

## FILMING THE OTHER IN THE CINEMA OF JOAQUIM JORDÀ

Fran Benavente

[fran.benavente@upf.edu](mailto:fran.benavente@upf.edu)

Glòria Salvadó

[gloria.salvado@upf.edu](mailto:gloria.salvado@upf.edu)

---

### SUMMARY

**T**he article studies in depth the filmic legacy of Joaquim Jordà through its essential dialectics: reality and fiction, word and representation, character and storyline, identity and otherness... Using the figure of mirror as an identitary threshold the authors explore the cinematic, ideological and thematic devices that have turned Jordà's work into a substantial and differential testimony of the contradictions involved in the filmic construction of the other: arouse, model and question the oral discourse in order to let the desired narration emerge.

### KEY WORDS

Documentary, Film essay, Mirror, Identity, Joaquim Jordà, Barcelona, Lewis Carroll, Fiction, Reality, Threshold, Cinema, Literature, Fantasy, Mental illness, Dream, Narrative structure, The Other, Chat, Oral discourse, Word, Representation, Political dialectics, History, Resistance, Difference

## ARTICLE

### Through the looking glass

From a roof in Barcelona's Eixample, microphone in hand, Joaquim Jordà turns to the camera and announces "*we are here to make a film essay*". *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»* (1969) was only to be a preparatory film-sketch for a later adaptation of the novel by Maria Aurèlia Capmany, but became a film that edifies the fundamental theoretical lines of the cinema of Joaquim Jordà. Following the short documentary *Día de los muertos* (1960), codirected with Julián Marcos, and the fictional experiment, codirected with Jacinto Esteva, *Dante no es únicamente severo* (1967), Jordà deals with the first film in which he openly exposes the cinematographic, ideological and thematic devices that would become key in his work. Therefore, *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»* is in effect a film essay, as he himself announces in the prologue of the film, but in addition to being a piece that converses and considers literature, it is a film that reflects on the cinema of Joaquim Jordà.

Panning from right to left leaves the table where Jordà was sitting seconds before and the camera follows the buildings and plots that can be made out from Maria Aurèlia Capmany's flat. The camera again finds the director, who is reading a short summary of the life of the writer who appears on the back cover of *Un lloc entre els morts* –a book which becomes the epicentre of the film–, it leaves him and heads towards a window through which Capmany can be seen typing. The windowpane makes a strange reflection, as if it was a mirror. The vague figures of the cameraman and of Jordà become caught in this image. "[...] the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist. In another moment, Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room."<sup>1</sup> The next shot shows Maria Aurèlia Capmany in an identical position. The image is the same but the camera is indoors. Jordà has found an opening through which to enter the universe of the mirror.

---

<sup>1</sup> CARROLL, Lewis. *Alícia en el país de las maravillas. A través del espejo*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra 2006, p. 244.

The fleeting appearance of the cover of the book *The annotated Alice*<sup>2</sup>, while Capmany explains how she has structured her novel, shows the relationship that this 52 minute documentary –and, by extension, Jordà's cinema– establishes with Lewis Carroll's universe. Habitually, *Més enllà del mirall* (2006) is the film by Joaquim Jordà that is related with Carroll's tale of 1871, *Through the looking glass*. But already in *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»*, Jordà had shown an interest in working with cinematographical mechanisms (narratives, mise en scène,...) focusing on the idea of "crossing the mirror", that is to say, being able to get into another world, where everything is back-to-front, where the systems of interpreting the reality that the audience knows become deactivated, obsolete. Hence, throughout *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»*, Jordà articulates a play on mirrors between reality and fiction that evolves constantly. Based on the misunderstanding brought about by Capmany's tale, which is presented as the biography of a real character when in fact it is a novel, Jordà discovers different universes that oscillate between the here –reality– and the beyond the mirror: the world symmetrical to the real world, but inverted due to its reflection; therefore, almost equal, but organised the other way around. The writer presents Jeroni Campdepadrós as a historical personality of Catalan literature. Based on reflections of Catalan society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is an inexistent testimony of an epoch and of a country. Capmany reproduces the image of a reality in her novel and reveals that it is fiction when Jordà asks her to lay all her cards on the table after the camera has shown the distorted double of the writer in a painting which is hung on the wall. From one mirroring to another.

Another manifestation of the universe of the mirror is the set of green toned images that dot Maria Aurèlia Capmany's oral story. They become the opening to a world of fantasy<sup>3</sup>, Alice's wonderland<sup>4</sup>, from where Jordà looks through his sarcastic camera, conscious of looking at us from behind the mirror. If Capmany's discourse moves constantly between reality and fiction, with the insertions of this domestic excerpt, the film includes another reflection of reality. Thus, *Maria Aurèlia Capmany*

---

<sup>2</sup> *The annotated Alice* is the edition commented by Martin Gardner of the two stories in which Alice is the protagonist: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the looking glass*. It is the book which deciphers all of its secrets: mathematical, of logic, linguistic, psychoanalytical, etc.

<sup>3</sup> And more so if we take into account that they were filmed in Formentera under the hallucinogenic effects of an acid; another way of distorting one's perception of reality.

<sup>4</sup> To this end, Capmany says of the protagonist of her novel: "*there was a world which he hadn't been shown [...] of brightness, pleasures, landscapes [...].*"

*parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»* seeks doors, openings<sup>5</sup>, to the other side of the mirror; it proposes means of access to this universe that is practically identical to the real universe, but is totally opposite, and which is, at the same time, symmetrical and asymmetrical.<sup>6</sup>

Another specular image which also belongs to Carroll's second tale of Alice is the chess game. Interpreted by scholars as a metaphor of life and, therefore, as a complement of the metaphor of the mirror, it now appears in the film on Capmany and it is a central element in *Més enllà del mirall*. This film takes the shape of a chess match and its protagonist, Esther Chumillas, is the white pawn that represents Alice in Carroll's tale. The match played in the film faithfully follows the movements the pieces make in the book, in which each new experience for Alice equals a movement of the pawn. The game starts at exactly the same point: the white and red figures are located like at the start of *Through the looking glass*; and it finishes in the same way: Alice (Esther Chumillas / the white pawn) is crowned queen and wins the game. The problem of the girl's alexia and agnosia are of secondary importance since she has achieved the personal and professional goals that she had set herself at the start of the film.<sup>7</sup> How to overcome the difficulties in reading and interpreting the world caused by these illnesses is one of the main aspects of the film. In a session with speech therapist Núria Torradas (always before the mirror, which helps to recover the coordination of movements, spatial orientation, etc.), Jordà and Chumillas practise recognising images and look for the noun that defines them. Again, the Carrollian universe emerges. Humpty Dumpty, the huge, arrogant egg in *Through the looking glass*, articulates a whole theory as to the uselessness of proper nouns –as they contain no informational value–, the importance of common nouns –since they appoint the main characteristics of the element to which they refer– and the random variable of their meaning. “–*When I use a word [...] it means what I want it to mean..., neither more nor less! –The question is [...] whether you can make words mean so many different things. –The question is [...] which is to be master... that's all!*”. Precisely, agnosia and alexia are capable of preventing the connection between signifier and signified; of turning a person into any other; of changing spectacles into a bicycle. As the title says, the film explains the reality from beyond the looking glass, from the territory that Jordà and

---

<sup>5</sup> “*The gateway to the universe of fantasy is not now a fall, but the action of going through the glass of a mirror to submerge oneself in a reflected world*”. GARRIDO, Manuel. “Introduction”. In: CARROLL, Lewis. *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> “*What most fascinated Carroll about the mirror image was, clearly, the register of asymmetries and lateral deviation phenomena, the fact that while certain figures –such as may be the case, for example, of a sphere– are symmetrical in their specular images and indistinguishable from them, others –such as happens to our hands and our bodies– show in that reflection a relationship of opposition.*” GARRIDO, Manuel. “Introduction”. In: CARROLL, Lewis. *Ditto*, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> “*The outcome of Through the looking glass [...] is also a cathartic explosion of liberating effect.*” GARRIDO, Manuel. “Introduction”. In: CARROLL, Lewis. *Ditto*, p. 37.

the other characters occupy as of the moment they are diagnosed with the diseases. "[...] *all my ideas about Looking-glass House... First, there's the room you can see through the glass – that's just the same as our drawing room, only the things go the other way.*"<sup>8</sup> The common characteristic to all of Jordà's films is the monstration of reality from an unusual perspective: the revelation of hidden aspects –despite being on view–, the situation of the audience always on the other side of the mirror to discover the reality of the reflected world, which it already knows but not in that way.

When Maria Aurèlia Capmany defines Jeroni Campdepdrós's creative system it seems as if she describes the cinematographic device that Joaquim Jordà uses over the years: "*to the extent that he is an imaginer and a creator of the reality he does not like, therefore that disguises it to make a completely new thing from it [...], he does not see nor wishes to see what he has before his eyes and so he invents. He invents a reality changing elements that come to him from this reality. Naturally, later he uses this invention to explain this reality.*" From this superposition of realities *Mones com la Becky* (1999) is born, which mixes the documentary day-to-day of the therapeutic community of Malgrat de Mar, the witnesses who speak on the figure of Egas Moniz, the fiction interpreted by João Pinto on the Portuguese medic, the actor's own experience as a patient, the theatre play on Moniz put on by the patients at the centre and the after effects of Joaquim Jordà's cerebral thrombosis. The mirrors are constantly multiplied, as happened in *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»*, and each tale generates another in such a way that it is impossible to keep track of which was the first tale. In this way a game of hierarchies takes place which is similar to the one by Carroll in the two tales of Alice in which dreamed dreamers appear. "*Which dreamed it?*"<sup>9</sup>

All of Jordà's work touches on the limits between reality and fiction or, in other words, between reality and reflection, if we bear in mind that Jordà is capable of turning the reflection into the true reality, his. The presence of the mirror is so important in his films that even Ramsés, one of the patients of the therapeutic community in Malgrat de Mar, states at the end of *Mones com la Becky*, with regard to the experience of having taken part in the film, that for him "*it has all been like a reflectant... It's like looking into the mirror but double [...] a photo and me... two mes and a photo... it's the mirror*". Not only has he seen himself projected on the TV monitor in one of the rooms of the centre along with his fellow patients, but the whole film projects characters in others. Thus, the patients are incapable of distinguishing their biographies from those of the characters they play in the theatre play. The device

---

<sup>8</sup> CARROLL, Lewis. *Ditto*, p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> Title of chapter XII of *Through the looking glass*.

of the reflection leads the audience to the statement that the Cheshire cat puts to Alice: "*We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad. [...] You must be or you wouldn't have come here*".<sup>10</sup> If Jordà is mad because he takes the same tablets as the patients, the patients are actors and the professional actor is a patient... is what the world that Jordà shows is the one that is found on the other side of the mirror, where everything can work back-to-front. The mirror is always a key element to conduct the transition: Pinto becomes Egas Moniz reflected in the mirror and the patients become the characters of the work at the mirrors where they make up. The transition from black-and-white to colour (when Jordà confesses to Ramsés that he takes similar tablets to the ones he takes) is analogous to the mirror dissolving and also works as a gateway between one world and the other (also in *Numax presenta...* distinctions of this kind occur between black-and-white and colour).

In *Mones com la Becky*, Joaquim Jordà explains his cerebral thrombosis and compares the sensation he had at that moment with the fall of the horse of Saul when he becomes Paul, collaborator of the apostles. "*it's like a bolt of lightning that goes through your brain and from that moment on everything changes and everything changed ...*" From then on, he has to decipher the reality that surrounds him in a completely new way. "*... and I noticed I saw the world in a very different way and most deficiently, moreover*". The citation of this passage from the bible in order to evoke the idea of the fall requires another metaphor in the context of this article: that of the fall by Alice through the rabbit hole that leads her to Wonderland, a disconcerting, completely new place.

Carroll's universe also penetrates in *De nens* (2003). Jordà counterpoints the main story with several, disconnected, theatrical scenes where he reflects, provokes and talks out loud of matters related with what is being spoken about (and not spoken about) at the trial, in the streets of the Raval, etc. In these scenes, one of the actresses reads fragments of letters written by Lewis Carroll addressed with great esteem and admiration to his (female) childhood friends. This correspondence and his love of taking artistic photographs of girls branded Carroll an eccentric character suspected of child molesting. In Jordà's film, his texts are a pretext for the irony and the criticism of social hypocrisy.

## The verb and the image

---

<sup>10</sup> CARROLL, Lewis. *Ditto*, p. 165-166.

Let us return to *Més enllà del mirall* and to the session of image recognition. Joaquim Jordà and Esther Chumillas try to identify the different drawings. They sometimes disagree. They dialogue as to the different possibilities and the mechanisms of perception employed. The audience can observe how this conversation gives rise, on the one hand, to the fundamental problems of identifying the figure, of the coordinates of the image, which basically affect the girl; and, on the other, to those of associating the figure with a concept, those of the word, which fall with Jordà. The phenomena of alexia and agnosia refer to one of the fundamental dialectics of this director's cinema: that of the word and the image. Also the situations of conversation and of confrontation of a character converge with the images of "the other" or of himself which, as we will see, are among the filmmaker's favourites in articulating the forms of his cinema.

*Més enllà del mirall* does not display a testimonial vocation but appears traversed by a conceptual dimension that reenacts and sums up the procedures that make up Joaquim Jordà's cinematographic world. Thus, in addition to the core discourse on the idea of normality and the "other" ways of seeing the world, it is a film that focuses basically on the brain. The altered brain, as a figure translated into the story in different ways, is present throughout Jordà's filmography from *Mones com la Becky*, through *De Nens*, where it appears as a geographical paradigm, a living brain-world-universe subjected to all kinds of surgical interventions (of social and urbanistic hygiene).<sup>11</sup>

This reminds us of what Isaki Lacuesta wrote in his contribution to the book by J.M. García Ferrer and Martí Rom.<sup>12</sup> Jordà's cinema is a mental cinema, of ideas, that attacks the vanity of retinal cinema fascinated by the pure powers of the image. That refers to the old idea of a Jordà unconcerned with the *mise en scène*, handing over the control of the camera and decisions regarding the frame to his technicians (as if the cinema exhausted the limits of the picture), only interested in the narrative structure and only paying attention to the characters. In order to solve this paradox some seek to specify the virtues of Jordà's cinema, pointing to his talent for the *mise en situation*.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the issue affects the dialectics and hierarchies between the image and the word that cinema rooted in the documentary and of political change, like Jordà's, cannot fail to reconsider.

---

<sup>11</sup> In both cases one of the forms of the brain will be set in the shape of a labyrinth. In *Mones com la Becky*, the film begins with a sequence of the medics-historians conversing in the labyrinth of Horta. In *De Nens*, the labyrinth is that of the city itself and of the plot itself, the chaotic world depicted in the film (hence the provisional title of the film of *KO's* – referring to "chaos").

<sup>12</sup> LACUESTA, Isaki. "Una apuesta contra Jordà". In: GARCÍA FERRER, J.M.; ROM, Martí. *Joaquim Jordà*. Barcelona: Associació d'Enginyers Industrials de Catalunya, 2001, p. 138-141.

<sup>13</sup> GUERRA, Carles. "Un cine de situación". In: *Nosferatu*, number 52, April 2006.

With regard to this, Jean-Louis Comolli, theorist and filmmaker, has pointed out the importance of an eavesdropping camera and has defined the idea of the capturing of images as the capturing of language<sup>14</sup>. This importance of listening poses questions as to who is filmed but also as to who films and is translated into the relationship between character and filmmaker, character and camera, character and the living and social environment. To this end, decisions as to the form of the interview and on whom it is filmed become truly relevant. In the same way that there are filmmakers with a keen eye, like Johann Van Der Keuken (who operates the camera in his films), or filmmakers with a keen ear, like Frederick Wiseman (sound operator in his films), Joaquim Jordà can be classified as a filmmaker-converser.<sup>15</sup> In cinema like his in which the word, especially the oral story, constructs the film and determines the image, it is essential to arouse, model, question the discourse of the person speaking in order to reveal the narration sought. Likewise, this word is irreparably linked to attitudes of the body, which we may call "the become-character" of the film. Sometimes, the words and the attitudes of the body do not correspond and enter a dialectic circuit. Likewise, the word is shaped in relation with a space inhabited by it or in relation with the images upon which it is superimposed.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, all of these procedures of Jordà's can be seen at least as of the film *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'«Un lloc entre els morts»* and are framed within the fundamental dialectic between document in construction and fictional reconstruction that run throughout Jordà's filmography.<sup>17</sup> This has been dealt with sufficiently but it is interesting to see how it appears in the film in question in the way of a premature essay, notes in the form of a story for the future fictional adaptation of a text that will not be produced. Thus the oral evocation of the story precedes –and finally supplants– the work foreseen in its condition of preparatory work.

The film, furthermore, is still attached to the stage of the filmmaker's work in which structural interest (typical of the school of Barcelona) is just beginning to become a political indicator. Nonetheless, it is

---

<sup>14</sup> COMOLLI, Jean-Louis. "Nous Deux. La forme de l'entretien". In: *Voir et pouvoir. L'innocence perdue: cinéma, télévision, fiction, documentaire*. Lagrasse: Verdier, 2004, p. 90-103.

<sup>15</sup> Carles Guerra has made reference to a dialogical cinema which, according to him, would be inaugurated in *El encargo del Cazador*. As we shall see, dialogical strategies can be seen in some previous works by. Cif. GUERRA, Carles. *Op.Cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> "Mais aussi: à ces êtres réels qui aspirent à devenir personnages, quelles contraintes, quelles indications, quelles limites poser? Au nom de quoi? De la loi du film? De la règle du jeu? Du seul plaisir? Du rendement social? Et inversement, à ces sujets en train de faire un saut de côté, quelles libertés, quelles autonomies, quelles marges, quelles capacités d'improvisation ou de transgression laisser?" Cif. COMOLLI, Jean-Louis. "Filmer l'autre". In: *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> It was also to be (and perhaps will finally be) the thematic centre for the organisation of courses and seminars by the Quico Sabaté foundation, which he devised prior to his death.



interesting to see how the story's narrative-plays now refer to the role-plays of the bourgeoisie as an empty class that needs to take the stage, exist in imaginarily coded rituals.

### Experiments of the word

*Mones com la Becky* is perhaps Joaquim Jordà's first radical experiment as far as filming the other as the self. That is to say, the filmmaker himself includes himself among the mad, among the others, and against the discourse of social control. This venturing into the field of the other is the ethical principle that determines the political load of his cinema: the fact that he stands side by side with positions that escape the reductions of order or the perceptions of normality. The film touches on this and works the idea of the story in process –the construction of the performance– and the shift between the documentary and fiction. At the end, the story becomes a performance, theatre or filming before which the mentally ill patients are confronted with the images of the work they interpret. As has been said, this is one of Jordà's favourite devices: confrontation with the other or with the self seen as another. This can be seen in practically all of his films. On this point, there is a need to recall once more the sentence by Ramsés, one of the patients at the Malgrat de Mar psychiatric clinic, as a comment on the excerpt he has just seen: "*Two selfs and a photo. The mirror*". The mirror, indeed, but also the word, since, as Ramsés himself states in his fascinating speech, the word, like the theatre, is the fundamental therapy to activate the mind, the water that gives life to plants, the motor of conversation. Thus, we identify the two fundamental elements of Jordà's cinema flashing around the figure of the mirror: the word and the representation. The representation of the word and the word as a representation.

The most complete film of Jordà's militant phase, *Portogallo, paese tranquillo* (1969) is presented as the filming of forbidden words, a clandestine collection of testimonies by anti-Salazarist resisters and army deserters. The means chosen in most cases, especially when dealing with anonymous characters, consists of showing the interviews in groups, in private flats, in their own living environment. The idea is to arouse dialogue with the camera but also conversational exchange, dialectic within the collective. The word in this case is the discourse of resistance against the theatre of history and the word of the institutions, which generally appears staged in the form of self-celebratory rituals or of performance conveyed by television images that show the dictator, inheritor of Salazarism: Marcelo Caetano.

The word concentrates on bodies that do not allow circumstances to beat them, as an alternative story to the discourse of power. The latter, contrarily, is constructed as an institutional index, portrayed from a certain distance and always on the evidence of its fake and seeming nature.

*Numax presenta...* (1979), a documented chronicle of a process of resistance started right at the time of its end uses similar mechanisms but with a viewpoint that distances itself from militant optimism to get closer to the pride of the resistor who, nevertheless, has lost the combat. It would not be too bold to say that this film closes an era, that it includes the struggles and the frustrations of a certain Spanish transition and it opens up another by superimposing a certain uninnocent political conscience in the mechanisms of the film essay initiated in *Mauria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'Un lloc entre els morts*. *Numax presenta...* begins in the middle of a works committee meeting. A declaration of combat marks the start of a film whose end the workers assure us they do not know. An open film, therefore, despite which is construed as an oral story given by the workers themselves in retrospect on two years of strikes, self-management experience and struggle against capital and pressure from without. The word makes the events circulate and places the conflicts on the table. There are several devices but there is a preference for conversations in the setting of the factory and discussions in more or less numerous groups. The camera seeks explanations and the workers themselves can disagree with the purpose of their own actions. What the film captures, in the end, are the circumstances of a process of verifying the impossibility of constructing a solidary, durable working environment –in terms coined by Sloterdijk<sup>18</sup> due to the pressures exerted from without (the plot of the employers and the business market) and the disintegrating tensions within. Two strategies of mise en scène oppose each other and act in counterpoint to the editing of the film. One focuses on observing how the workers appropriate themselves of the discourse, take the floor and reproduce (they almost always narrate) the process of struggle. They are filmed on the factory premises. Oral narration constructs the story and reproduces the tensions that determine their end: the militant energy of the youngest compared to the reluctance of the veterans, who wish to maintain the hierarchies and differences in salary. The problem lies in the perversion of ending up reproducing the mechanisms of exploitation inside the self-management experience. This dialectic is lived as a debate, as an argument, as an exchange of points of view. This is why it is so important to capture the word of the workers in the body of the collective, contrasting it with that of the rest of workmates. We can perceive the degree of involvement, the conviction to the struggle, the attitudes of those who

---

<sup>18</sup> SLOTERDIJK, Peter. *Esferas I*. Madrid: Siruela, 2003.

have nothing to lose. Moreover, this mechanism reproduces the device of the works committee meeting, a paradigm of the democratic functioning of the militant cells and of conviction in open, equalitarian dialogue as a means of executing workers' action.

In this context, the revolution appears as a fleeting but joyous experience. The film ends with a party, a collective meeting inside the factory that responds to the initial declaration. It is, on paper, the celebration of a failure that nonetheless becomes a triumph of attitude and a construction of experience. It is then that some of the more active workers take the floor. The film projects their discourse towards the future. The joy of the final ball works the counterpoint of these hopes with the final decline of the reconstructed process. This procedure is reinforced with the melancholic musical coda of the tango *Adiós Muchachos*.

### Filming the enemy

We have said that in *Numax presenta...* two strategies of mise en scène exist side by side. The oral reconstruction of the workers' struggle is superimposed with the theatrical representation of the plot by the employers to put an end to the factory, requalify the land and sell it to build flats upon. This speculative plot, disguised as a problem of business functioning that needs solving, acts as a prelude to the structural context that is to burst out in *De Nens*. In this case, the bourgeois word, the word of power, appears filmed from quite some distance, with fixed, face-on shots, framed in a clear theatrical device verging on the music-hall or revue attraction. Mario Gas directs the actors who interpret the entrepreneurial senior members and the administrators. The Brechtian distancing mechanism, the need to gain awareness of the plot of exploitation, becomes clear with this procedure, which ridicules the discourse of the enemy by means of arousing farce.

In Jordà's cinema, the enemy tries to take centre stage, take command of the word, impose its discourse. The idea, therefore, is to unmask this process, to make it apparent. To this end, perhaps the great theatre of the representation of power can be seen in the trial of *De Nens*. Not in vain, it structures the whole course of the film and it works as a structural backbone. The centre of the space is taken by the judges and the prosecutors. What is staged is a kind of farce that shows the huge amount of prejudice circulating, the lack of interest in clearing up the real circumstances surrounding

the case and, above all, the absence of possible dialogue.<sup>19</sup> The judge interrupts, questions and constantly conditions the declarations of the accused and the defence witnesses. He also curtails and directs the interpretation of the defence lawyers' speech. He monopolises the floor. On the editing table, the filming of the real trial becomes a study of the relations of power, the circulation of the word and the reactions it induces. The panning and reverse angle shots stand out showing the court's lack of interest in the stories of the accused. On the other hand, the perverseness of the technical language of the experts and the psychologists ties in perfectly with the legal mechanism as the mark of the sanitising discipline of the stories of power and of the institutions of control. This strategy extends in the form of an echo or chaining through institutions in connivance with the word "official", like the press, for example. Journalists give absolute credit to the official versions and they convey the news among themselves; all of them repeat the same thing in the same lazy fashion, unconcerned with investigating the case. The press (written, radio and televised) is the platform for the propagation or rumour, dispersive and selfish intoxication, fabricated news which is revealed as a banal word, radically hostile to any form of otherness. This network of mechanisms of vigilance and control is weaved in the middle of another structural plot that hangs over the Raval district and the film itself: the urban transformation plan as an instrument of surgical intervention on the undesirable elements of the social fabric. This operation on el Raval is no different from Egas Moniz's lobotomies (*Mones com la Becky*). Moreover, as in that film, the alternative strategy or strategy of resistance uses theatrical reconstruction as a distanced, parodical mise en scène which, again, ridicules the official discourse and is used by the filmmaker to appear on stage and offer his point of view, his autobiographical experience, and stand beside the victims, on the other side of the mirror. In this same film, the songs of Albert Pla, narrations also made from a stage, constitute another word of resistance against the discourses of control. Thus two stories and two re-enacted stages act as a counterpoint to the enormous imagery construction raised by the mechanisms of justice, the press, the council and the police. For the filmmaker it is a means of intervening without creating or handling anything that belongs to documentary register.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> "During the trial, the judge's look of disgust, of feeling sick was quite clear towards him (Xavier Tamarit)." Cif. GARCIA FERRER, J.M; ROM, Martí. *Ibid.*, p. 128. This reverse angle shot of the figures of order is to be one of Jordà's greatest concerns when filming the trial.

<sup>20</sup> "For me both things were essential. I could not intervene in the trial, but I could do so by means of inserted persons, Albert Pla, with whom I fully coincided in the vision that should be given and through the theatre performance. It is the need to set up an alter ego and say what I think without manipulating the trial. There is no manipulation of the events, I know that this had to be rigorous, there is not the slightest manipulation of image or sound, there is nothing that is not

Light is cast on other spaces of the work of Jordà as of *De Nens*. Let us see, for example, how the legal or political institutions, and even the architects in charge of town planning, take pleasure in, live, in public performances or before the cameras. They need the auto-mise en scène. This idea, let us recall, has a political load associated from *Portogallo paese tranquillo* and is fundamental at the time of filming "the enemy". For example, in *Veinte años no es nada* (2004), Vicente Valero ex-civil governor of Tarragona in the Barrionuevo era, who confronted Juan Manzanares unarmed during the robbery on the banc Sabadell in Valls, and who was shot, appears interviewed in a raised position with Tarragona Roman amphitheatre in the background. It is a clearly different situation of mise en scène to the rest of the characters in the film.

In *De Nens*, besides the experts who place the Raval case in a historical and urbanistic perspective, the interventions by the witnesses of the neighbourhood, people of the Taula del Raval or other associations, conveyance again takes the form of conversation. Contrarily, in most of his declarations, we see Pep Garcia -president of the Raval Neighbours Association, pro-council- alone, self-convinced and haughty. As a curious but significant coincidence we find in this same film the voids where declarations are missing of characters who refused to appear in the final edition. Their absence, marked by signs indicating this, is as or more significant than their presence would have been.

One last, slightly more ambiguous case, we can find in *El encargo del cazador* (1990). This is the Jordà's reconstruction of the atmosphere of el Bocaccio, a place where the anti-Francoist bourgeoisie of Barcelona socialised and which was regularly frequented by Jacinto Esteva. Jordà brings together some of the protagonists of the period in a kind of recreation of the mythical establishment of the late 1960s, he puts them in groups and he makes them converse. The guests recall events of the past and weigh them up in view of the time that has elapsed. Jordà builds a series of lateral travelling shots that highlight the scenic device and contrast the figures present with the photographs of Colita that are on the back wall, behind the tables. Jordà's intention is openly critical. He aims to show this frivolous, banal group, both now and then, which has ended up occupying the centre of the social and cultural stage without any non-conformist spirit. Again, the density of time brings out the ascertainment of a certain failure –that of a project of "cultural revolution"– and the melancholy derived from the void left by the decline of non-conventional spirits, who paid the price for their failure

---

*said at the time it takes place, nor is there any transfer of image."* Cif. SEIFERT, A; CASTILLO, A. "Entrevista a Joaquín Jordà". In: *Lateral*, n.114, 2004.

to adapt to the mechanisms of standardisation. The intention is yet more apparent when the filmmaker contrasts the reconstructed scene of el Bocaccio with another travelling shot along the bar in the Tuset gallery in which other friends of Jacinto Esteve appear –his mates from drinking sessions and infinite card games—<sup>21</sup> less known, but who greet and pay tribute to him in quite a more real, sincere manner.

### Archaeology of history

History and its time are present in Jordà's cinema as of *Maria Aurèlia Capmany parla d'Un lloc entre els morts*. In the end, the fictitious biography of Jeroni Campdepadrós can be used to filter a certain chronicle and a vision of history.<sup>22</sup> But it is *Numax presenta...* the film that really releases a conception of history as a mechanism of ideological domination and of rejection of the differences, a kind of archaeology of knowledge in the Foucaultian sense. The paradigm would be constituted by the vision of the transition, central to many of Jordà's films. In *Numax presenta...*, the theatrical representation of the strategies of the employers shows the connivance of the political world that plays the major role in the Spanish transition and, therefore, fundamental, trauma-free continuity in respect of the senior members and the running of the dictatorship. It is not difficult to recognise Santiago Carrillo participating in the discourse of consensus beside the bourgeoisie and against the workers.<sup>23</sup> The first step occurs, the first ascertainment of a view of the transition as a failure and a betrayal of the ideals of the anti-Francoist struggle which, logically, becomes prolonged melancholiously into *Veinte años no és nada*.<sup>24</sup> The reference of the tango is clear –let us recall that the first film closed with the words and chords of the tango *Adiós Muchachos*– and strengthens the time density of the sense of loss that is outlined as a final consequence of *Numax presenta...* Twenty years later, reproducing meetings and dialogues between the characters who expressed their desires at the final party at the end of the original film, again reconstructing the discourse of their own representation on the border between documentary and fiction, what is sketched is a historical

---

<sup>21</sup> MANRESA, Laia. *Joaquín Jordà. La mirada lliure*. Barcelona: Filmoteca de Catalunya, 2006, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> "Maria Aurèlia speaks of the character on whom her novel is based; it is an invented character that enables explaining the Catalan society spanning the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries". Cf. GARCIA FERRER, J.M; ROM, Martí. *Op.Cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> "I also filmed some sequences at the Institut del Teatre, with actors from Mario Gas's group, reconstructing how the characters of the employers had acted, but in the form of a musical comedy: how they had taken advantage of the famous "Pacto de la Moncloa (Moncloa Pact)" to trick the workers". *Ibid.*, p. 94

<sup>24</sup> "To this end, Numax is a devastating document, not without its sense of humour, about the cul de sac in which the revolutionary optimism of years past have culminated". In: *Contracampo*, number 22, June and July 1981.

portrait of the Spain resulting from the transition<sup>25</sup> as a renunciation of all of the principles of struggle, as a disintegration of any utopia. All that remains is the coherence and the ethics of the loser who has kept his principles at the price of failure (the workers of Numax) and the possibility of the conveyance of these principles to the new generation.<sup>26</sup> Quite the contrary to the historic setting of the socialist Spain represented, albeit indirectly, in the film.

The density of the historical discourse grows in the magma of the film essay and becomes an especially enriching historical experience as of the moment in which it is constructed as a certain loss or dissolution which leaves film prints (images) or spectral presences. And it bursts, it could be said, when it is mixed with autobiographical chronicle. That is why *El encargo del cazador* is so important, an evocation of the absent figure of Jacinto Esteva constructed on the testimonies and the marks of a ghost, which is in reality a historical, experiential chronicle of the school of Barcelona and biographical portrait of Jordà through the mirror. It is the story of the other failure, of lost or dispersed energy, of a unfruitful rebellion which, as in the case of Juan Manzanara of *Veinte años no es nada*, finds an unclassifiable, mysterious character, capable of facing the journey to the "the heart of darkness" and, finally, consuming his life prior to entering a regime of normality or conventionalism.

This connection of historical experiences also shapes *Mones com la Becky*, in which Egas Moniz's inventions run parallel with the metaphors of social control and his interventions in the brain stretch to the generalised dispensation of drugs in order to reduce behavioural disorders. The psychiatric clinic becomes a social metaphor and its control mechanisms invoke vibrations of those of the elimination of the difference. In this way, Egas Moniz, imagery emblem of Portuguese Salazarism and absent but

---

<sup>25</sup> At the start of the project, the film was to include interviews with the politicians involved in the transition. "*In order to complete the film essay in the transition which Veinte años no es nada set out to do, Jordà wanted to include interviews with the real authors, the public figures with names and surnames involved in the process*". Cif. MANRESA, Laia. *Op.Cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>26</sup> " *They lost but they did not fail. "I wasn't interested in telling the story of a failure. I wanted to explain that within the mediocrity and the horror of the last twenty-five years, they had known how to preserve something: the idea that they could not fall into certain abjectness, they could not be tricked, that they were responsible for maintaining a story they had lived. An exemplary story". As they do not tire of repeating in Veinte años no es nada, Numax was for that group of workers their university. Conversing with Joaquín Jordà in his Barcelona flat one December afternoon, approaching with him the collective experience of the two films, we discovered that Numax is also a university for us. On the one hand because it shows a radically autonomous process of politization which cannot be explained by the weight of the ideology but by the capacity of invention and creation of some shared lives. On the other hand, because it positions us in a story which is ours: the muted story of the Spanish transition, as a story of devastation and betrayal. "I lived the working class world in its capacity of organisation and revolt", states Jordà recalling the experience of Numax presenta.*" Cif. GARCÉS, Marina. "Numax, nuestra universidad. Conversación con Joaquín Jordà". In: [http://www.nodo50.org/tortuga/article.php3?id\\_article=4477](http://www.nodo50.org/tortuga/article.php3?id_article=4477)

radiant figure of all the film (somewhat inverse to these other ghosts as are Jacinto Esteva and Juan Manzanares) is echoed in the denunciations of the militant film *Portogallo, paese tranquillo*.

If Moniz is the dark centre, invoked in representations, objects, figures and documents, of *Mones com la Becky* which is that of *De Nens*? This film's origins are the result of three events. The first is Jordà's move to Barcelona following his cerebral thrombosis. As a neighbour in the Raval district, he feels the need to work on a certain context and represent a universe of which he is a part. This space was the stage of the so-called Raval child molesting plot, a scandal devised by the press and the police somewhat artificially reported by journalist Arcadi Espada in the book on which the film is loosely based.<sup>27</sup> This book<sup>28</sup> and Espada himself, who appears in the film as a witness for the defence "in conflict" with the public prosecutor, constitute a second event for consideration. The third, and perhaps most important reality is the existence of rumour as a driving force of the story and theme of the film itself, which analyses and explains the consequences thereof. The rumour is started by the report made by a teacher who works in el Raval but does not live there –in fact, she dislikes the social reality of the district– on the basis of the stories she is told by a child. Without telephoning the parents in question or verifying the story, she decides to report the case, first anonymously and then, when the plot unravels, providing her name. The teacher appears in the film and it becomes clear how she enters the register of the characters that seek notoriety and some automise en scène. In any case, as we learned with the cinema of Fassbinder, the rumour is conveyed in the form of news by a press that acts as an extension of the police; and a cascade of betrayals is triggered. This environmental quality of rumour and of betrayal is related with the social context of urban regeneration. In the film, this is represented towards the beginning, by means of a travelling shot which leads us through the house of one of the accused families while the voiceover of Josep Cuní is heard announcing the holding of the trial admitting the birth of the piece of news in a summer that was lacking news. Significantly, the travelling culminates at a window through which we can see a sign announcing the plan to rebuild and reform the neighbourhood. Thus the buoyant rumour and the news it generates (which informs of a police and judicial plot) are found in their urban framework.

---

<sup>27</sup> "Back from Madrid and settled in here I perceived something that was happening, a neighbourhood that was harbouring something greatly catastrophic, and that something was not spoken of, there were like mysteries, like secrets and confronting viewpoints, you could see that somebody wasn't speaking to somebody else, people living in the same street, or strange enmities. A city divided in two, then Arcadi Espada's book came out and I went to its presentation. I saw the author and some of the characters of the story, and I was shocked by the pain with which they told the events and I thought it could be an interesting subject for a film". En. SEIFERT, A; CASTILLO, A. *Op.Cit.*

<sup>28</sup> ESPADA, Arcadi. *Raval: del amor a los niños*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000.



Finally, all results from a story which again shows us the betrayals of the transition and the abandonment of ideals. The very town planners who has fought side-by-side with the neighbours are responsible for the tidy-up plan that expels them from their own neighbourhoods.

### A place among the dead

Jeroni Campdepadròs i Jansana, the eternal unadapted poet of *Un lloc entre els morts*, is to die young. He opens a fictional heritage followed by Jacinto Esteva, who discovered the heart of darkness in Africa and he left an assignment: *El encargo del Cazador*. Juan Manzanares, Pepi's bank hold-up colleague in *Veinte años no es nada*, understood that the world for which he had fought was turning its back on him. He channelled his energy fighting against the establishment prior to consuming himself and dying. Of the three, some works, some images remain (filmed or written) and recorded in memory.<sup>29</sup>

Peter Sloterdijk writes: "*What Heidegger has called being-towards-death does not so much mean the march of the individual towards final solitude, anticipated as panic determination, but the the circumstance that all people must at some time abandon the space to which they felt bound, strongly connected to others. Hence death has a greater effect on the survivors than on the dead. Thus, human death always has two sides: one, which abandons an icy corpse, and the other, which shows the remains of spheres: some such remains are assimilated in higher, revived places, whereas others are abandoned like waste fallen from old places of animation.*"<sup>30</sup>

Jordà's characters are basically survivors who, sometimes, summon the remains of this strong lost connection. What was once a generation or a working class solidarity or a political struggle. The remains are still signs of resistance. Like in *De Nens*, where the corpse is that of a Barcelona of which just a few traces remain. From El Xino to the Raval.

*Més enllà del mirall*, proclaims, however, the triumph of Esther Chumillas, who rediscovers the community and its bonds, who rebuilds her sphere. She wins the chess match. Finally, the one who

---

<sup>29</sup> We could add Jacintín, son of Jacinto Esteva who committed suicide by swallowing a drop of cyanide. According to Daria Esteva: "He is ahead of his father in his self-destructive thirst". Cif. MANRESA, Laia. *Op.Cit.*

<sup>30</sup> SLOTERDIJK, Peter. *Op.Cit.* Page 54

was missing was Joaquim Jordà who passed to the other side of the mirror before fully finishing the editing of the film. He found his place among the dead.

#### FRAN BENAVENTE

**P**rofessor of Film Theory at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Professor of the MA in Contemporary Film and Audiovisual Studies at the same university. Ph.D. in Audiovisual Communication at Universitat Pompeu Fabra. In his doctoral thesis, *The tragic hero in the western: the genre and its limits*, he has studied the relation between film genres and the imagery of tragedy. As a researcher his interest focuses on film aesthetics and its social and cultural implications. He is a member of the research group CINEMA (Center of Aesthetic Research in Audiovisual Media). He contributes to a number of publications and writes articles on cinema and television in general interest magazines and academic journals.

#### GLORIA SALVADÓ

**P**rofessor of Audiovisual Narrative at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Professor of the MA in Contemporary Film and Audiovisual Studies at the same university. Ph.D. in Audiovisual Communication at Universitat Pompeu Fabra. In her doctoral thesis, *Countershot with death. Image and History in Contemporary Portuguese Cinema*, she studies the role of Portuguese film tradition in the cultural and aesthetic frame of contemporary European cinemas. She is a member of the research group CINEMA (Center of Aesthetic Research in Audiovisual Media) and her interests as a researcher focus on audiovisual narratives and film and television script writing. She contributes and writes on cinema and television in several publications.