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THE OTHER SPAIN BECOMES VISIBLE

Reports from the End of a Dictatorship and the Breakup of a Society in Europe Europa (1967–1978)

Since the Spanish Civil War, during which volunteers from a host of countries participated in international brigades to support the young republic in its struggle against the military and the Falange, Spain has been a benchmark, and not just for West German leftists. A reference point, solidified in a certain way for decades, at which history seemed to have stood still. For only after the death of the dictator Franco in 1975 did the time of political persecution, prohibitions, and social taboos come to an end. Following a referendum in December 1978, the constitution of a representative monarchy was adopted, and already in '77 state censorship was abolished.

In the middle of the seventies, the whole world was looking to Spain. And this included the Berlin International Film Festival as well as the Arsenal (at the time still the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek). In 1978, for instance the jury of the Berlinale's competition, under the leadership of Patricia Highsmith, gave the Golden Bear to the entirety of the Spanish contributions.¹ This is also why the majority of the films in the Arsenal collection from Spain come from this period. In these archive films, the phase of the political and social transition from dictatorship to democracy, the so-called "Transición," is presented from a leftist perspective, critical of the system and subversive both in politics and aesthetics.

The present project, a film series for the Bundesverband kommunale Filmarbeit e.V.,² is concentrated on a selection of eleven works of the widest variety of formats and provenance from the period between 1967 and 1978. There was something visible in them at the time that was clearly only waiting to come to light and to the screen. Something that had never entirely disappeared, even in the worst years of the state repression, and

¹ The prizewinners were *Ascensor* by Tomas Munoz, *Las Palabras de Max* by Emilio Martínez Lázaro, and *Las Truchas* by José Luis García Sánchez. The other jury members were Theo Angelopoulos, Antonio Echza Sausinenea, Frieda Grafe, Sergio Leone, Jacques Rozier, Larissa Schepitko, Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares, and Konrad Wolf.

² The plan is for the series to tour in a separate project to some of the cinemas organized in the Bundesverband kommunale Filmarbeit e.V., at the latest in 2014. Informational materials based on the research presented here is to be produced, and cooperation partners in schools and universities are to be sought.

that was unfolding something new with the growing political resistance and increasing refractoriness of cultural producers: the cinematic representation of “another Spain.” Today—with historical hindsight—these underground films, independent productions and commercial releases, these short and long experimental, documentary, and fiction films reveal something in a density that is exemplary for the interweaving of film, politics, and aesthetic program that the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek has always stood for. But in this constellation—one is almost tempted to say “montage”—of different films, there may also be a social universe in breakup to be found, one which has avoided film historical notice in its full ramifications.³

The program as a whole invites us to a curatorial tightrope walk between historical reconstructing a social upheaval and its (renewed) utopian charge. In view of the great economic and social problems that the EU country of Spain current finds itself in, this gaze back to the starting point of its “journey to Europe” takes on particular weight. It brings the integrity, the enormous potential, and the great hopes of this collective movement into the present, and makes clear how far we have come from the virulent discourses of the time.

Underground Barcelona

The center and pivot point of the films chosen⁴ is, with a few exceptions, the Catalan Barcelona, and not, as one might expect, the country’s capital, Madrid. In 1967 the avant-garde artist and film producer Pere Portabella presented *NO COMPTEU AMB ELS DITS* there, a surreal experimental film of great beauty. Among the other figures in Catalonia’s “*cine clandestino*,” the independent cinema and filmmaker scene in the underground, is also Llorenç Soler,⁵ who made the two films *CARNET DE IDENTIDAD* and *52 DOMINGOS* in 1970. The first is an experimental film, critical of the system and edited in the style of the classical avant-garde. The second is a milieu study about young workers from the

³ Since November 2011 I have spoke with a large number of film experts and witnesses about the project, the time after Franco’s death, and the film prints at the Arsenal. I would like to thank the following people here for their support, advice, and comments: Pedro Alvarez, Teresa Delgado, Tanja Horstmann, Ralf Junkerjürgen, Maria Jose Lasosa, Ignacio Mendiguchía, Concha García?, Karola Gramann, Ulrich Gregor, Erika Gregor, Wilhelm Roth, Markus Ruff, Heide Schlüpmann, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, Marian Stefanowski.

⁴ Much like the social events immediately before and after 1975. Only later did Madrid take over this role, become the center of the so-called “Movida.”

⁵ The databank indicates the filmmaker in two ways: in Spanish the name “Lorenzo” and in Catalan “Llorenç Soler.” This is also an indication of the successive emancipation of the Catalan language in the (international) cultural industry.

south in the impoverished suburban neighborhoods, who are learning the highly symbolically-charged profession of bullfighting in their spare time.⁶

Also from Barcelona are *LA TORNA* (1978), *OCAÑA*, *RETRAT INTERMITTENT* (1978), and the series *NOTICIARI DE BARCELONA*, an initiative of the Institut del Cinema Catalá, which was founded in 1975 by the anti-Franco opposition. These alternative newsreels were produced past the censors for screening in Barcelona cinemas.

Antoni Padro's *SHIRLEY TEMPLE STORY* rises like a monolith of subcultural obstinacy from out of the independently produced 16mm films of the time that critiqued the system. The four-hour underground marathon from 1976 is a cheeky, entertaining, and musical piece in black-and-white about the underworld of recent history. Rosa Morata plays a Shirley Temple-Lolita character in it with big curls, who, as an allegory of the Spanish nation, goes to the US south looking for the Wizard of Oz, a vampire (!).

They are accompanied or haunted—as the case may be—by other allegorical figures: three nerve-wracking, dolled-up society ladies, Pit, Pot, and Put, who obviously stand for the Franco regime, and three young men, Paco, Jesus, and Luis, who wear contemporary outfits—also not to be taken quite so seriously—and embody the revolution, the progressive forces of Spanish society.

Of Life and Death

The fact that sparks of sputtering and subversive work such as *SHIRLEY TEMPLE STORY* could get underway in the mid '70s should not deceive us: despite the economic and social liberalization of the last years of the Franco regime, as a rule the question of power was still a matter of life and death. For instance, in 1970 the "Burgos trial" took place, a showcase trial of 16 members or followers of the Basque underground organization ETA.⁷ And in 1973 the newly named Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco, seen as Franco's successor, was killed by the ETA. In 1974 and 1975 several political prisoners⁸ were sentenced to death and executed. Two films in the series deal with the regime's deadly repression:

⁶ Which was broadcast on television in 1970 in the GDR (website Llorenç Soler).

⁷ "Euskadi Ta Askatasuna" (Basque Homeland and Freedom)

⁸ Namely Salvador Puig Antich, (MIL – Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación), Xosé Humberto Baena Alonso, José Luis Sánchez Bravo, Ramón García Sanz (FRAP-Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota), as well as Juan Paredes Manot and Ángel Otaegui (ETA).

Iñaki Nuñez, representation of the newly forming Basque cinema movement, filmed *TOQUE DE QUEDA*, the story of the resistance fight Marta, based on the executions carried out in the summer of 1975. Also arrested and sentenced to death, she is only spared because she is expecting a child from one of her comrades.

LA TORNA by Francesc Bellmunt is the film documentary of the “bitter-biting” theatrical political parable by Albert Boadella and the ensemble *Els Joglars*. A set made of boards, actors with masks, and dialogue that ends up not being so funny after all. The play is about the criminal proceedings against the Polish street musician Heinz Chez.⁹ He had confessed to shooting a Guardia Civil and was sentenced to death by garrote in March 1974. In order to gloss over the political murder of the anarchist Salvador Puig Antich by executing a “normal criminal” at the same time, the two were killed on the same day. This is the source of the title *LA TORNA*: the “encore.” The play was banned in 1977 after around 40 performances, Albert Boadella and three other persons were arrested. This act of despotism triggered a large wave of international protest, and in Barcelona the union of film and theater workers went on strike. This is documented in the newsreel *LIBERTAT D'ESPRESSIÓ* (1978) by Antoni Ribas. Ulrich Gregor, director of the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, smuggled a 16mm print out of the country in his suitcase, in order to be able to show *LA TORNA* in the Forum at the 1979 Berlinale.

History of the Masses

At the end of his *Theory of Film*,¹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer once again emphasizes his conviction that cinema is in no way a medium of revolution. This, however, does not keep him from proclaiming at the beginning that it is the privilege of film over the other arts to be capable of depicting the “giant animal of the masses”—for instance by alternating close-ups and wide shots. “What does matter is that the alternating shots launch the spectator on a movement enabling him really to grasp the street demonstration.” Somewhat later in his list of the “specific properties” of film, he comes to the “phenomena overwhelming

⁹ This was what was known at the time of the Forum screening in 1979. Now it is known that the accused was named Georg Michael Welzel, who originally came from the BRD and was imprisoned several times in the GDR for trying to leave the country. Even during the process, the Spanish authorities had a lead about the citizenship of the accused, but they didn't pursue it in order to avoid problems with the West German authorities. At the time Spain had no diplomatic relations with Poland.

¹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer: *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. New York 1960.

consciousness,” which include the “atrocities of war.”

While viewing at the Arsenal, I often had to reflect on this, for the films that I selected contain a presence of state history, war, and social unrest that is hard to get away from. And of course on the one hand this touches on the fact that one epicenter of these films is the image of the social masses preserved in them. On the other hand, the simultaneous presence of history and present in them leads to a melange that is difficult to describe, between “grasping” and “being overwhelmed.”

After 1975, a variety of films were made that readjust history in opposition to the version of the regime, which had been the only available version for decades. This was a matter of certain taboos, for instance the destruction of the city of Guernica by the national socialist Legion Condor, or the question of how the military victory around Franco came to be. As a whole, these films from the second half of the seventies undertake to revise the events of the thirties while at the same time testifying to a re-construction of the country due to pressure from ordinary people and in public space. They produce a kind of echo of history. In *LA VIEJA MEMORIA* (1978) by Jaime Camino, for instance, eyewitness from both sides are interviewed, including the communist Dolores Ibárruri, the anarchists Abad Santillán and Ricardo Sanz, the Falangist Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, the military men Federico Escofet and José María Gil Robles (CEDA¹¹). On the other hand, the film confronts the spectator with a long series of film clips from the thirties and forties, whose subject as a rule is the “masses.” In constant alternation with those being interviewed in private spaces, we see state receptions, crowds in stadiums, demonstrations, formations of soldiers, marching Falangists, and the events of the war.

These images get a new historical dimension when watching them today together with footage from mass events in the seventies. The two examples in the program of the *NOTICIARI DE BARCELONA* are such documents: *LA DIADA DE CATALUNYA* (Albert Abril, Jordi Cadena) is about a demonstration on the National Day of Catalonia on September 11, 1977, which is considered “one of the largest demonstration of the post-war period in Europe.” The newsreel *LIBERTAT D’ESPRESSIÓ* (1978), which I have already mentioned, shows the “Asamblea Permanente de los trabajadores del espectáculo” protesting against the arrest of Albert Boadella and the banning of “La Torna.”

Already in the eighties, the art historian Francisco Calvo Serraller called the years of the

11 Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas

breakup, and in particular those of the Madrid “Movida,” a “verdadero fenómeno de masas.”¹² With the film documents of the second half of the 1970s, we become witnesses to a point in time in the history of cinema in the western world at which, presumably for the last time, spectators of the mass medium of film could encounter themselves on screen as a (triumphant) mass.

Sexual Identity

Both of the films in the program that deal with the topic of sexual identity refer to the writer Federico García Lorca, who was murdered by the Falangists in 1936. This internationally acclaimed homosexual artist was to a certain degree the leading figure of the new beginning. Thematising his fate and reactivating his works in various ways not only served to rehabilitate an intellectual and socially engaged representative of the republic, it also marks the recognition of a sexual identity that the Catholic-Francoist “compulsory heterosexuality” was diametrically opposed to.

In Jaime Chavarrí’s *A UN DIOS DESCONOCIDO* the venerated poet is also part of the plot. The gay magician José goes on a journey to Andalusia to the manor house where he grew up as the child of a domestic servant during the thirties. The journey also provokes a flashback into Spain’s repressed history: just like Lorca, who was a friend of the son of the manor and who is worshipped by José, José’s father also became one of the victims of the murdering Falangists one night in 1936.

Lorca is also a great model for the painter, performance artist, and drag queen Pepe Ocaña. The protagonist of the documentary film *OCAÑA, RETRAT INTERMITTENT* (1978) by Pons Ventura was an icon of Barcelona subculture, and was also a migrant worker from Andalusia. He tells in great detail about the bone-crushing circumstances in the country, about his early love for theatricality, and about the men. At once radical and vulnerable, we experience this extraordinary person in his apartment, in his workshop, on stage, and—usually in women’s clothing—on the streets of Barcelona.

The films in the series are by no means all unknown inside Spain. *OCAÑA* and *A UN DIOS DESCONOCIDO* have long been icons of the cinematic “Transición.” *LA VIEJA MEMORIA* is considered a standard work of historical documentary.¹³ In recent years the Catalonian film underground has also achieved the necessary recognition in public: on

¹² “Ein echtes Massenphänomen.” Francisco Calvo Serraller: *Medio siglo de vanguardia*. Vol. I, Madrid 1985. 101.

¹³ All three films have at times been available on VHS or DVD.

the one hand through the TV documentary *Crónica d'una Mirada: Historia del cinema independent 1960-1975*, on the other through the program "Clandestí: Invisible Catalan Cinema" by the New York institution PRAGDA¹⁴. Even Antoni Padro's SHIRLEY TEMPLE STORY was recently digitized by the Filmoteca de Catalunya.

The 16mm prints "slumbering" for over 30 years in the Arsenal archive are mostly in problematic condition. Copied on bad material, their color has faded. And the variations between purple-red and orange-red that remain create an alarming tone on the screen. This was very disturbing at first, but I've come to see it as part of the program. For Living Archive is a project that is being realized in the middle of the historical shift from analog to digital visual technology. The visible decay of the film material is part of the historicity of film. The program in June will therefore also contain prints that document this decay.

In her article examining Spanish commercial films between 1978-1983, Josefina Martínez claims that in these "moments of artistic freedom" between the abolishment of censorship and the so-called "ley Miró," "paradoxically" no film language of its own developed.¹⁵ The films of this project originate in the time before and immediately after 1975, and they are in no way exclusively commercial films, but also underground films and films that were made in an art context to get past the censors. This is also one of the reasons that there are no formal commonalities to be found here. But something else perhaps becomes visible in the mixed-genre synopsis of a specific period of Spanish cinema: an aesthetic program that is already in place in Erika and Ulrich Gregor's collecting policies, one that, due to its openness to all forms of film expression, looks something like a seismograph of social upheavals in a much greater scope. The filmmakers in the program all unflinchingly set out into uncharted territory. They have more questions than answers, and they want to contest their own future with these questions. This radically open attitude toward the object links the filmmakers with the West Berlin filmmakers and festival organizers who selected, collected, and preserved their films.

At this point, German film history and Spanish film history have gained a small chapter

¹⁴ Which could also be seen in 2011 and 2012 at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris and in the program of the Instituto Cervantes and Babylon Mitte in Berlin.

¹⁵ Josefina Martínez: *Tal como éramos... El cine de la Transición política española*. In: *Historia Social*, Nr. 54, Jg. 2006, 73-92. "A partir de 1977 varían las señas del cine español que prácticamente no se habían modificado desde la guerra civil. Lo paradójico del caso será que en estos momentos de libertad creativa no surgirán propuestas estéticas radicales y rupturistas sino que genera un cierto acomodo de la industria, una búsqueda que se centra en abordar la representación de la nueva situación sociopolítica y la diversidad ideológica con formulas realistas y poco arriesgadas." 92.

that might perhaps also be described as a chapter in the (imaginary) history of an international “cine imperfecto.”¹⁶

But this is an idea that has yet to be written.

¹⁶ Julio García Espinosa: *Por un cine imperfecto*. Cuba, 1969.
http://www.cinefagos.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=434:por-un-cine-imperfecto&catid=30:documentos&Itemid=60