ON A GENERATION OF CLANESTINE SPANISH FILMMAKERS

Throughout its history, Catalonia – and particularly Barcelona – has been persistently characterized as the forerunner of major social and cultural movements. Its geographical position within Europe and general progressive worldview made it possible for Catalonia to embrace Industrial Revolution ideals much earlier than the rest of the country. This is not surprising, since it was Barcelona where the early twentieth century saw the cultural and technological transformation that became the emerging national film industry. Barcelona's role in this revolution, however, was disputed by Madrid, leading to Barcelona's resignation, which coincided with the Civil War. Understood by the dictatorial regime of General Franco to be a mere instrument of propaganda, the film industry eventually settled in the state capital, near the watchful eyes of power, and Barcelona was left on its way to marginalization.

The filmmakers represented in the film retro CLANDESTÍ: Forbidden Catalan Cinema Under Franco at the Film Society of Lincoln Center focuses on a generation of independent filmmakers whose innate unwillingness to conform forced them to produce, distribute and exhibit films in Barcelona, in hopes of furtively propagating into the rest of Spain, in the most severe anonymity during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939-1975). Around 1936, both sides of the Civil War began to use cinema as a means of propaganda and censorship. A typical example of this is Luis Buñuel's España 1936, which also contains much rare newsreel footage.

CLANDESTI gathers the first generation not to fight in the Civil War (1936-1939). The devastating psychological, social, political and economic effects of this catastrophic event are on full display, powerfully illustrating the pervasiveness of postwar assumptions. National Development Plans supported by the international recognition of a community mired in the Cold War led to widespread increases in the severity of social injustices, causing waves of migrants fleeing from the countryside into cities unable to cope with the phenomenon, and conversely, massive outflows of workers to France, Germany and Switzerland. Sentenced to exile and intellectual annihilation, the merit of these filmmakers was to overcome the imposition of a decadent folk culture based on evasion with football, bulls, folklore, or the promise of prosperity.

In the 60s, international independent film productions with clear leftist overtones flourished. Activist and revolutionary documentaries were produced at a feverish pace. Social and political documentaries presented these ideals while engendering new stylistic approaches. These include Pravda by Jean Luc Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group (1969), Ingolstadl Recruits by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1971), The Cry of Jazz by Edward Bland (1959), The People and their Gun by Joris Ivens and Film Collective (1967), The Battle of Algeria by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966), the European New Wave, the British Free Cinema, U.S. Cinema 16 as founded by Amos Vogel, and Agit-Prop's Newsreel, founded by Jonas Mekas. The counter-culture of the 60s' was a link between the revolutionary fusion of popular culture and radical political utopia, condensed into subcultural movements against Order: students, radical activists, youth workers, feminism, radical blacks and Latinos, advocates for peace, anti-artists, anarchists, gay liberation movements, environmentalists, hippies, motorcycle gangs, all coming together to create a counter-culture.

In Spain, Franco's harsh positions tended to relax when applied to a film made for private, amateur, or non-commercial use. Law Reunion forbid people to meet. Parochial schools were the aliby to show subversive films, and people gathered around cinema to transform a entertaining screening in political meetings. The resulting clandestine position required their authors to develop cross alibis, leading to some difficulty in areas of historical investigation and film preservation but from the standpoint of political activism, quite advantageous. Shooting under the pretense of amateur filmmaking, filmmakers hid among the crowd of protesters with highly creative and experimental results. The films themselves were cut from laboratory's waste with the complicity of some professionals, and distributed through alternative circuits such as recreation centers, private homes, cinema clubs, universities, social and

cultural associations and parochial schools. In many cases, these films have no credits, in order to protect the identities of participants. However, despite this, we can be assured that while relegated to the margins of official history, the images produced by these authors are now a cultural imperative in the understanding of the last decade of Franco's movements of resistance, problems of housing and social services, immigration, political prisoners, freedom of expression, and so on.

These active and aware filmmakers were sensitive to the global outbursts of civil unrest in the sixties such as the Algerian War (1954-1962), the fight for civil rights of African-American (1955-1968), the feminist struggle in France, the Prague Spring (1968), in Chile, the unpopular war in Vietnam (1959-1975), and the Hippie movement. Further, taking advantage of Franco's forced semi-reformation following the economic collapse of the fifties, these authors took to the streets aware of their precariousness, but governed by the need to denounce the duplicitous regime benefiting from the tourist boom while continuing dictatorial means of dealing with dissent.

Some of the filmmakers represented have artistic aspirations, while those oriented toward revolution used the documentary form to broadcast their message. Both used as their basis a most powerful expressive subversive weapon: the reality. Connected with workers' movements and political parties, these authors put their images in the service of anti-common causes, and even managed to organize a distribution network with an international reach. Spaniards would go to border French towns to see forbidden movies during the 60 and 70. While Viridiana by Luis Buñuel was banned in Spain for sixteen years, due to the condemnation as "blasphemous" , the independent film distributor Central del Curt is set up by Marti Rom and Joan Martí Valls and showed Viridiana around Spain in hidden places.
The first use of the term "underground film" occurs in a 1957 essay by American film critic Manny Farber. The year before Juan Antonio Bardem, eternal radical classic Spanish filmmaker and uncle of reknonwed Javier Bardem, was imprisoned while shooting the film Main Street (Calle Mayor,1956). Kenneth Anger attended the Maurice Kossloff Dancing School with Shirley Temple and Antoni Padros shot the estravagant The Shirley Temple Story in 1978. These makers supported the idea that while art is not a substitute for social action, it can clearly be a proponent of this action, and it can change minds.
Spanish filmmaking and stars can't be understood without looking closely to this underground and clandestine subversive movement. Buñuel was the master of subversion in every capacity, Javier Bardem's family is a well respected and has a clear commitment to left wing politics, so is Javier. Almodovar started in the freerer underground art scene shooting Two Whores, or, A Love Story that Ends in Marriage (1974), Almodovar's first short film. The title explains how transgressive the film was. His early films had no sound, and he took a cassette with music while he personally did the voices of all the characters, songs and dialogues. Before the 80s' he was already a celebrity in the underground scene in Madrid to jump to International recognition with Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown (1988).

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