. It's unfair.

It is symptomatic that you mention *The Nun*. At the time of its premiere, the press repeated that, thanks to that film, we had seen that Karina is an actress, which is like saying that in Godard's films she was not.

Godard forced her to be a beautiful doll doing silly things. She was so beautiful that it was wonderful, but her first role as an actress, in fact, was that of Rivette. Jean Seberg in *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1959) is granted an identity as an actress that is far superior to Karina's in any of her films with Godard. What I am going to say might sound too severe, but Godard enclosed Karina within an imagery of a silent cinema actress, with magnificent eyes, a youthful figure and a flirtatious look. Bardot and Seberg, with whom he only made one film respectively, achieved a more complete image. Karina's image, I strongly believe, suffered from that long association with Godard, which in a way, killed the desire of other filmmakers. This attitude is a bit silly, to want the exclusivity of an actress. It's a very masculine thing, but it happens: if a director uses an actress a lot, another director may decide not to give her a role, because she has 'belonged' to another. Female directors do not have, in my opinion, that possessive urge. That said, Godard, who was a superb director of actors, has seemed to have totally lost that ability. His recent films are very interesting, but the actors are very bad. No one says it, but it strikes me as blatant. I cannot explain how a genius with actors such as he was has managed to get so bad since the late '80s. It's the move from Johnny Hallyday in *Détective* (1985) to Alain Delon in *Nouvelle Vague* (1990). One hypothesis is that the power of his



Vivre sa vie: Film en douze tableaux
(Jean-Luc Godard, 1962)



La religieuse (Jacques Rivette, 1966)

relationship with painting has ended up making him lose his sense of what actors are. And that is the moment when actors become paintings. The relation with painting is very delicate, in cinema.

In order to create its own system, did the Nouvelle Vague have to create its own star system?

Particularly with the aim of creating a new school of actors, defined by a naturalness, a spontaneity, that gave the feeling of being fresh in off the street. As well as an atypical beauty. Even in films that are considered pre-Nouvelle Vague, the difference is considerable. Think of Édouard et Caroline (Jacques Becker, 1951). Anne Vernon has a luminous beauty, but one that is typical of the '50s; it is not unprecedented. Daniel Gélin also possessed an image that the school of actors of the Nouvelle Vague, defined by its eccentricity and an unprecedented beauty, would end up breaking with. No one had seen a face like that of Jean-Pierre Léaud, for example, nor of Juliet Berto or even Stéphane Audran, in the case of Claude Chabrol: she had a reptilian image. They are filmmakers who invented beauties that had not yet been seen to avoid repeating the classic archetypes of French cinema. But from there also comes the difficulty that these actors had in playing roles in another type of cinema, later on. Stéphane Audran had a career that was totally marked by Chabrol. That absolute originality of the actors and actresses of the Nouvelle Vague was very fruitful in the cases of these filmmakers, but it set a prejudice for the rest, which is quite sad.

Did the notion of 'icon' have anything to do with it?

I don't think that any filmmaker from the Nouvelle Vague thought about or intended to create icons. I think it's a fantasy that could have been described much later. They wanted just the opposite: to be in the present. And to make a movie alive, in the present, you cannot film your actress as an icon. Which, by the way, is boring. It is something that is totally absent from American classic cinema, for example, which did not portray its actresses as if they were statues; only Marlene Dietrich has been filmed like this, in some instances. This is something that could have happened with Catherine Deneuve and Isabelle Huppert. Deneuve has been filmed as an icon of Jacques Demy by later filmmakers, and this is something that has no interest. That doesn't mean that when you are filming an actor you are not filming the memory of his past roles, but you have to give him a life of his own. The Nouvelle Vague followed the Rossellini school: the present, freshness. No mythology. They did not film for eternity, but for the present. His other favorite filmmaker was Howard Hawks: a haughty, cutting-edge, straightforward cinema, with no mythologies or finesse. Hawks never filmed John Wayne as a myth. One of the rare moments when this is not so is in *Mississippi Mermaid* (*La sirène du Mississippi*, François Truffaut, 1969). Truffaut fell into a trap: his own fascination with Catherine Deneuve's beauty. The result is a dead film, which I do not think Truffaut himself liked that much. On the other hand, Jacques Rivette is, in my opinion, the filmmaker of the Nouvelle Vague who was less fascinated by the beauty of his actresses, it wasn't very important to him: he was interested in the naked work of actresses much more than their beauty.

And the case of Paul Vecchiali?



Out 1, noli me tangere (Jacques Rivette and Suzanne Schiffman, 1971)

Vecchiali, even when he is filming Danielle Darrieux or Hélène Surgère, who are absolute idols to him, does not film them like this; just look at *En haut des marches* (1983). There is a sense of the present working. I find it very lazy to choose an actress just because we find her fascinating and filming her passively. No great filmmaker works like that.

I have the feeling, with regard to the idea of the modern star in European cinema, that Françoise Lebrun has represented that like no one else has in French cinema, and that perhaps her role as Veronika in *The Mother and the Whore* (*La Maman et la Putain*, Jean Eustache, 1973) is the most crucial role for an actress.

In relation with other filmmakers, it is very possible. Much more than for herself.

Yes, she knew how to place herself far from that role from the beginning, but for later filmmakers it was sometimes a way of almost invoking the spirit of that film, as if she were carrying it, hence the word 'icon'.

The female characters in *The Mother and the Whore* are very strong, while the male character has an objective weakness. One important thing regarding the relation between this film and the present is the volume of text. It is something that I am very sensitive to. I may be a little reactionary, but the tendency to short, dry, realistic dialogues, "Pass me the salt", filmed if possible from behind—I find that laconism quite annoying. When an actor has the genius of the text, he creates a very strong emotion. The great actor represents an encounter with a great text. And I think that is the supreme test for an actor,

because it brings into play charm, rhythm, with something that is very difficult to achieve. Just think of Oliveira or Straub.

Do you think that an actor's association with a filmmaker or a film is more difficult to overcome for an actress? Léaud overcame Truffaut, Amalric overcame Desplechin. However, Lebrun will always be Eustache.

It is true that iconic female characters may have generated a greater desire for replication, for repetition. To be a prisoner of one's own fascination is something that is totally without interest. One part of the intelligence required to be a filmmaker is the ability to recognize this type of danger. That being said, there are some actresses who are easier to transport from one universe to another, and other actresses for whom this is more difficult. Let us return to the Huppert-Deneuve dichotomy, which is very interesting, since Huppert's genius is that of intelligence and Deneuve's is a genius of beauty. It would be very difficult to transport Deneuve to another universe. In *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000), for example, seeing her as a factory worker in a headscarf becomes ridiculous. Or in *I Want to See* (*Je veux voir*, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 2008): seeing her walking among Lebanese soldiers is simply grotesque. However, we could perfectly imagine seeing Huppert doing that. Deneuve may seem less harsh than Huppert, and yet there is something closed-off in her genius, something which is hard to relocate. Huppert has a kind of restlessness in her performance that enables such things better than Deneuve's serenity does.

After the Nouvelle Vague, Diagonale, the production company that included Vecchiali, Jean-Claude Biette, Marie-Claude Treilhou, Jean-Claude Guiguet... They also created a school of actors...

The difference between Diagonale and the Nouvelle Vague is that the former was based on a common love for the French cinema of the '30s, while for the latter, it was American classic cinema. Within Diagonale, the most innovative one in terms of actors is Jean-Claude Biette. For example, there is no sentimentality, all his cinema is anti-sentimental, without that singing aspect that the others might have inherited from Marcel Pagnol or Abel Gance. In that sense, he would be more Hawksian. And he's a completely anti-mythological filmmaker. In his films, Howard Vernon can quote Shakespeare, and he's not pompous, even Vernon is shown with a mysterious lightness. This is something that has to do with the fact that, in his cinema, the characters/actors seem to be passing through, to have come from another story, going through this film and then going back to another.



En haut des marches (Paul Vecchiali, 1983)



Agent trouble (Jean-Pierre Mocky, 1987)

The novelistic perspectives of his films open up to such an extent that they create that extraordinary sensation which allows the actor/character relationship to be unique. It is totally mysterious and it is very hard to say where it comes from. They are movies that look like endless forests in the depths of which the characters can get lost at any moment.

In French cinema there is a border that should be defined between the surprising usage of stars, as in the cinema of Vecchiali, and the anti-natural usage.

Yes, that's the case of Belmondo in *Mississippi Mermaid*, to return to the previous example. Trying to use an actor against what he is, so often turns out catastrophic, in my view. Truffaut's lyrical texts sound stiff in Belmondo's mouth, we can feel his discomfort. The unexpected use of an actor or an actress is usually considered great, but it rarely gives us anything.

Jean-Pierre Mocky is a filmmaker who has always wanted to have stars, and indeed has always had them, in a very different cinema and economy.

He is interested in the star, but not in her seduction. Filming beautiful actresses is something that he was not interested in; he always wanted to film monsters. But Mocky is an absolute genius in his ability to welcome actors from very different universes and integrate them naturally into his films without forcing anything. For example, Catherine Deneuve in *Agent trouble* (1987). We might think that an actress who is as rigid as a board, basically more chic than comic, could never function in his cinema. And yet it is marvelous, because Mocky does not force her nature: he does not turn her into a vulgar fishmonger, he makes her discreetly ridiculous with a curly wig, and

sticks with that. In that cinema which, a priori, might seem exaggerated, there is a hidden delicacy. We are very far from Bruno Dumont, who has no delicacy when he uses Juliette Binoche against her nature as an actress. It's an intuition: to know where to stop.

Are there situations that could harm a star in French cinema?

Rohmer. It has always been said that you shouldn't work with Rohmer. Fabrice Luchini spoke of how working with Rohmer killed his career for a while, since the French film industry considered the actors in his cinema to be ridiculous, effeminate. Pascal Greggory had to wait to work with Patrice Chéreau, who gave him roles of virile, tortured men. No actor discovered by Rohmer has had a great career in the French film system thanks to him. In the '70s and '80s, Rohmer's cinema was considered ridiculous: cat's piss. The difference between him and Mocky, whose cinema, we can assume, might harm an actor's career, is their success with audiences. Mocky made films that were watched by a million people, he was popular. There's less risk. Besides, I think the actors sensed Mocky's generosity, and that's why they were not afraid to perform for him. A popular generosity that is not present in a certain auteur cinema, say, that of Benoît Jacquot.

I have the feeling that in France, in auteur cinema, there are two schools that have survived and prevailed in recent decades: the Bressonian school and the Pialat school. The school of retention and the school of conflict.

Pialat is a great filmmaker, but a disastrous influence. I do not see any good heir of Pialat, nor any fruitful relationship with the actors that have come from there. This is because Pialat has



Les belles manières (Jean-Claude Guiguet, 1978)



Julie est amoureuse (Vincent Dietschy, 1998)

been simplified. In his cinema, there was a dialectics between the documentary, the present, and the obsession with art. I think this comes from his desire to be a painter. The search for the present moment, of the accident, is contrasted with the idea that art resides in form. This second element is one that has been forgotten by his heirs, who have preferred to exclusively preserve the idea of ‘dumping reality’: cinema understood as a shout. In Bresson’s case it’s more complicated, but I also believe that it’s not a good idea to be inspired by him. There are few good heirs of Bresson’s cinema. Jean-Claude Guiguet’s *Fine Manners* (*Les belles manières*, 1978) is one of these exceptions: the portrayal of the young protagonist (Emmanuel Lemoine) is perfectly post-Bressonian, but it is because it adapts the codes of the Bressonian actor to a tragic sentimentality that has absolutely nothing to do with Bresson. But I repeat: they are two schools that are of little benefit to French cinema. However, we can find some good heirs of Renoir, like *Julie est amoureuse* (1998), Vincent Dietschy’s film that is marked by the disparity of the performances, the mixture of genres, the exuberance, the attention dedicated to each actor. It is admirable, and totally isolated in its kind; there is no such work with the actors by almost any current filmmaker. However, I think it’s the best school.

Jean Gabin and the evolution of his career is interesting with respect to our interpretation of the film star in France. The second half of his career is the one that remains today in the eyes of spectators: those popular films in which he always plays a kind of patriarch, often violent. And so the previous Gabin is forgotten: the one who is in love, fragile, feminine, in his films with Jean Grémillon, for example.

That is something only Depardieu has been able to restore. He is the actor that crystallizes the entire French cinema, he is extraordinary. He is everything at once and he has been

everything. He has been seen as a god by both auteur cinema and popular cinema. He is the absolute counter-example. Any theory that we establish about the actor, the star, he can contradict it. He is the childish and feminine Gabin of the ‘30s, and Depardieu’s femininity seems evident to me, but also the patriarchal, ultra-heterosexual Gabin. He can embody Obelix with his twenty-kilo belly and, at the same time, Truffaut’s tragic-novelettish feeling. He is unique and will not be reproduced. Only with such an actor could Marguerite Duras achieve the beauty of *The Lorry* (*Le camion*, 1977), without falling into mythology and, on the contrary, having fun, both the filmmaker and the actor. This was not possible between Godard and Delon in *Nouvelle Vague* and, as I said, that is what overloads that film.

Strangely enough, the more savage and animal, even monstrous, Depardieu’s body has become over the years, the more childish he seems to us.

Yes, because it expresses a great innocence, even in his most brutal roles. An absence of corruption. His strength also comes from the fact that he has become very interested in artists and intellectuals. Once an agent told me something that struck me: ‘The intelligence of an actor or an actress who wants to last lies in approaching artists and intellectuals.’ Those films with much lower budgets than those stars usually experience add something to their careers. French actors who only seek success disappear after five years.

Jean-Pierre Léaud said, in an interview in issue 3 of *Sofilm* magazine (September 2012), that he was proud of having managed to ‘always remain on the side of the intellectuals’.

Yes, it is a sentence that I love. I have had the opportunity to work with some rather brutal actors who treated me as

an intellectual, and I think it is not possible to last like this. Anyway, films are made with the head and, after a while, you need to be a little intelligent when you are making cinema. Even though it is a purely intuitive intelligence, not intellectual, as I said before.

In the case of Léaud and Depardieu, might it have something to do with a need to 'be nourished'? They were both self-taught, and Léaud was even a 'son of the cinema' who needed to continue learning from those new parents and teachers that his life as an actor had brought to him. It is almost a vital rather than an artistic issue ...

No doubt, and perhaps this is why it has been devalued in French cinema.

You were talking before about the risk of painting in the relationship between a filmmaker and his star. Like Pialat, Philippe Garrel also comes from painting. The curious thing is that he is someone who somehow combines the two current schools of the actor in France: on the one hand a visceral, intimate, even familiar relationship, verging at times on an exercise in exorcism, and on the other hand, he films the actors almost as pure presences.

One thing that must be recognized, in fact, is that while he is someone who is fascinated by painting, his cinema lacks academicism; this danger does not lurk in his films. Meanwhile, at some point, Godard's cinema can be haunted, as we said before, by this 'great art' academicism in relation to painting. I have to say that Garrel is a filmmaker for whom I don't feel any fascination, but he is interesting for several reasons. One of them is his unique method of working with actors and actresses: he rehearses for a year and, once filming starts, he

does



Loulou (Maurice Pialat, 1980)

and, at most, a second one. And that's it. In that sense he is very far from Pialat: his filming does not try to exhaust the actor. But in his cinema there is also a puritan rejection of the seduction of the actor. I'll explain: in his films, there is a pleasure when filming the truth of the faces of his actresses which, for me, hides a kind of puritanism. We could say that he seeks the physical ruin of his actresses. A fascination for the woman when she is breaking down. In American classic cinema, the actress was filmed in all her glory. Garrel is looking for the opposite: filming her in decay. Another interesting thing about Garrel is the lightness of his touch. His relationship with actors is not monumental, and we can almost imagine him directing them like a painter who makes light brushstrokes in his painting. That said, I think for example that in his relationship with the actors, Jean Eustache, whom we have already talked about, was much more interesting. Not only because of what they have to interpret, in *The Mother and the Whore*, for example, but because of the presence, density and sensuality of his actresses.



Les hautes solitudes (Philippe Garrel, 1974)

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The 7 families game: The families of actresses

Axelle Ropert

A vast area of love can be formed around physical charm,
 But that is of little importance.
 At the end of the day, what matters is the actress's particular morale.
 Jean Cocteau



Leonor Silveira in *Vale Abraão* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1993)

THE SPIRITUAL TYPES

Emblematic figures: Delphine Seyrig, Leonor Silveira

Place of origin: the heights.

Nature: they have no gifts whatsoever beyond their spirit; that is, their sense of irony and permanent inspiration. They know how to *breathe* and to deploy their oxygenation power. Inhale, and the voice rises; exhale, and the word dies. *Clarity* is their virtue. They speak, we hold our breath, the air becomes still, and the atmosphere becomes empty. Even so, the imminent and ever-renascent asphyxiation may always emerge, in the fleeting form of slight confusion caused by a lapse (that ‘Thank you, sir’ from Antoine Doinel to Fabienne Tabard in *Stolen Kisses*) or a loss of voice (Michel Piccoli’s marine confusion in *Party*). They are inhabited by Spirit, and they repay this inhabitation by bestowing grace around them. They can only die from tuberculosis, a slow laceration that attacks what sometimes serves as a heart: the lungs.

Distinguishing characteristics: the art of keeping their voices in suspension.

Prohibited: doing any sport.

Suggestions: play Malibran or Kathleen Ferrier.

Clues: Kristin Scott-Thomas’s downcast eyes.

What they ask of us: to be left breathless in mid-speech (like Michel Piccoli).



Françoise Lebrun in *La maman et la putain*
(Jean Eustache, 1973)



Juliet Berto in *Céline et Julie vont en bateau:
Phantom Ladies Over Paris*
(Jacques Rivette, 1974)

THE CALM TYPES

Emblematic figure: Françoise Lebrun.

Place of origin: a harbor by Vermeer.

Nature: they speak as if they have slept for too long. Slurred words, untidy chignons. ‘Meadow-saffron the color of lilac and of shadows / Beneath your eyes, it grows there; your eyes are like those flowers / Mauve as their shadows and like this autumn / And for your eyes’ sake, my life is slowly poisoned’ (Guillaume Apollinaire). The lowlands embrace them with open arms, and couches welcome their horizontal figures, in those postures that enable them to speak a *tone lower*. They are cursed by a slight slow motion, because the personal clock of sorrow and hope breaks when there is no (other) possible love. They are nurses (*The Mother and the Whore*) or wardrobe assistants (Emmanuelle Riva in *Liberté, la nuit*); they bandage and they sew. What stays with us is not the pleasure of those painstaking chores that serve to highlight their lost sorrows, but that flattering pose; that arched neck and gracious spirit.

Distinguishing characteristics: actresses with a geological vocation: they erode easily. However, this erosion should not mean the exhaustion of resources, but a chance to ‘climb back to the surface.’ That is their opportunity.

Prohibited: the glibness of all Garrel’s most recent movies.

Suggestions: play, once again, the delighted drunkenness of a Ninotchka visiting the West.

Clues: a glass of absinthe? An opium cigarette?

What they ask of us: to change our sleep cycle.

THE HELPLESS TYPES

Emblematic figures: Joan Fontaine, Juliet Berto.

Place of origin: haunted houses, orphanages.

Nature: they are easily unsettled, to the satisfaction of invisible enemies who allow these empty women to experience their power of resistance. In Hollywood, Joan Fontaine is hit particularly hard, threatened by Rebecca’s ghost and a glass of milk (*Suspicion*). In Paris, Juliet Berto learns judo and struggles in the twists and turns of dialectics (*Out 1, Le Gai Savoir*). While a chest movement sent Dana Andrews back to the logical horror of his fate (*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*), the elasticity of long distances and an obsession with all kinds of rituals attempt to reduce (topologically speaking) an incomprehensible world to playful laws in miniature (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*). Joan folds — Juliet unfolds. They are not victims, they are only tricked, and it is *trust* that shatters their relations with the world. It’s only one step from ‘damaged’ to ‘ammunition,’ a step which Juliet skips easily, as she stands dejectedly at the end of a street. It’s not ‘real’ revenge, rather a lack of respect that they have for a game you might call ‘Scare me if you want me to trust you.’ Grace and a vein of terror are not brought face-to-face for nothing.

Distinguishing characteristics: Joan blushes and Juliet slurs her words.

Prohibited: exposing them to real terror, because pathos is detrimental to poverty — like when Joan Fontaine faces those Cukorian furies in *The Women*.

Suggestions: the role of Bluebeard’s last wife in a script by Jean-Claude Biette.



Maria Casarès in *Orphée* (Jean Cocteau, 1950)



Ingrid Bergman in *Europa '51*
(Roberto Rossellini, 1952)

Clues: a liking for taboo subjects.

What they ask of us: that we who are not in danger should show them a little kindness.

THE QUEENLY TYPE

Emblematic figures: Maria Casarès, Françoise Fabian.

Place of origin: isolated areas, deserted palaces.

Nature: it is not so much about reigning, but rather about *taking* (love, admiration, support, etc.). While some play with the power of submission, they prefer the power of respect. A finger raised imperiously, a held gaze, they assert themselves so strongly that they don't need to give orders. 'Violence is fair where sweetness is vain' (Corneille). They possess the power of law because they rule — period. They do not command, nor do they forbid any specific aim, anything in particular, any precise objective (they are Kantian, of course, though they do have slender, trembling hands). 'You are my death.' With this brilliant line, Jean Marais subjects himself to an exclusive amorous servitude in *Orpheus*. The (illusory) belief that they are the only ones who suffer for these women prolongs their reign *ad vitam aeternam*. Whether they are aristocratic or bourgeois, the plebeian world is forbidden for them because power is not determined by social class, but by an indifference to all perceived, experienced or shared hardships. Place a helpless person before a queen and you will see the full force of her cruelty and scorn. Nobody can ever forget Juliet Berto's humiliation before François Fabian in *Out 1*. But an inability to carry out life-saving acts in ordinary life might be tragic, and that vulnerability dangerously raises the stakes on their grandeur. To parody Corneille, they should be taught this line: 'No matter how great queens are, they are just like us.'

Distinguishing characteristics: the angle of the head as the art of silently indicating which choice to make.

Prohibited: do not play the Marquess of Merteuil (too much outright venom would be detrimental to the display of their greatness).

Suggestions: play Balzac's forsaken women (don't we already have Jean-Claude Guiguet's *La Visiteuse?*).

Clues: Marie-Armelle Deguy playing Viriate in Corneille's *Sertorius*.

What they ask of us: the (Paulhanian) stance of the prisoner in love, the Patti Hearst syndrome, even.

THE SINCERE TYPES

Emblematic figures: Ingrid Bergman, Deborah Kerr.

Place of origin: Northern lands.

Nature: Cary Grant confessed to Deborah Kerr: 'I loved you at first sight because I knew you were sincere' (*An Affair to Remember*). Sincerity, instantly revealed at the heart of meetings and conversations, accelerates or even short-circuits the course of feelings — love at first sight is compelling. The impact of sincerity is not measured by a lack of hypocrisy or secrecy. These sincere types are indeed capable of lying, acting and evading, because their sincerity goes beyond their confessions, to the point of jeopardizing their chances of love (i.e. Deborah Kerr's sacrificial decline in *An Affair to Remember*). Everything is there, making all future pretence or silences obsolete, disguising the denial of words with inanity,

within *the expression*. This expression makes the most secret movements of one's soul immediately readable. Unlike the helpless types (such as Joan Fontaine) or the transparent ones (Gene Tierney, etc.), we cannot picture them in their youth. In short, they are mature women *par excellence*, as brave as little soldiers. Paradox: the embodiment of sincerity, in spite of all, they are the great actresses of romantic comedies, which means that everything is calculated (facial expressions, compromises, clumsiness and seduction). A sincere comedy is not a matter of timing, of misunderstandings or of the (anticipated) outcome of its charm. It is rather a way of putting the end before the beginning; of rejecting the tempo of the seducer as he savors every last morsel of his conquest, and the imminence of the moment that the woman 'surrenders,' thereby confessing to him — sincerely — that it's not worth it, because love *has already been gambled away*. The wisdom and the impatience in this statement, though not cruel, clearly come from the theatre (*Elena and Her Men*). The generosity of how they play makes them capable of great compassion — more than any other type of woman. 'For deep mercy is like rain: it keeps falling back onto the earth from which it came, and is a blessing for the fields.' (Rilke). Their (expressive) sincerity reaches its peak in their act of self-s forsaking, and they also leave their husbands (*Europe 51*, *Tea and Sympathy*) to devote themselves to helping others.

Distinguishing characteristics: they know when to stop talking so they can listen better (Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant's mother in *An Affair to Remember*, Ingrid Bergman and Giulietta Massina in *Europe 51*).

Prohibited: playing virtuous women who choose to embark on an extramarital affair (*The Grass Is Greener*).

Suggestions: their husband should die for love (*La Princesse de Clèves*).

Clues: we shouldn't forget (in Japanese film) about Kogure Michiyo, the eldest sibling in *A Geisha* (Mizoguchi).

What they ask of us: to understand the powerful seduction exerted by domestic virtue. Long live the conjugal *amour fou*!

THE TRANSPARENT TYPES

Emblematic figure: Gene Tierney.

Place of origin: Boreal regions.

Nature: 'I am passionate about her as one might be about a



Gene Tierney in *Leave Her to Heaven*
(John M. Stahl, 1945)

species of flower.' (Marcel Proust) They are not virtuous, only discreet, and they are constantly besieged by lapses of memory. When Gene Tierney leaves a fateful clock to its ticking (*Laura*), or the cries of a drowning man desperately calling her for help (*Leave Her to Heaven*), the echoes of a sonata from an obsessive portrait (*Dragonwyck*), or a laugh (Rex Harrison's) that is lost in the past (*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*) — her face always seems to reflect fake questions. Always 'excessive,' as if the movie was uninterested in her; it simply lets her be, as it opens the doors of the story, one by one, so that no incident spoils the plot. This bullet-proof naïveté returns light, our gazes and the men's kisses to their origins, where evil does not yet exist. These transparent types are not women, they are just young girls or fake mature women (*Advise & Consent*) who admirably withstand the artificial cosmetics of ageing (*Heaven Can Wait*) in order to better attain their reward: to turn into a ghost, to love what we become, and to love ghosts (*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*). To surrender to the charms of eternity — isn't that the illusion that consecrates them to the contemplative curiosity of the audience?

Prohibited: walking hypnotized along windowsills, unless this has been prescribed by Dr Korvo (*Whirlpool*) — the diabolical doctor who scrupulously applies the principle of 'kill or cure.'

Suggestions: play the role of Madame de La Chanterie, a heroine whose sudden clemency led her to utter the following Kleistian quote to the old lawyer, who is eventually forgiven: 'Angels get their revenge, too' (Balzac, *L'envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine*).

Distinguishing characteristics: they offer men (Don Ameche) and specters (Rex Harrison) the chance to become immortal.

Clues: a child-like voice that considers itself to be cured from failed marriages by psychiatric shock therapy (read Gene Tierney's autobiography, *Self-Portrait*).

What they ask of us: ask JFK.

THE DETERMINED TYPES

Emblematic figures: Hawksian actresses, Anne Bancroft (*7 Women*).

Place of origin: the Olympic Games of modern life.

Nature: these are the best women for *making decisions*. And these dynamic decisions about love (in Hawks), or moral, final ones (in Ford) are inseparable from physical action. If choosing which side to be on or what to do next is all done instantly, it's because in their world, uncertainty does not and cannot exist. If the female doctor in *7 Women*, made up like an oriental doll, meets the tragic fate of the Mizoguchian heroines when she sacrifices herself, it is for the purpose of better accentuating a fundamental difference: to reject any 'feminine condition.' Their kind of heroism is different to that of other women, but above all, it is not inexorably determined. Loneliness is safe — and that includes solidarity. The woman who sacrifices herself in the last Ford movie also has to break the walls of silence that imprison another girl in *The Miracle Worker*. Hawksian actresses (Paula Prentiss, Katharine Hepburn, Gail Hire, Elsa Martinelli, Carole Lombard, Ann Sheridan and Rosalind Russell) can only be loved all together, because the actions of one produce a reaction from another, because the emergence of one 'example' implies the existence of the others. A Hawksian actress is a *prototype* who faces nothing but masculine indifference. In any case, it is not a 'war of the sexes,' but an intransigence that is as futile as it is demanding: to make her male counterpart *lose his temper* (the unacknowledged aim of all Hawksian actresses). They love to sink down onto couches, sneak into rooms illicitly and unleash wild beasts, and they walk and talk as if they were leaping hurdles. 'My dear Volgelstein, she's the latest, freshest fruit of our great modern evolution: she's the self-made girl!' (Henry James). What will their victory be? Officially, a loving one, and *the man will fall into their arms*; unofficially, a clinical one, and *he will return to childhood*. After having finally discovered the elixir of youth, the much dreamed-of formula, Dr Fulton utters these decisive words: 'How can one survive one's own childhood?' (*Monkey Business*) Remember Cary Grant in *Bringing up Baby*, *I Was a Male War Bride* and *Monkey Business*, and Rock Hudson in *Man's Favorite Sport?* Why should seduction take such a strange form? The answer seems clear: for women, love is simply the chance to have *the luxury of a brief pause*. As so often happens in Hawks's films, they are in fact stories of movement, dynamics, mobility and rhythm. Hawksian heroines could not possibly manage to keep up that tempo for the entire length of a movie without a brief masculine pause, in which they conquer the heart of some boorish, regressive, sublimely soft klutz, someone like Rock Hudson or John Gavin. That is why we don't believe that the



Anne Bancroft in *7 Women* (John Ford, 1966)

gynaecium represents that unfathomable promised land. Isn't it much nicer to live like they do here, in a world where no one can follow you, a world that keeps backing off from you, a world that is behindhand or even (actually) *backward*? The world of the Hawksian actresses is a world that is backward because of their men, all men; because of their scatterbrained wise men, their penniless detectives, their bumbling cowboys, their Cornelian aviators, their sappy sailors, their irritated hunters, their journalists rushing hither and thither, their shy athletes, their betrayed pharaohs and their blind soldiers. And in this world you should always kill two birds with one stone: seduce them for a while, and then scare them into becoming less backward.

Distinguishing characteristics: they love to puncture men's pompousness, with their deep voices (Lauren Bacall, Paula Prentiss) or their uniform (Dr Cartwright in *7 Women*).

Prohibited: appearing naked on screen. The elegance of their bony forms comes from the fact that they *bear* clothing and hectic dialogue. Remove their clothes and all you'll have left is the structure.

Suggestions: the role of Kleist's Penthesilea for Anne Bancroft, and Stendhalian heroines (Mathilde de La Mole, Countess Sanseverina, the Duchess of Palliano, etc.) for Hawks's actresses.

Clues: they have certainly proved inspirational — in the US, Michelle Pfeiffer, Linda Fiorentino, Jamie Lee Curtis and Melanie Griffith are all ready to replace them. In France, we hope that Marianne Denicourt succeeds in getting rid of her 'bourgeois-ness' and Dominique Reymond her 'redneck-ness.'

What they ask of us: to anticipate their actions so that we can — at least once — be in synch with them (mission impossible).

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Cinema and its actors

García Figar

Cinema has been hijacked by its actors. Successfully and gloriously, in their opinion. And who are we to disabuse them of this idea? On the one hand, we find actors who have been lured into movie-making by the sacred hunger of self-interest, people who refuse to resign themselves to financial mediocrity, and even less so to their unfitness for work. Cinema, they think, will meet their humblest ambitions. Any 'smart guy' can aspire to a role in it! It's a good business that requires little work and can also be fun, in fact. Which Spaniard doesn't think himself willing and able to perform a heroic act? However, this tendency (which is racial in its origins) can easily fail if it is badly planned or organized.

But the supposed 'stars' (there are so few of them shining in the heavens of film-making!) possess another, higher and more fragile purpose: that of celebrity. It must be so exciting to see oneself on the big screen: either well-dressed or badly undressed, invited out, flattered, praised, in love and speaking in their own voice, listening to themselves and hearing, amongst the crowd, their first name or a business pseudonym. Publicity binges often give birth to so many other kinds of binges.

Even so, greedy or exhibitionist attempts in this direction have not always been feasible in the real world (and the latter even less so than the former). Being a cinema actor, a star, is not about appearing in showbiz, comedy or drama to act out a role, an idea or a human being. It's about knowing how to portray them, in their entirety; living the way they live, just as their creator presents them, just as they were themselves. Not long ago we saw on screen a Don Juan Tenorio who was played as an amusing puppeteer, and a Doña Inés portrayed as a lady who was even stuffier and more frivolous than the busybodies from *Monipodio*. Tirso de Molina would have never recognized them as his own creations, nor would have Zorrilla have acknowledged them as his muse's adoptive children. If an action is only executed out of self-interest, it will never achieve perfection, because its foundations have already been ruined. Whenever any action is preceded by attempts at exhibitionism, it will simply turn out as exaggeration, mannerism and muscular tension — something that makes any performance unattractive.

Any actor, any star, should adopt the phrase 'forget yourself' as his motto for acting; that is to say, impersonality. While it is true that personal characteristics should be used to help play the role, the 'self' should not be visible; it must be hidden and forgotten, as it is the worst enemy of acting. There is no doubt that this total stripping of the self requires specific personal conditions, such as a complete knowledge of oneself, an accurate, intuitive sense of the role, the historical period, the atmosphere, behavior and the corresponding ability to embody all this within oneself as a whole. And not just as a superficial costume, but rather as a substance that is absorbed and brought to life. Failing to excel in all these areas will only lead actors into vulgarity, absurdity and ridiculousness.

The 'embodiment and re-embodiment' of roles requires a great deal of study, observation and experience. The actor must immerse himself in the environment where the actual characters exist. And if this environment no longer exists, then the actor should explore others that most closely resemble it, and which preserve most of its features. The 'ways of being' of the old aristocrats are not quite like those of the 'new rich.' There is no comparison. 'Military psychology' has essential differences — it is achieved through a twofold discipline: inner and outer. This discipline subordinates the person's own will to someone else's, and toughens up the physique, lending agility and looseness to all its movements and cadenced rhythms. The military man is not his uniform or his rank, he is defined by a peculiar 'behavior' that is exclusive to a certain social status. What's more, many military families possess a rich vein of correctness, nobility, chivalry and honor, one which even includes women and children. Playing the part of a military man means becoming a soldier, absorbing 'military behavior' so deeply that it comes to constitute another self. How many actors have considered that? Many of them just put on the costume and think that they've achieved their aim. That is why most of the soldiers we see on screen are mere caricatures or masks: they represent all the worst of the profession but none of the best. And the same must be said about playing teachers, priests and solicitors. In such a liberal age, we have never known any roles better for theatrical and cinema performance than

those of Rabelais or Galdós. The image of the 'popular' actor is falsified in its very conception, and it has been butchered of its tiniest details because it has been inspired by a character that is least representative of the 'popular' role: the pure-bred show-off. Are we to deny the 'popular' actor his psychology, based on tradition, the wisdom of the time, the long-established experience and the spiritual elevation that has lain at the bottom of his soul for centuries?

A good actor is acknowledged because of his 'capacity for absorption,' an intense perfection that is achieved by few. The immense majority of them never 'get into' their role, instead they simply play it superficially. This flaw becomes clear in the metamorphosis that the actor undergoes during the course of the scene. In many ways, the actor will find himself changing, different, and the audience will also notice this, thinking that they are watching various characters, but played by only one actor.

And so, should we create 'drama schools'? Actors are not taught, nor can they be improvised. An actor is born an actor; he comes into the world possessing the basic talents required for the stage. But those talents are like rough diamonds: they need to be polished and shaped.

First, they must be searched for, and once they've been found, they should be taken to the 'drama school' to be shaped and polished. This polishing, however, is not an experience, or a kind of gymnastics — it's work, methodical, hard but flexible work on those innate talents, forcing them to offer their best. Don't singers also have to do undergo such methodical training, involving all manner of hardship and privations?

A good actor should be a decent type, good-looking, with perfect limbs, a harmonious body, graceful in his movements and flexible, with a clear, well-modulated voice, correct, disciplined, and above all entirely natural. He should possess good manners and tact in large amounts. He should be sensitive but not hysterical, vehement but not reckless, emotive but not lachrymose, brave but not arrogant, composed but not cowardly, loving but not foolish, pensive but not scheming, prompt but not hasty, and relaxed but never too laid-back.

I admit that some people will not accept my opinions as I write this. Because instead of portraying perfect men, isn't drama all about despicable, weird, crazy, ugly men? Like real men are? But the ones meant to play them shouldn't be like that, because they would not make the cut. A real character might be flawed, morally or physically, but the imitation shouldn't be, because it is fictive, and fiction should seek perfection. Acting and performance require perfect flaws, which in turn require a perfect balance between extreme exaggeration and a fearful

taciturnity. Just because the drunk speaks dully, vaguely and falteringly, should the actor do the same? If that were the case, cinema would be ideal for the deaf and the hard of hearing. The viewer must understand every word clearly, with the right intonation, and every syllable comprehensible. There are some actors who can do perfect drunk voices — even though they are faked — and if they keep on doing movies, they'll probably end up having to get treatment for their vocal cords. The public should receive perfection within the limits of performance. Can Don Juan Tenorio be portrayed as an ugly man, with buck teeth, skinny legs, and a shrill, feminine voice? That's what we saw in one movie about Don Juan Tenorio. And a man with buck teeth and skinny legs can't make a woman fall in love with him, nor can a man with a shrill, feminine voice swear grand oaths or perform great exploits (even if they might be reprehensible in nature). Thus, 'ugly' or physically flawed men with a poor stage presence should simply not work in the movies. That is my recommendation.

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Cinem Asking the directors: What foreign actor's personality corresponds to...?

Josefina de la Torre



Tony Román

At the offices of Hércules Films. Tony Román, director of the film *Escuadrilla*, greets me warmly. He is heavily involved in preparations for a new film he's going to direct, also for Hércules Films, entitled *Boda en el infierno*. Since I wouldn't like to steal another single minute of his precious time, I take the straightforward approach:

"Tell me, Tony: which foreign gentleman do you reckon Alfredo Mayo's personality is most similar to?"

He replies without hesitation.

"Even though, doubtlessly, every actor has his own defined personality, and Mayo has this strongly, I think his is very much like that of Charles Boyer and Jean Gabin... Naturally, on his side, he has the gift of youth."

He is silent for a moment.

"You'll notice that both actors I've mentioned are French... And the thing is that I don't see Alfredo Mayo as any American gentleman. Do you?"

But since I'm only seeking his opinion, I just smile gratefully.



MAROTO AFIRMA QUE, EN SU TRABAJO, HAY CIERTA SEMEJANZA ENTRE RICARDO MERINO Y CHARLES BOYER

Edgar Neville

I ask him about Rafael Rivelles.

“Which foreign actor do you think his personality is most similar to?”

He replies quickly:

“None. Rafael is only like himself. Moreover, he can do what other actors can't. Someday we'll see.”

Edgar's statements are categorical. He then reflects for a few seconds.

“Maybe”, he adds, “he is a little like Leslie Howard... but I'm not sure.”

José Luis Sáenz de Heredia

The maker of the film *Raza* answers my question.

“Luis Arroyo's closest physical counterpart is the rather forgotten ‘Buddy’ Rogers from the Yankee big screen. But the only resemblance I can see is physical.”

“...?”

“There is no affinity between the two actors' personalities. I mean, I don't think there is one, because, strange as it might sound, I haven't seen any films starring Luis Arroyo.”

“How come?” I ask curiously. I remind him that almost all the films starring Luis have been directed by him.

“It is precisely that daily collaboration that makes it impossible for me to achieve that innocent point of view of the mere spectator. That's why I cannot establish a parallel between the two personalities. However, it does allow me to explore all the possibilities that this guy can offer as an actor. He emerged into the world of cinema with the finest complement to his great qualities: a truly optimistic passion for cinema as a form of art.”

Luis Marquina

A phone call: “Tomorrow, 12 pm, at Cifesa.” Here comes the director of *Torbellino*, just in time. I bring up the name of Manuel Luna.

“Manolo Luna? I think his personality could be compared to that of Willie Birgel, the famous German actor. I don't mean they look

alike, but rather the way they act.”

He has to answer the phone, but he's back a few seconds later.

“Luna is an excellent actor: flexible and understated. Contrary to some people's opinion, I honestly believe that Manolo's characteristic role is not as the ‘traitor,’ but as the sedate, balanced, reasonable gentleman.”

Eduardo García Maroto

We talk on the phone, because there is no way to get to see Eduardo Maroto face to face, what with the editing of *Raza... Oro vil...* and the preparations for a new film in Ballesteros... At first, he tries to avoid answering. He's too modest.

“Well... Ricardo Merino... looks like Ricardo Merino.”

“What about the way he works?”

“With regard to the way he works, I find a certain resemblance with the great French actor Charles Boyer.”

I ask Maroto for a photo of him to illustrate this article. He tries to refuse. In the end, he says:

“I don't want you to think badly of me, so I'll send you what you ask. You'll see that it's terrible. I have this bad habit of wearing sunglasses during filmmaking, so when I'm seen in magazines, I resemble a blind lottery ticket seller.”

Eusebio Fernández Ardavín

He meets me at the offices of Suevia Films. Every minute of his time is precious, because he is overseeing the new film he is making for this company. He's absorbed by his job, but that's no excuse not to give me a warm welcome.

“I think there's a similarity between Fernández de Córdoba and Spencer Tracy. That, at least, is what I've seen in *Unos pasos de mujer*, a film we've just made together. I dare say he is similar not only as a performer, there's also a physical resemblance to that great actor of the American big screen.



Adolfo Aznar

The director of *Todo por ellas* hesitates a bit before answering.

“My answer regarding Luis de Arnedillo might even surprise him. A director penetrates his artistes' psychology more deeply than their own relatives or friends can do.

I listen closely.

“Arnedillo, who possesses what is probably the most beautiful male voice in our cinema, is a man who changes enormously when he laughs or even just smiles. Classifying him as a romantic gentleman or a ‘villain’ — the two extremes of absolute *seriousness* in performance — that would be a terrible mistake...”

“...?”

“He should be given roles as an ‘*homme fatale*’ — excuse the expression — a man who is relaxed and dangerously charming for women. His personality will then come out strongly. Roles in which he plays an elegant, cynical, mundane sceptic. Something like the roles played by the famous William Powell. A good example of this is the scene of the inn in Flanders, in *El milagro del Cristo de la Vega*, in which Arnedillo appears as an undeniable *wunderkind*, very friendly and with great poise.”



Aznar is in no doubt:

“I believe that when he is finally given a role suited to his appearance and nature, this good-looking gentleman will easily achieve his ultimate triumph.”

José López Rubio

I enter his office at Ulargui, and in my honor, he turns on the heater. Something I very much appreciate.

“It’s always difficult to find a double for any actor”, he begins, “because any resemblance undermines the personality of one of the two: the one who resembles *the other*. And in any kind of art, whoever resembles anyone else...”

“Even so...”

“Although I know Julio Peña like the palm of my hand, it would be hard to find his counterpart. Let me think...”

I respect his silence with great curiosity.

“In his appearance, and artistically speaking, I would say maybe a mixture between Robert Montgomery and Phillips Holmes, I think...”

Julio Fleischner

It is on the actual set at Roptence, between scenes from *¡Qué contenta estoy!*, that I finally get Julio Fleischner to answer my question. He is visibly and charmingly patient. This is the only way I can get his opinion.

“Tony d’Algy?” he asks, while watching the actor, who is walking across the set. “His personality could be compared to that of Clive Brook and, at the same time, Melvyn Douglas. But it would be very difficult to find any similarity with an actor with such a remarkable personality.”

“...?”

“I’ve worked with him on a couple of movies. I love his work. Tony is a wonderful ‘cinema actor.’ That is, without doubt, the most difficult variety in the acting profession. He even acknowledges the camera so well that he only needs a few shots.”

The director’s assistant approaches.

“The dialogue’s ready.”

And Julio Fleischner, considering our conversation to be over, allows me to stay on in a corner, so I can watch them film the scene.

José Busch

I am told that I can find the director of *Para ti es el mundo* at a swish bar. So off I go. Affirmative. He quickly agrees to my request and soon we’re sitting at a table, face to face.

“Antonio Casal... I have honestly never thought about that. But I have it. No doubt. Antonio is a gentleman and has a very photogenic face. Even so, he’s strongest in comedic roles. Don’t you think he embodies Cary Grant’s character perfectly?”

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Madrid: 28th December, 1941.

GODART, Caroline. *The Dimensions of Difference: Space, Time and Bodies in Women's Cinema and Continental Philosophy*.

Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, London, 2016, 120 pp.

Fang Qi

Luce Irigaray is a theorist who is quoted time and again in feminist literature on cinema, though oddly enough, very few of those texts approach her theories as a consistent foundation from which to apply cinematographic analysis. Caroline Godart's book *The Dimensions of Difference: Space, Time and Bodies in Women's Cinema and Continental Philosophy* (2016), has come along in a timely fashion to fill that gap.

In her book, Godart examines four important movies directed by women — *The Piano* (1993), by Jane Campion, *Beau Travail* (1999) and *Trouble Every Day* (2001) by Claire Denis, and *The Holy Girl* (*La niña santa*, 2004) by Lucrecia Martel. As a philosophical framework, the author makes use of an ingenious combination of Irigaray's observations on sexual differences, and several points of agreement with other philosophers such as Bergson, Deleuze and Nietzsche.

Godart commences her argument using the two models of heterosexual encounters proposed by Irigaray. In the phallogocentric model, the space between a man and a woman is erased, and she ends up being possessed by him through a denial of her own space. In the model that recognizes sexual difference, meanwhile, the woman's singularity is preserved while desire takes place in the meeting between the two.

This constitutes the starting point for one of the concepts that the author employs as a benchmark throughout the entire book: the concept of 'interval' as proposed by Irigaray. According to Irigaray, this interval refers to a distance that protects the integrity of both parties in a heterosexual relationship. However, this interval tends to disappear if these parties agree to meet in an intimacy. Using Irigaray's terms, Godart explains that desire is an opening-up to the other. But at the same time, it is a distance maintained so that the uniqueness of each person

is preserved, thereby preventing possession by the other. Thus Irigaray is proposing a new form of heterosexual relationship that consists, essentially, of removing the subjugation to the other. In the temporal space of the interval, different possibilities emerge, and one of these is the autonomous femaleness that exists for itself. As a result of all of the above, the book, by using Irigaray's notion in cinematographic analysis, introduces a valuable source of knowledge for feminist cinema criticism.

The movies examined in the book constantly refer to this theoretical starting point. Female directors 'coincidentally' incline toward a technique for filming female figures that uses close-ups marked by a 'tactile visuality' (a closeness that visualizes a texture susceptible to touch) while they are granted a distance that is reserved through their silence and the construction of their own inner spaces. As a consequence of this style of filming, a typology emerges of a desirable, complete woman who resists objectification by the male gaze. The women's cinema exemplified in this book, rather than encouraging identification with its characters, mainly converses with the viewer's intuition — as understood in Bergsonian terms. Perhaps as a result of the special sensibility of their directors, these movies resort to such senses as hearing and touch — in contrast with those approaches that appeal solely to the sense of vision as the fundamental source of knowledge in the rigid regime of the heterosexual male gaze. This frequent preference by these directors is combined with an ambiguous narrative that encourages the emergence of an openness towards the other, towards the feminine.

Godart confirms the existence of a reverse gaze that is particularly notable in the films of Claire Denis. In her case, the director's observance of male figures in vigorous movement should not be interpreted as a gaze that imposes power,

but rather as another route, one of many, taken as a sexual difference by the director towards strangeness and otherness — that is, her on-screen male characters. The book perceptively suggests that what lies behind this female approach is wonder. According to Descartes, the wonder that comes from a new discovery and the feeling of surprise it generates is what leads to the first of all passions. Irigaray, meanwhile, takes this Cartesian idea and grants wonder a creative affection based on recognizing that difference is something that is constructive for new relationships. According to Godart, this is the relationship between the director and her characters. There is still a distance between the director or the audience and the mysterious other — the characters on screen. And that singularity of the other refuses to be a mere erotized object of the gaze. This distance becomes specified by the formal techniques that are used: blank stares (discordance between the gaze and its object), the interrupting of cause-effect, abnormal spaces and elliptical editing. Everything leads to the feeling that it is impossible to reach the other. The gaze of the director towards her male characters is a neutral one, sympathetic and without judgement, respecting all their singularities in order to sensitize their interior. She admires them just as they are, in their own everyday worlds, using the interval of sexual difference.

The book insists on the idea of time as a significant element for establishing the integrity of each trajectory, represented by its characters in that 'image of time.' The duration of that time indicates alterity and the difference between single entities, open to change in an ever-fluid process. It is thus the prior condition for eliminating possession between lovers. Lovers have their own time in which their singularities and their intimate and sensual encounters can develop. When viewers are exposed to the duration of their movies, the directors mentioned in this book are promoting the idea of the capacity for free relationships without any hierarchization.

The singularity, inner complexity and legitimate existence of each character are all justified in the movies mentioned in the book, even with regard to sexual violence. Godart observes how frequently sexual violence appears in these movies, unlike in Irigaray's approach. While Irigaray conceives the idea of a relationship that is free from all phallogentric repression, where mutual respect for sexual difference between a man and a woman can lead to equality, directors do not aim to solve the tension between these two encounter tendencies in their cinematographic worlds. Their movies show explicit sexual violence, but they do not condemn its brutality. As the book explains clearly, all the above-mentioned movies invite the viewer to freely interpret the characters: they are not classified within the typical dualities of classic cinema — goodie or

baddie, pretty or ugly, hero or villain, etc. Rather, they are immersed in an all-too-human ambiguity and contradictions. Female figures, often silent or sparing with words during the movie, reflect the gaze of the filmmakers: a cold, unjudging observation of the ferocity that is inherent in desire — for desire is indeed inexpressible. It seems as if the only option we have left as viewers is to surrender to the constant changes and irreconcilable forces of a life guided by intuition — in contrast with the cinematographic model of men, ruled by action and knowledge. And here lies the pleasure of this kind of cinema. Together with these acute observations, Caroline Godart's book opens up revolutionary possibilities for overcoming a rigid view of the world based on fixed categories and meanings.

BRADATAN, Costica; UNGUREANU, Camil (eds.) Cinema and Sacrifice.

Routledge, London, 2016, 176 pp.

Rebecca Anne Peters

When looking up the definition of *sacrifice*, it can be a bit jarring to see, that more often than not, the first definition of the word listed is the more literal, less commonly used or contemplated meaning — the offering of a life, especially to a deity. In our everyday usage, the second, more prevalent meaning instead encompasses the notion of giving something up. However, some middle ground can also be found, such as the loss of life in pursuit of political or personal aim, without religious context.

This tension between a more secular understanding of the word *sacrifice*, and the religiously significant meaning creates a sense of discord throughout *Cinema and Sacrifice*. The notion of sacrifice, even of life, within the secular and the religious sense is a key underlying debate throughout the essays included in the book. As Bradatan points out in his introductory chapter, ‘Sacrifices can please the gods and bring forgiveness to humans; they can pacify enemies and make friends; they can solve crises, heal collective traumas, make or remake communal bonds’ (2014: 2).

These complex and highly varied viewpoints surrounding the concept of sacrifice are interrogated through filmic selections. Each chapter is authored by a different academic, sometimes coming from theoretically distant vantage points. Collectively, the book explores divergent aspects of sacrifice through the medium of cinematography; the diverse group of texts creates a rich and intricate discussion with the films being analyzed as well as between the texts themselves. The most interesting tension between the essays emerges as they shift from more politically focused contributions towards more overtly theologically grounded interpretations of sacrifice. The loom of religion never fully leaves the topic. Every discussion of the concept, even in the secular sense, holds a reference back to the religious, in one way or another.

This reminder of the underlying, more historic sense of sacrifice is brought up a number of times throughout the first half of the book, even though it is made up of texts approaching the topic from the societal sphere, or *this world*. The notion of this looming of religion or myth comes through prominently in Bargu’s essay on *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, 2008). He writes,

‘For Horkheimer and Adorno, Odysseus’ adventures, and especially his encounter with the Sirens, can be read as a formative moment for the constitution of the modern subject because they point to the entanglement of myth and reason: myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment reverts to myth’ (2014: 10).

This circular nature, and reverting back to myth, mirrors the constant tug of religion in the discussion of sacrifice throughout the book.

Each chapter apart from one (the last) considers a film or small group of films, and the concept of sacrifice in relation to that filmic work. They do not aim to come to a consensus on the use or means of understanding the representation of sacrifice within film, but instead each author approaches their filmic selection individually, through the framework set out by the film itself. Then, instead of trying to find common ground, the texts intentionally force the reader into different layers or vantage points regarding the centralizing combination of cinema and sacrifice. The final essay departs from its predecessors by focusing on the individual theoretical viewpoint of Lyotard (drawn from four key texts of his work), offering another angle from which to understand sacrifice and its relation to cinema.

The films themselves range from blockbuster hits, like *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel

Gibson, 2004) or *Melancholia* (Lars von Trier, 2011), to films that are much less well known, some employing non-actors. Each example of sacrifice is individual and holds little connection to the other films analyzed throughout the book. But why should they? A main assertion of the collection is that there are many types of sacrifice, and each needs to be approached from the angle most appropriate to the filmic case.

While it might seem that such a varied group of essays would struggle to find continuity as a whole, the strength of the collection is found in the two major theoretical responses presented considering sacrifice in film (the social or political and the theological). The texts work their way from an acknowledged distance in regards to the religious understanding of sacrifice, towards an acceptance of this vantage point, even if at times retaining the theological understanding and rejecting the traditional religious narratives (as is the case in the penultimate chapter authored by Bradatan). As well, the texts hold continuity in their treatment of the films; each uses the film itself as the starting point and impetus for the theory discussed, not the other way around.

One important aspect of the conversation that the collection fails to address however is a historic overview of the many

manifestations of sacrifice within the entirety of film history. While individual essays touch on the issue in relation to the particular film that they are analyzing, or when delving into the theoretical framework from which they are approaching a particular film, none offer a large-scale historical vantage point. Though the introductory text suggests that one of the project's aims is to fill a gap in the comprehensive study of the topic of sacrifice within cinema, it is unfair to expect a series of texts to accomplish what would be difficult to adequately address in an entire book approaching just a historic overview of the topic. Moreover, the aim is not a historical perspective, but to look at the many angles and approaches within this interdisciplinary topic.

First published as a special edition of *Angelaki: journal of the theoretical humanities*, in 2014, this collection of essays will be of specific interest to readers of film studies as well as theology. Though more broadly, it reaches into media studies in a wider sense and also holds interest for the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics (especially biopolitics), popular culture, and cultural studies. The interdisciplinary nature of this book is one of its strongest characteristics; it does not constrain itself to approach its topic of sacrifice within cinema from a single vantage point.

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