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Looking amid the rubble: New Spanish documentary film and the residues of urban transformation (Joaquim Jordà and José Luis Guerín)

ABSTRACT

Spanish documentary film has experienced an extraordinary flourishing during the beginning of the twenty-first century, in parallel with the increasing democratization of audiovisual means of production. In this essay I link this democratization with Spanish documentary's tendency to become a collective social experiment that emphasizes interactions between film-makers and filmed social actors. In particular, I analyze the case of films dealing with urban transformation, because their capacity of intervening in the processes of social construction of reality is especially significant.

KEYWORDS

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experimental
documentary
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José Luis Guerín
gentrification

1. Contemporary Spanish documentary has achieved recognition in some important international festivals and venues, such as Rotterdam's IFFR and NYC's Anthology Film Archives and MOMA. Well-known international critics and scholars have highlighted the significance of Spanish non-fiction films: for example, Michael Chanan exemplified the new global boom of cinematic documentary at the very beginning of his *The Politics of Documentary* mentioning three key Spanish films: Victor Erice's *Dream of Light* (*El sol del membrillo*, 1992), Joaquim Jordà's *Monkeys like Becky* (*Mones com la Becky*, 1999) and José Luis Guerín's *Work in Progress* (*En construcción*, 2001). Chanan himself, together with Bill Nichols, Carl Platina, Catherine Russell and Paul Arthur participated in a monographic issue of the Spanish journal *Archivos de la Filmmoteca* in 2007, which reflected the growing interest in the genre. Inside Spain, a rich bibliography around the 'new forms of Spanish documentary' (to paraphrase Alfonso Crespo's expression) is emerging.
2. There are two frequent ways of framing what is new and interesting about recent Spanish non-fiction films in critical studies: one is to simply point out their ability to attract audiences and to enter the circuits of fiction cinema (Jordi Balló 2010; María Ulled Farkas 2006), and the other is to emphasize their deconstruction of the limits between reality and fiction (Manuel Yañez, Angel

The existence of something that we could call 'New Spanish Documentary Film' seems today to be widely accepted by critics, artists, audiences and scholars.¹ The works that could fit into this label, however, are abundant and diverse, and there are many possible ways of understanding what is 'new' about them. In this text, I will propose the current democratization of audiovisual production and the increasing tendency of documentaries to acknowledge the relations between film-makers and filmed social actors as key notions for understanding the new wave of non-fiction film in Spain. I will show how some documentaries, by calling attention to its own process of coming into being, have become collective experiments capable of illuminating and even transforming the dynamics of the social construction of reality. The sensitive issue of renewal and 'gentrification' of poor urban neighbourhoods has been a particularly fertile terrain for these kinds of cinematic experiments, which have thrived upon the residues of local associative cultures resisting the menace of the increasingly privatized megalopolis.²

Two veteran Catalan film-makers, Joaquim Jordà (1935–2006) and José Luis Guerín (1960–), have produced two of their major works documenting the transformation of the historic Barcelona neighbourhood of el Raval: *De nens* (Jordà, 2003) and *En construcción/Work in Progress* (Guerín, 2001), which I will analyze later. Very importantly, they have done so by developing different approaches to creative documentary, which have become strongly influential in the careers of other younger film-makers. In fact, the prolific and influential trajectories and styles of Jordà and Guerín can be used as guides for identifying two main trends in recent non-fictional Spanish film. In general terms, while Jordà's work is perhaps the best example of an approach to documentary that puts in focus the relations between those who film and those who are filmed, thus exposing and questioning the process of making the documentary itself, Guerín's can be considered a good representative of a more authorial approach, one that attempts to blur the borders between reality and fiction by provoking or suggesting situations and dialogues for social actors.

In the broader Spanish (and global) documentary scene, the tension between authorial control and opening to interaction with social actors is today more relevant than it has ever been, given the growing democratization of the access to audiovisual production brought by the 'digital revolution'.³ In a world in which more and more people are able to construct audiovisual representations of reality, the roles of the documentary film-maker, the subject of the documentary and its audience are becoming fluid and sometimes interchangeable. This does not mean, of course, that the ethics and practices of collaborative audiovisual production have been invented recently. As Bill Nichols explained, there have been tendencies to reveal the relationships between film-makers and social actors and to provide the latter with some form of agency throughout the history of documentary. Notably, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw the emergence of *Cinéma Vérité*, a very important development in that direction, for which, as Nichols himself stresses, new, less intrusive and costly technologies of filming were instrumental.

NON-FICTION FILM AS SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

The recent advent of the 'digital revolution' has enabled an explosion of works that have renewed the field of audiovisual documentary. Criss-crossing the different sociocultural milieus of audiovisual non-fiction we find of course the implicit discussion about what is 'new', 'experimental' or 'creative' and what is

not. There are many different approaches to that question, but the most interesting are the ones that try to think non-fiction film in its specificity, instead of just applying the general paradigm of 'avant-garde' or 'modern' film.⁴ As can be seen by looking at the proliferation of trends and hybrid formats of documentary, it is true that the ongoing democratization of access to production of (audiovisual) meaning seems to have reached a deeper level in the realm of non-fiction than in fiction, at least in Spain. In relation to this democratization, we have to understand the new forms of experimentation in documentary, which, as Michael Chanan, Bill Nichols, Stella Bruzzi and other critics have pointed out, have to do with the opening of the subjective, self-critical and performative dimensions of the genre.

Bill Nichols provided a very useful classification of 'documentary modes' that helps to explain this opening. As is well known, documentaries have come a long way from the expectations of objectivity associated with the 'expository mode', which uses resources such as the 'voice of God' and tends to erase the concrete historical and biographical conditions of social actors on both sides of the camera (the Francoist '*Noticiarios y Documentales*', NO-DO, whose exhibition was mandatory in every Spanish theatre from 1943 to 1975, are a perfect example of these types of documentary films). Throughout the history of the documentary genre, and especially in recent decades, the concrete historical and biographical circumstances of people filming and being filmed have 'come back with a vengeance', making non-fiction films more interesting and complex.

What Nichols calls 'poetic', 'observational', 'participatory' and 'reflexive' documentary modes are all ways of questioning the authority of a 'neutral' and disembodied source of knowledge about the world. It is perhaps the 'performative' mode, however, that can better help us rethink recent trends of experimentation in documentary film across the globe. The performative mode not only abandons the illusion of a central source of authority and knowledge in order to stress formal aspects (poetic), the lives of others (observational), the interactions of film-makers with those others (participatory) and even the conventions of the documentary genre (reflexive). It can do all of that, but additionally, it 'emphasizes the expressive quality of the filmmaker's engagement with the film's subject' (Nichols 2010: 152), and, in Bruzzi's expansion of the concept, it calls the attention to the performative quality of the behaviour of social actors on both sides of the camera (2010: 154).

In this way, the 'performative' turn brings back the embodied and subjective positions that classic authoritarian documentaries wanted to erase, and it also introduces a very important focus on the process of dealing with those different positions, the process of making the documentary itself. Spanish critic Antonio Weinrichter has used the example of Nick Broomfield's films to explain how performative documentaries 'focus on everything that usually takes place before the beginning of any documentary and that is normally hidden in the "finished" version of the films' (2004: 53). Thus, Broomfield shows himself in the process of looking for the relevant people to interview, negotiating how the interactions should take place, and sometimes even failing to achieve the material he wanted. The process is already the film. And that is one of the reasons why the 'performative' mode is different from the 'reflexive', which explores the conventions of the documentary genre but does not necessarily expose the material conditions of its own genesis.

In the direction of expanding the concept of the performative documentary as Nichols understands it, and in line with Bruzzi's and Weinrichter's

Quintana, Josep M. Català, Alfonso Crespo, María Luisa Ortega). In this article, I will follow the lines of analysis opened by Elena Oroz, Gonzalo de Pedro, Antonio Weinrichter, Casimiro Torreiro, Josetxo Cerdán, Santos Zunzunegui and others in order to investigate a tendency in new Spanish documentaries to reflect their own making process and to show the performative participation of film-makers and social actors in that process.

3. The label 'New Spanish Documentary Film' is certainly problematic: firstly, there are non-recent documentaries that anticipate these 'new' ones (instances are Luis Buñuel's subversive 'mockumentary' *Land Without Bread* (*Las Hurdes. Tierra sin pan*, 1933), and works by other great experimenters such as Basilio Martín Patino, Jacinto Esteva and Pere Portabella). To this we have to add that many of the films that fit the label were produced in Catalonia by Catalan crews. Finally, even the concept of documentary itself could be questionable as the best way of referring to these 'new' types of films. The term has become very unstable precisely because of the transformations in the filmic tradition that we analyze, but still we prefer to maintain it instead of shifting to the popular alternative of 'non-fiction film', because the later can obscure the blurring of fact and fiction that characterizes some of the 'New Spanish Documentaries'.
4. This is precisely what authors Elena Oroz and Gonzalo de Pedro criticize in the analysis of Ángel

Quintana, which for them represents a hegemonic approach to documentary that subordinates documentary to fiction (Pedro and Oroz 2010: 68).

5. 'Assuming its condition as a subjective account that proposes a partial and situated knowledge; making explicit its conflictive relation with the real, through fragmentation, reflexivity, the unfinished and the tentative, and its equally ambiguous relation with social actors, underlining performativity of all enunciative act at both sides of the camera'.

additions, Oroz and de Pedro bundle together a constellation of traits for a type of documentary, which, they say, 'situates itself in postmodernity'

asumiendo su condición de relato subjetivo y que propone un conocimiento parcial y situado; explicitando su relación conflictiva con lo real, a través de la fragmentación, la reflexividad, lo inconcluso y lo tentativo, y la igualmente ambigua relación con los actores sociales, subrayando la performatividad a ambos lados de la cámara de todo acto enunciativo.

(2010: 71)⁵

This constellation can be loosely summarized by the idea that this type of documentary basically is open to question each and every aspect of itself. In its recent turn to 'performativity' or 'postmodernity', documentary becomes fundamentally a hybrid open form in which processes of intervention in the social construction of reality are exposed in all their complexity. That is why documentaries are able to create powerful, intense, and even life-changing experiences for film-makers, filmed people and audiences. When it asserts its distance from 'objectivity', documentary film becomes a laboratory of social and existential experimentation.

TWO DOCUMENTARY FILM-MAKERS ON THEIR WAY TO THE CITY BRAND

The ability of these forms of experimental documentary to touch on core aspects of life is probably what has made the issue of urban transformation one of the most attractive topics for documentary film-makers in Spain. An economy strongly focused on the real estate sector has produced a country that seems to live in a perpetual demolition and construction process, one that in fact functions well as a metaphor for the perpetual proliferation and renovation of the symbolic world that humans share, and that also mirrors the deconstructive documentary practices that expose those symbolic processes themselves. This tendency cannot be understood without referring to the peculiarities of the Spanish model of capitalist development. It was the deeply flawed attempt at industrial development undertaken by the Franco regime that planted the seed for the current decadence of the neighbourhoods formed before the civil war around industrial labour. As the urban studies collective *Observatorio Metropolitano* has pointed out, industry under Franco was always excessively dependent on imports of foreign machinery and also on foreign investment. That is why Spain started its process of 'tertiarization' early; a process of shifting from an industrial to a services-based economy that all rich western countries would also undergo due to the global crisis of industrial capitalism in the 1970s, but which in Spain was to be conditioned by what, already in the 1960s, had become the major national source of income: tourism.

The model of post-industrial capitalist growth in Spain, the one that is still hegemonic, was built by the political and economic elites of the Franco regime, and it was founded on tourism and the vast conglomerate of construction and real estate companies that this sector favours. *Observatorio Metropolitano* suggests that we should understand this economic and political model in the terms put forward by Molotch and Logan in their theory of urban economies as 'growth machines' (2010: 333). Instead of relying upon the growth of economic activities themselves, as the classic industrial model

does, urban 'growth machines' depend on the sustained growth of urban territory, real estate prices and demographics. This model entails a strongly territorial version of post-industrial capitalism, with an important fragmentation of the state, which leaves a lot of space for the different cities and towns to compete against each other for real estate investments and urban developments. This kind of urban politics was described by David Harvey in 1989 in terms of the shift from 'managerialism' to 'entrepreneurialism', which subordinates every social or ethical concern to the goal of attracting investments to an urban territory, and thus transforms the city itself in a commercial 'brand' that needs to be sold through constant publicity campaigns and endless spectacular beautification. The other side of this spectacle of the city brand is, of course, the devastation of urban ecologies, communities and traditional spaces that politicians deem unattractive to investors.⁶

As early as 1967, the frantic process of urban destruction and renovation that propels this model was already a key issue in the cinematic work of Joaquim Jordà. According to Teresa Vilaros' interesting reading of *Dante no es únicamente severo* (1967), which Jordà co-directed with his friend Jacinto Esteve, this avant-garde fiction film is an expression of the decadence of the industrial Catalan bourgeoisie, who could not do anything but stare with utter passivity – as the characters in the film seem to do – at the apocalyptic end to the industrial city they once owned. Jordà and Esteve, themselves the offspring of the elites that ruled the Catalonia of textile industries, of Gaudí, and *Modernisme*, are part of a kind of generational '*fin de race*' that was hoping for proletarian revolution to come after industrialization, but instead encountered the advent of tertiary capitalism. As Vilaros says, they found themselves in a Barcelona that 'ate stones', because of the frantic demolitions that submerged the city in the same volatile dust cloud that we see in urban documentaries today.

In a much more explicit way, the crisis of the industrial model of capitalism is also central to the twin documentary films of Jordà *Numax presenta/Numax Presents* (1980) and *Veinte años no es nada/Twenty Years Is Nothing* (2004). In these films we encounter also some of the forms of experimentation with the social construction of reality that are perhaps the most valuable legacy of Jordà to contemporary documentary. Both films constitute direct ways of intervening in the lives of the people they deal with; both can be considered to be *performative* 'social experiments'. *Numax presenta* is a film made by the workers of the appliances factory Numax, in which they themselves explain how they have come to autonomously run the factory, after the owners abandoned it because of the economic crisis. Workers interview each other, re-enact events from the recent past, show themselves in quotidian assemblies and meetings and even stage a play in which they imagine the perspective of the owners of the factory and other members of the financial and political elites. The whole process of making the film is part of the film itself: the film-maker and the workers have thrown themselves into an open-ended process in which knowledge is not neutral, but produced through the interactions of the different subjectivities at play.

The same happens with *Veinte años no es nada*, the film in which Joaquim Jordà recuperates the stories of these workers twenty years later, when the process of tertiarization was much more advanced in Spain. As Jordà travels through the country locating the now fully dispersed participants from the Numax experience and talking to them about their lives, what is at stake again is not so much the possibility of acquiring an 'objective' knowledge of what

6. Anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2007) has worked extensively on recovering this other side of the city brand, in works such as *La ciudad mentirosa. Fraude y miseria del 'modelo Barcelona'*.

In an illuminating essay, Antonio Gómez L-Quifiones (2007) has analyzed the contradictions between the neo-liberal conception of space as commodity and the construction of a democratic city in which subjects are expected to be free and capable of choosing their own destiny. He explained that films such as *Work in Progress* and *The Sky Turns* (Alvarez, 2004) show this contradiction by emphasizing the state of disempowerment that falls upon those who live in towns and neighbourhoods transformed by processes of capitalist 'modernization'.

7. Josetxo Cerdán characterizes the centrality of the communicative function of Jordà's work in the opening of *De nens*: a message from a troubled mother to her daughter using the cameras of the film. Jordà, says Cerdán, always puts his films 'al servicio de aquellos con los que se hace' (2005: 360). Also Santos Zunzunegui pointed out that Jordà uses documentary as a means for bringing together people, 'para situarlos en el interior de un mundo posible' (2007: 190), one that otherwise they would not share.

has happened in the recent years, but of triggering a collective and embodied process of interactions that allows them to *construct* common memories, experiences and knowledge. As Antonio Weinrichter has explained, performative documentaries displace the classic problems of objectivity or veracity that were at the centre of classic documentary, and instead emphasize issues of communication. When we look at Jordà's relation with the creative explosion of Spanish audiovisual documentary in general, and we focus on his work on the transformations exerted by post-industrial capitalism in the city, we cannot stress enough how rich and influential this performative approach has been. His way of looking among the rubble of tertiarization and post-industrial capitalism has been performative in the sense that he has not only filmed the residues left behind by urban 'growth machines' but also established channels of communication for social actors to understand themselves as part of those symbolic, experiential and vital 'residues'. When in 2003, Jordà devoted the film *De nens* to the transformations of Barcelona's neighbourhood of el Raval, he was to use the same performative approach.⁷

Two years earlier, José Luis Guerín had filmed similar processes at el Raval in his *Work in Progress* (2001), but he arrived with different cinematographic experiences and interests. To continue to use Nichols's typology, we can say that Guerín's two previous non-fiction works fall more along the lines of the 'poetic' and 'reflexive' modalities of documentary than the performative. José Luis Guerín had become one of the main references of 'creative documentary' in Spain during the 1990s, having produced a very marginal but also very respected film called *Innisfree* (1990), in which he played with myths and memories surrounding the small Irish town that John Ford used as location for *The Quiet Man* (1952). In his second film, *Train of Shadows* (*Tren de sombras*, 1997), Guerín used fake 'found footage' recorded by an imaginary amateur turn-of-the-century film-maker to reflect on the relations between cinema and the ephemeral quality of time.

Josetxo Cerdán has stressed the philosophical and meta-cinematic orientation of Guerín's work, noting that if *Innisfree* approached film as mythology, *Train of Shadows* focused on film as phenomenology. In any case, neither of these employs the performative mode, because instead of displaying the open process of dealing with different subjectivities on both sides of the camera, Guerín is more interested in showing 'visual and acoustic rhythms, patterns, and the overall form of the film' (Nichols 2010: 150, 'poetic mode') and 'the conventions of documentary filmmaking' (2010: 151, 'reflexive mode'). Even if Guerín's films call attention to the manipulative capabilities of cinema and towards the historical quality of images, he still uses a classic authorial position, which, as Elena Oroz and Gonzalo de Pedro have pointed out, refuses to acknowledge the ambiguous relation of the film-maker to the social actors that he films. His works are very far from classic expository and 'objective' forms of documentary, but they still share with them a certain disembodied quality. In *Train of Shadows*, for example, the materiality of the (fake) found footage, with its imperfections and time-produced erasures, is crucial, but the whole film lacks any attempt at historically, socially or biographically situating the hidden hand that organizes all these materials into what we are seeing. What Guerín proposes here is a different type of game, certainly also of a very complex and sophisticated nature, but more based on the film-maker's voluntary blurring of the limits between fact and fiction, of spontaneity and illusion, than on the exposure of the problematic encounters of those who film and are filmed.

DE NENS AND WORK IN PROGRESS: GLEANING IN EL RAVAL

Coming from these different backgrounds and ways of practicing cinema, Jordà and Guerin converged in their interest in the transformation of Barcelona's el Raval at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Significantly, even though both film-makers started by living in the neighbourhood they wanted to film, their investigations were distinct in nature from the very beginning. In the opening sequence of Guerin's film, a caption reads: 'Cosas vistas y oídas durante la construcción de un nuevo inmueble en "El Chino", un barrio popular de Barcelona que nace y muere con el siglo'.⁸ Although the reference to the apartment building is specific, the caption also gives a sense of a casual methodology: 'things seen and heard'. We cannot help but think of a *flâneur* with a camera. Also, the reference to the birth and death of the neighbourhood introduces a very broad possible narrative horizon. The aim of this cinematic 'investigation' is thus wide in its scope, and fragmentary in its method. In fact, Guerin did not produce a screenplay for this film, and although the film certainly uses some recurrent motives, characters and visual strategies, there is no main narrative plot organizing its course.

Jordà's case is different, as he himself has explained in an interview. For him, it all started by a sense strange things were happening in the neighbourhood: 'había como misterios, como secretos y como miradas enfrentadas' (Seffert and Castillo 2004: 42).⁹ He immediately starts focusing on that particular story among the millions of other possible things 'seen and heard' in the neighbourhood. He also adopts a narrative model for the story:

Toda historia cuando se empieza a construir, al menos para mí, tiene que tener unos modelos, y para mí el modelo de esa historia era el cine negro americano, el cine de los años 50, 60, el cine de investigación.

(2004: 42)¹⁰

At the heart of Jordà's film we will indeed find an investigation, one that in fact has to do with an actual criminal case.

So, apparently, we have the *flâneur* and the detective, both roaming the same neighbourhood. But this needs qualification in both cases. Contrary to what we might expect, the 'things' that Guerin sees and hears are not encountered in an aimless drift. Guerin is not at all trapped in some kind of fascination for the supposed immediacy of what his camera records. As Joan Resina has noted (2008: 256), he is well aware of the historically constructed quality of what surrounds him, and actually he starts his film with archive images from *El alegre paralelo* (Ripoll, 1964), a short documentary about 'el Chino's' nightlife.¹¹ We see black and white shots of prostitutes, bars, lively streets, and then the camera follows a drunken sailor who unsteadily abandons the area. These images will haunt the whole film, especially as we encounter characters who seem to be residues from that old seedy neighbourhood, now struggling to survive in modern times. But Guerin's interest in historicity goes even further. The identity of this neighbourhood is not just made of that specific memory, but of a continuous construction and destruction of everything, of a series of layers of human experience that overlap, confuse and question each other. Certainly, as Martínez Carazo has pointed out (2007: 6), that drunken sailor from the old *Paralelo* film is echoed by the homeless senior who strolls around the apartment building in construction with his stories of an allegedly epic past as a sea wolf. But, furthermore, the construction of the apartment

8. 'Things viewed and heard during the construction of a new apartment building in "el Chino", a popular neighbourhood in Barcelona that was born and dies with the century'.
9. 'There were some kind of mysteries, some kind of secrets and opposed view points'.
10. 'Every story, when it begins to be told, at least for me, should have some models, and for me the model of that story was the American film noir, the film from the 50's and 60's, the investigation film'.
11. For Resina the inclusion of these images speaks of 'the emergence and disappearance of the visible, the historicity of "seeing"' (2008: 256).

12. '[...]offered alcohol to the poor, gave raincoats to the exhibitionists, and lent drugs to the kids without interest'.

building itself reveals the presence of other strange messages from the past, such as the human skeletons that appear when industrial excavators start digging and find a Roman archeological site, or the nearby oldest church in Barcelona, which construction workers observe and discuss from their scaffolding. They ask one another how people could build such a difficult structure without machines, comparing that work with their own, and with the building of the Egyptian pyramids that they saw in the TV projection of *Land of Pharaohs* the night before.

Also for Jordà, 'el Chino' is a neighbourhood in transformation, and he, like Guerin, includes a brief glimpse into the memory of the old underprivileged neighbourhood, right at the beginning of the film. We hear music, and the camera takes us inside a crowded space, a civic centre in el Chino, where renowned Catalan singer-songwriter Albert Pla is giving a live performance of the song 'Nana de l'Antonio', that is, 'Antonio's lullaby'. This song is about the death of a fictional inhabitant of the old neighbourhood of el Chino: a petty delinquent, an alcoholic pimp. Importantly, the song plays with the moral ambivalence of the deceased, explaining how much the prostitutes that he 'cuidava i protegia i estimava i explotava amb tanta gràcia' ('so graciously took care of, and loved, and exploited') are going to miss Antonio, and how much his many bastard sons are also going to miss him, because Antonio was a good man, a Robin Hood of the slum who 'oferia alcohol als pobres i regalava gavardines als vells exhibicionistes i donava droga als nens sense interès'.¹² This is all sung in the characteristically childish style of Albert Pla and with the soothing cadence of a lullaby, establishing an ambience of tender vulnerability and degradation that is going to be crucial for the rest of the film. In *De nens*, that old neighbourhood of el Chino acquires a very concrete representation, and the historical interplay focuses clearly on the changes suffered by the neighbourhood since the beginning of the democratic period in Spain, in the 1970s. There are no Roman skeletons or pharaohs here; the chronological scope is smaller: from the marginal el Chino to the semi-gentrified el Raval, which is the name now widely used, as the neighbourhood becomes assimilated into the 'Barcelona brand'.

With Albert Pla's song continuing in the background, the camera leaves the civic centre and we start seeing the preparation for a trial at judicial court. Soon we hear the voices of journalists explaining that this is the trial of the 'Raval case', a case that had a strong impact in the media when the police claimed to have discovered the largest network of paedophiles of Europe in the neighbourhood of el Raval. This was in 1998, and police arrested fifteen people then. Now, in 2001, only five of them are being prosecuted; the rest were released for lack of proof. As the film carefully reconstructs throughout its three hours of duration, it all started with a woman calling the police to make a denunciation based on rumour, a rumour that soon would spread and create those 'strange enmities' that Jordà sensed when moving to the neighbourhood. But, how is this linked to the 'gentrification' of the neighbourhood, and to the memories of marginality and activism that opened the film? Establishing those connections is perhaps the main goal of the documentary, and there is no linguistic explanation that can substitute the complexity and the cinematic creativity that accomplishes that goal. But, in terms of narrative plot, the connection is simple: some of those accused of pedophilia in the 'Raval case' were members of a neighbourhood association called 'La Taula del Raval', which had strongly opposed urban policies implemented by the municipality of Barcelona, and accused the government of corruptly

favouring big construction companies instead of creating long-promised parks and green zones. The man charged with the worst accusations in the 'Raval case', Xavier Tamarit, was a member of that neighbourhood association and also the founder of a hospice for homeless and troubled children in el Chino; he was a social worker and a well-known member of the grass-roots neighbourhood movement that since the 1970s has opposed urban speculation and expropriation of poor households in Barcelona. Now, in the documentary, we can see how he undergoes a trial in which everyone seems to have condemned him in advance: the media, the judges and the public. The whole case, however, as the documentary demonstrates with obsessive attention to detail, is constructed on a very thin basis: the testimonies of some children interrogated in very irregular circumstances by the police. As in Guerín's film, here we also find a neighbourhood in construction, but among the rubble and the scaffolding a corrupt and intricate network of interests, manipulations and even extortions appears, one that is not evident in *Work in Progress*.

This difference interests me. Of course, it wouldn't be fair to state that *Work in Progress* simply misses the cruel subtext of gentrification. Inspired by one of the most innovative documentary works of the last decades, Agnes Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs and la glaneuse*, 2000), and following Michael Chanan's (2008) suggestion, we could say that instead of repeating the resounding messages of consumerist society both films 'glean' whatever is left of those hegemonic narratives. But, again, if documentary film-makers glean the residues of capitalist 'progress', they can do it by openly sharing the process of 'gleaning' with the people they film, or by minimizing the traces of their encounter with them, thus limiting their intervention in the creative process. The important question is not only how cinema can engage with the socio-historical processes that construct reality (and with the residues produced by that construction) but also *who* cinema 'represents' in the first place. Who is behind and in front of the camera, who gets to glean fragments of whose life and who gets to illuminate what is left over by hegemonic social narratives and becomes part of the social construction of alternative lives?

As Cerdán, Oroz and de Pedro have noted, Guerín's use of 'docudrama' or 'creation of situation' techniques determine the viewer's perception of the social actors in *Work in progress*. The sequences in which fragments of possible fictions arranged by the film-maker sprout out of social interactions, such as the insinuated love affair between the construction worker and a young neighbour, constitute the ones that most clearly produce the 'blurring the limits between fact and fiction', which is one of the most repeated characteristics attributed to new Spanish documentary. But, perhaps we should ask: what is really so interesting about erasing that limit? As Spanish philosopher José Luis Pardo has pointed out, the whole western philosophical tradition resounds in the debates about how reality and fiction – 'history' and 'poetry' in the classic writings of Plato and Aristotle – should relate. He reminds us that Plato's and Aristotle's suspicions towards poetry, towards the imitation of reality, were caused by the fear that fiction would be used to embellish history, and thus to justify the cruelties of wars and tyrannies.¹³ What was really at stake in those writings, and later through the 'reality and fiction' debate in western philosophy, were the dangers of imposing rigid models for measuring the value of reality, and more concretely of human action, thus turning it into an instrument for external ends. Plato and Aristotle wanted human actions to have value for themselves, not to be measured in relation with fossilized ideas of what is good. Basically, the problem with poetry for the Greek philosophers,

13. José Luis Pardo states that the 'poetizing of history' is not just a 'un problema teórico', 'es un combate contra los intentos de justificación de la historia (es decir, de canonizar lo ocurrido como necesario e inevitable)' (2008: 117).

according to Pardo's reading, was that it tended to jeopardize human freedom by submitting it to fix ideals.

Would it not be fair to say that the same danger exists when a film-maker tells social actors what to do in a non-fiction film? Instead, a performative film like *De nens* opens a social process of collective interactions and reflections in which human action keeps its unpredictability and immanent value. From the moment Jordà begins to walk around el Raval and to talk to people about the 'mysteries' and grievances of the neighbourhood, that process has begun, and it continues throughout the filming process, which in itself produces encounters and dialogues between social actors that may not have occurred if it weren't for the call put out by the film. Once the documentary is done, the process continues, because its viewers may be able to share and grow the network of social interactions created by the film.

PREARIOUSNESS, VULNERABILITY AND AUDIOVISUAL AS COMMONS

Nichols has called attention to the feeling of precariousness of the present moment in films that are open to shifts in direction depending on the social exchanges that take place in front of the camera and that film-makers cannot control. This is especially true for *De nens*, because it produces a process of confrontation of social narratives ('el Chino vs. el Raval') that, despite the efforts of some social actors, is brutally dismissed by institutions of power (judicial, political, mass media). We see how, *before our very eyes*, slander, prejudice and greed end up prevailing over memory, ethics and truth.

But it is important to understand that the confrontation of different visions of the world happens here in a much different way from, for example, the equally performative documentaries of Michael Moore, to cite perhaps the most famous practitioner of this modality. The rhetorical approach, the goal of 'proving a point' that is central to Moore's films, has limited importance in Jordà's work. Instead of trying to control that precariousness of the openness of free human action and its vulnerability to abuses of power, Jordà dwells on it, making films in which that precariousness appears as what we have in common. This is exactly what the philosopher Marina Garcés (2008) has pointed out, in dialogue with Judith Butler's (2006) work on 'precarious life': the experience of precariousness and vulnerability before power can at the same time be the experience of a common ground. We discover that we are interdependent in our vulnerability. *De nens* is not the staging of some kind of competition for the imposition of a unique narrative on others. It is an acknowledgement of human vulnerability towards the abuses of others, and thus of our inextricable interdependency. As Garcés emphasizes, being interdependent is not just being susceptible to attack by others but also of being capable of sharing a world, of exposing oneself to others and of being affected by them. In this sense, vulnerability and interdependency should not be understood only as passive or receptive qualities. They also are forms of collective potency that break through isolation and thus make it possible to understand individual precariousness in political terms.

Perhaps the element in the film that best expresses this ambivalence of vulnerability and interdependence is the Albert Pla soundtrack, with its subtle mix of contained rage and tenderness. Also, the re-enactments of some emotionally charged moments in the micro-life of the neighbourhood, such as the first encounter of social worker Sabeli with the gang of homeless children, the later

confession of heroin addict child Conchita after having killed a taxi driver or her final death by overdose, are present in the film not so much as elements of rhetorical support for the cause of the social workers and activists, but more as simple expressions of vulnerability, of the shared fragility of those abandoned and marginalized by the triumphant model of the Barcelona brand.¹⁴

Nichols has asserted that performative documentaries challenge the epistemological assumptions of the classic expository modality by acknowledging the subjectivities of film-makers and social actors. In cases like *De nens*, this means including not only certain strong individual points of view but also the collective vulnerability of the social body before those who impose their narratives of power. In this film, deconstructing the power of the 'voice of God' does not authorize the emergence of many other little divinities with their own perspectives, but recognizes the social actors' necessary interdependency as producers of knowledge and affects.

This primacy of interdependency and collective production of meaning is in no way just a particularity of Jordà's work, or even of performative documentaries in general. It is certainly an unstoppable trend in contemporary culture, as media theorists such as Henry Jenkins, Peter Walsh and Pierre Lévy have shown. According to them, the democratization of cultural production allowed by digital technologies and the new social media are deeply transforming the way we understand culture, putting in crisis the 'expert paradigm' and shifting to forms of collective intelligence.¹⁵ Intellectual and affective interdependency has become an ineludible reality through the Internet, but it trespasses the frontiers of the digital. In a growingly complex and interconnected world, we tend more and more to recognize that all the important things in life are best engaged through collaboration, and that no individual should exclude others from the communal deposit of experience that is generated collectively.

A thorough analysis of the crucial transformations that this renewed emphasis on collaboration and sharing is producing in late-capitalist societies falls beyond the scope of this essay. But still, the opening of the documentary film tradition towards more participative processes of sense making is signaling towards this broader context. If audiences are more and more reluctant to accept documentaries in which a disembodied 'voice of God' tells them what to believe, it is because they are more and more able to access and understand the origins of any discourse about reality by themselves (it is many times one click away). In an age of massive circulation of information the expository function of documentaries loses interest in favour of its capacity to create situations in which social actors perform changes in their milieus. Michel de Certeau's (1997) classic analysis of the dynamics of mass and popular cultures is corroborated by these processes: cultural consumers are not passive; they reinterpret what they receive, and they adapt mainstream cultures to their own necessities. Despite the concentration of much of the production of commercial audiovisual material in the hands of the corporate media and entertainment industry (analyzed by César Rendueles in the Spanish case), the accessibility of new video technologies has multiplied the capacity of responding to that production. Growing social phenomena such as citizen journalism, 'remix cultures' and the creative commons/'free culture' movement (all of which have an important audiovisual component) have deliberately opened the conversation about the same issue that Jordà's performative documentaries brought up: 'who has the right to represent who?'

Jordà's films, and any other cultural productions that contribute to an expansion of the access to the means of (audiovisual) representation, cannot

14. Salvadó and Benavente read these re-enactments as a way of 'situarse al lado de las víctimas, al otro lado del espejo' (2009: 9), thus emphasizing the importance of empathy and interdependency.
15. It is important to note that digital technologies cannot be considered as the only cause of the recent growth of collaborative cultures in the network society. As sociologist Manuel Castells (2009) has pointed out, networks are a form of social relation that has always existed and that differs from hierarchical or bureaucratic forms of organization. But before the advent of the new digital technologies of information and communication networks were very limited in their capabilities.

help but be a threat to any social project trying to limit or privatize those means. If we accept that cultural representations are built using a common deposit of human experiences, languages and traditions, it should not surprise us that, more and more, when people see that someone is trying to monopolize parts of that common deposit, they respond actively by reclaiming their rights to self-representation. In the context of these growing conflicts, Jordà's films, together with the myriad of other audiovisual projects and fragments that encourage universal access to the production of meaning, may become less the 'rubble' of discarded pasts than the tools for a shared and horizontal construction of possible futures.

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