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CONFRONTING SUCCESS: FILM NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL CONTESTATION

ABSTRACT

The notion of success appears frequently as the epitome of personal fulfilment and films have been often selected as the preferred vehicle for materializing narratives of prosperity, triumph and good life. Nevertheless, films may also be used as devices for the exposure of uncertainty, disenchantment or broken hopes. In this article, I propose to use some particular examples of Spanish movies as empirical repertoire for considering the relevance of fiction films in confronting uncertainty and both exposing social discontent and promoting active contestation, thus weaving a sense of continuum between different generations and contexts.

KEYWORDS

Anthropology and Cinema, Fiction films, Disenchantment, Film narratives, Social contestation.

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INTRODUCTION

As usual during over 80 years, the annual edition of *Time* newsmagazine in 2011 was devoted to the person of the year, continuing a practice that has brought for decades worldwide attention over a particularly influential person who purportedly deserves the honour of being featured at the cover page. Since Charles Lindbergh achieved such distinction in 1927 thanks to his pioneering non-stop flight from New York to Paris, several famous personalities, as Mahatma Gandhi in 1930, human groups, as the *Apollo 8* astronauts in 1968 or even supportive associations like *Good Samaritans* in 2005 have merited this symbolic credit. However, the 2011 issue honoured a broad, heterogeneous yet worldwide-extended collective, or to be more precise, a broad, certainly heterogeneous yet worldwide-extended *figure*: The protester.[1] In the front cover, upon a reddish background, backdropped with grey and black demonstrator's silhouettes scattered all over the scene, there is a lone ocher-coloured figure outlined with a large raised up neckerchief that fully covers half of his/her face, along with a woollen hat tightly pulled down to the eyebrows. Only part of his/her forehead and eyes are barely visible. In the forefront it is written as follows: "The Protester. From the Arab spring to Athens. From occupy Wall Street to Moscow".

In the magazine's online version, the nomination was introduced in this way:

"No one could have known that when a Tunisian fruit vendor set himself on fire in a public square, it would incite protests that would topple dictators and start a global wave of dissent. In 2011, protesters didn't just voice their complaints; they changed the World" (Time, 2011).

And the foreword already stated that: "History often emerges only in retrospect. *Events become significant only when looked back on*". *http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102139_2102380,00.html*; emphasis added).

This is indeed an interesting combination: time, history and protest. Who protests, why and in which contexts? How may these protests be read, heard, understood, filmed, edited or broadcasted?

As explicit in the magazine's front page, the whole story is a fascinating amalgam of North African demonstrators, Spanish outraged (*indignados*), Greek rallies or American movements. And a quick looked over other media would show up similar additions.

But trying to analyse similarities and differences of all these – somehow connected – social movements would overtly exceed the aim of this article. Rather, I propose to focus on one particular case – Spain – taking into account the *long durée* of the disenchantment against a dystopic present that has emerged after decades of solemn promises of a brighter future and the embodiment of certain notion of success – i.e. the one achieved by the combination of personal effort, a solid training

[1] *www.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011*

background and a firm will of social amelioration. Hence, My proposal here is to reflect on the historical, diachronic dimension of a particular phenomenon that otherwise might be misinterpreted as the outcome of the disappointment within a particular generation instead of the cumulative effect of a series of partially broken hopes through time and different contexts.[2] In so doing, I propose to use some particular examples of Spanish films as empirical repertoire for considering the relevance of art, fiction films and material culture in confronting uncertainty and both exposing social discontent and promoting active contestation.

A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CINEMA AS A CULTURAL OPERATOR.

Philip Rosen (2001) thinks of historiography as a network of particular connections between documents, texts and other historians' productions and the specific types of construction of History they entail. In such relationship films become a crucial cultural production since they may not only recreate a given historical time but also use fiction to purportedly show different viewpoints over that very same time. Thus, cinema and fiction turn out to be active agents in the creation of knowledge for social research (Vickers, 2010). In that sense, Rosenstone (1995) states that History only comes to being after its reconstruction and it is ultimately the consequence of a specific set of underlying ideas and values. If Rosenstone dives into the close interdependence between film and History as an Historian, my purpose here is to approach the interconnection between film and anthropology by considering the potential ethnographic value of cinema and fiction.

Such correspondence assumes the often ambivalent character of cultural representations, as Bhabha exposes in the relationship between nation and narratives: "To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself" (1990: 3). In a sense, film as a source of History faces us with the Saussurian distinction between *lange* and *parole*: if for Bhabha the former was the law and the latter the people, in my proposal the narrative / context dyad would result in the combination of underlying meanings (*langue*) and definite situations with social interactions (*parole*).

In other words, I take fictional films not only as representatives of reality but rather as vital expressions of it, as Ferro claims in considering cinema as a potential "counteranalysis of society" (1988: 29), thus pointing at a fundamental crossroads between cinema and social science: "[...] the historical reading of a film and the cinematographic reading of history" (Id., 19). The question at this point may be how fiction may be effective in conveying certain aspects of lived experience (Rinehart 1998) and render them relevant to the anthropological enquiry. Pasolini asserted that cinema is a language that expresses reality with reality (Piault 2011: 3), and in my opinion the intention-

[2] Obviously I am not suggesting that the Indignados movement or the multiplicity of civil activist campaigns that arose in Spain in 2011 were not the ultimate result of a specific political and economical milieu. I am merely pointing at a deeper chain of social despondency among certain social sectors that has led to the eclosion of a dystopic social scenario.

al elaboration (or distortion) of this reality may very well pave the way for a more complete comprehension of certain social backgrounds and cultural practices3, as I will try to show hereinafter in the Spanish case.

Despite it is not possible to carry out here an exhaustive examination of similar contributions to the contexts of realization and distribution of cinematographic accounts on recent (and not so recent) contestation movements, I would like to briefly mention some particular examples on the prominence of such contexts to understand the impact and influence they may have upon audiences. By the end of the 1960s, Jorge Sanjinés, a Bolivian filmmaker, plunged into the thorny issue of forced concealed female sterilization in an indigenous community orchestrated by "Progress Corps" American physicians. Instead of choosing other audiovisual strategies (namely documentary), Sanjinés took fiction as a narrative tool to expose a given situation and ultimately connect with indigenous social power. Sometimes considered a brilliant piece of revisionist cinema (Schwartz 1997: 269), this Quechuan-spoken film uses several Andean symbols to pose the fundamental problem under recognizable indigenous terms (i.e. the coca leaf ritual).

On a much less tragic basis, *Tout va bien* [Everything goes well] (Godard 1972) deals with working-class struggle in France from an ideologically-situated point of view. Framing the plot in the aftermath of May 68, Godard uses fiction in a documentary-style filmmaking not only to think about a social fact but, rather, to turn the narration of this event into a quite more explicit persuasive-driven ideological vindication. As in Sanjinés' film, social distress is at the core of the plot and the fictionalization of certain situations does allow the perception of such dissatisfaction under different narrative (and analytical) parameters.

More recent productions would very well illustrate the potential interdependent nature of both documentary and fiction realms to tackle contestation movements. Take, for example, the current economic crisis that has unleashed traumatic consequences for many countries across the world. Documentary films like *Inside Job* (Ferguson 2010) or *99%: the Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Films* (Aites, Ewell, Krstic and Read 2013) do face different dimensions of those consequences and also deal with some feasible causes of this enormous upheaval. But fiction may serve in this light, as Bhabha (1990) claimed, to explore different (and sometimes ambivalent) cultural representations of the phenomenon. Hence, titles as *The company men* (Wells 2010) or *Too big to fail* (Hanson 2011) do explore more specific, character-focused approaches. Quite the same could be said of documentary insights into recent social movements in Egypt (*The Square*, Noujaim, 2014) or of fictional examinations of late-sixties riots among the gay community in New York (*Stonewall*, Emmerich, 2015).

Let's now take a closer look at a particular historical example of film narratives of social contestation.

[3] As Rose points out: "Visual images do not exist in a vacuum, and looking at them for 'what they are' neglects the ways in which they are produced and interpreted through particular social practices" (2001, 37).

THE SPARK THAT SET THE FIRE

On May 15th 2011, a critical network platform *Democracia Real Ya* (Real Democracy now!)4 and other civic associations called for a pacific demonstration in some Spain towns and Cities, including Madrid. Tens of thousands gathered and simultaneously protested against the alleged political submission to the obscure financial forces that have beget the current crisis. This movement soon caught international attention and the so-called Spanish Revolution widely echoed on the international press.

In the early manifestos, uploaded to diverse open Internet websites, their promoters overtly spoke of hope and the need of an ethical revolution. They complained against: "corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice", furthermore stating that: "Instead of placing money above human beings, we shall put it back to our service". (http://www.democraciarealya.es/manifiesto-comun/manifesto-english/)

Above all, collective voices deplored what they perceived as a moral fraud. The younger branch of this heterogeneous social movement reacted against learned standards of success and "god life" by confronting narratives of prosperity which were mainly based on a material –naming economic– raising which was supposed to be achieved by means of the singular equation of academic merit and personal effort. They felt upset, cheated, overtly disappointed as very few of the promises that guided their training since early age had been fulfilled. Hence, while many detractors pointed at this movement as a dire example of a broader "anti-system" collective, the main claim of their advocates was that it actually was this *system* which has turned against them.

Taking a step back, we can appreciate that, statistically speaking, this generation of young people have certainly reached a critical point. For example, if we consider certain figures concerning unemployment rate for youths under the age of 25 (figure 1) we could plainly see the dramatic dimension of their precariousness in the labour market, which may lead to a

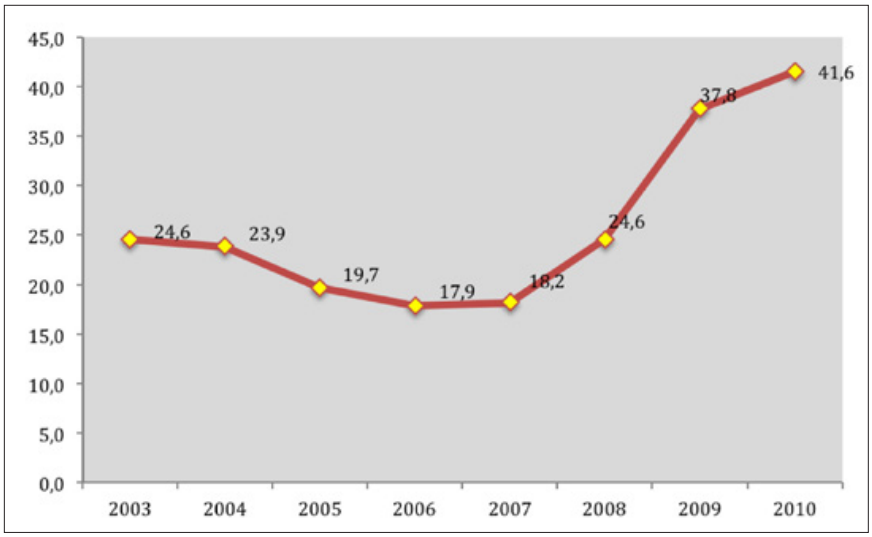

FIGURE 1 - UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, ANNUAL AVERAGE, AGE GROUP <25 (%). SPAIN. 2003-2010. SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION FROM EUROSTAT DATA.

[4] *www.democraciarealya.es*

FIGURE 2 - UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, ANNUAL AVERAGE, AGE GROUP <25 (%). SPAIN (1987-2010). SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION FROM EUROSTAT DATA.

seemingly cruel paradox in Spain: the best trained generation ever finds itself facing one of the worst labour scenarios in the country's recent history (leaving the civil war and the terrible post-war years aside).

However, if we take a closer look at the situation over a broader time span (figure 2) we do appreciate that instead of becoming an ephemeral event, this situation seems rather structural and it may approach what Polavieja (2006) has labelled as "the Spanish anomaly", regarding the high rate of temporary employment in the Spanish labour market, in addition to absolute numbers of jobless population within that age range.

Hence, we could trace this "anomaly" back to previous demographic cohorts by analysing how the notion of *good (or better) life* has appeared as the epitome of a brighter future, a path to social success and a way of personal fulfilment – so this unfortunate situation would have never had to happen –, and how certain narratives have hitherto confronted uncertainty, both exposing social disenchantment and promoting active contestation. I will refer here to fiction films since they have been often selected as the preferred vehicle for materializing such expectations and narratives due to their extraordinary capacity of penetrating into the social tissue and of reaching diverse and massive audiences. Therefore, rephrasing Appadurai (1996: 13), fiction becomes a heuristic device to talk about culture, inasmuch as cinema has not only become today a major aesthetic form but it does also shape cultural assumptions under narrative and normative forms that help the anthropologist to better understand everyday social practices (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1991), not to mention the creation of new human knowledge through visual reperesentation[5] (MacDougall 2005).

Fiction films as potential ethnographic sources.

In his book *Cinema. A Visual Anthropology*, Gordon Gray refers to the academic value of film by making a crucial statement that places it as a potentially paramount source for social research: '[...] the study of cinema can provide insights into areas of a society of a different time or place that otherwise may be difficult, or even impossible, to access' (2010: x), and this

[5] Especially in cultural environments where such knowledge about the world is increasingly based on the generation of images (Stafford 1991) and on a strong connection between seeing and knowing (Jenks 1995; Rose 2001), despite Berger's warning concerning the unsettled relation between what we see and what we know (1992: 7).

is possible because we can use film to retrieve: '[...] information on the ideas and prejudices of a particular time and place, again particularly of the culture-producing class' (Ibid. x). As an anthropologist who has been using film in my academic research for nearly 20 years, I could not agree more with him. Cinema could become a primary documentary source given its extraordinary ability to penetrate into the social tissue and subsequently to spread embodied abstract principles and ideas –such as certain culturally specific conceptions about how life is, should be or someone would like it to be – over massive audiences. Hence, fiction films should be of outmost relevance for social and cultural research since, as Giroux pointed out:

> [they] produce and incorporate ideologies that represent the outcome of struggles marked by the historical realities of power and the deep anxieties of the times; they also deploy power through the important role they play connecting the production of pleasure and meaning with the mechanisms and practices of powerful teaching machines. Put simply, films both entertain and educate (Giroux 2002: 3).

This statement rightly reveals the crucial role of movies in the cultural landscape. As Paget (1998) recalls, the Latin root of fiction is the verb "*fingere*", which could be translated as "to mould" or "to shape". It is, therefore, a term that suggests an imaginative elaboration of reality (not that far from Grierson's celebrated characterization of documentary as: 'the creative treatment of actuality' – Ellis 2000 –) that '[...] was not necessarily perceived as a lie' (Paget 1998, 105). Then, what he calls the '[...] "mocking up" of the real event' (Idem: 108) would better deserve the term "*fake*tion", and by so doing he operates a neat distinction between the narrative and stylistic elaboration of the reality-as-perceived, and the deliberate attempt to fake it out. If we consider fiction in this light, movies may acquire a substantially different nature.

If we think of the best communicative artery to propagate certain ideas during most part of the XXth century (before the generalization of web-based services and other information and communication technologies), we would possibly find that cinema could be the perfect vehicle to achieve this role. Thus, if used purposely, films' intentions may be addressed '[...] so as to authorize certain readings and to discredit others' (Barbash & Tylor 1997: 60). Hence, as Cassetti (1993) and Chaplin (1994) have exposed, we must pay attention to the various roles that ideology and symbolic constructions play in the social patterning of proper and improper attitudes according to the hegemonic mechanisms of power at a given time and in particular contexts.

By the same token, films may also be approached as subversive devices. After all, filmmakers, through the meanings affirmed it their work '[...] may just as easily subdue the status

quo, counteract repression, and empower our subjects, as the opposite' (Barbash & Tylor 1997: 60). That is the realm where fiction becomes a crucial asset.

CINEMA AS DISENCHANTMENT: THE SPANISH CASE

The protesters who took the streets in 2011 were mostly young citizens, but by no means were young generations the only agents in the protest. Medium-age individuals and even older collectives (later on grouped under labels as "yayoflautas", a slang word to refer to seething senior citizens) were also actively rallying and undertaking specific protest actions. As they claimed:

> We are the generation that fought and got a better life for their children. Now they are putting the future of our daughters and granddaughters in danger. We are proud of the social response and the impulse that are showing the new generations in the struggle for democracy worthy of this name and for social justice, against the bankers and complicit politicians. We are at your side, feeling, neighborhood assemblies and also in action. If someone wants to dismiss his bravery by calling them "perroflautas" we can call ourselves "iaioflautas [catalán versión of yayoflautas]. (Excerpt of the manifesto available at *www.iaioflautas.org/el-nostre-manifest*.

If we consider the Spanish history since the mid 1940s, thus covering most part of these generations' life cycles, we may face singular circumstances. A devastated country tried to emerge and strived to overcome a cruel and bloody civil war, surrounded by countries exhausted and also devastated by the World War II. Part of the Spanish 'anomaly' at that time relied on the political regime present in the country, since it was one of the few European dictatorships that survived the European turmoil of the Great War. Contrary to other consolidated o renewed democracies in European countries, the Spanish government enclosed itself in a political autarchy until the 1950s. Firmly based on national-catholic guidelines, the Regime presented the civil war as a national crusade and overtly spoke of a brighter future based on the moral and physical prosperity of the renewed country. Hence, official discourses soon erased both the unwanted past and the inconvenient present. Misery, dissidence or poverty were absent of the Spanish official reality. And that was the first step to a massive deception: the unrealism in the depiction of reality lead to a constant fuelling of aspiration based on the official reports about truth instead of the real dimension of social living conditions.

Cinema became at that time an ideological –as much as instructive– weapon either to promote the hegemonic view of a renewed country, or to counteract it –inasmuch as the control and surveillance of the hegemonic power deliberately banned the depiction of certain situations, which otherwise would have

been virtually invisible to mass audiences. Nevertheless, discomfort, uncertainty and also veiled dissidence poured out of the alleged seams of reality and cinema was the preferred media to expose them by means of its refractive nature.[6] Obviously, it had to be done under conventional clothes; otherwise, such films would never had been allowed to be screened. But the reality was somehow contested. Sometimes even firmly (though subtly) challenged.[7]

Hence, for example, depictions of deviant, pitiable, hazardous or criminal behaviours could be screened as long as they got a proper punishment in the end, according to the censorship moral orthodoxy. Beyond this formal observance, such films are one of the few major cultural testimonies we can access to investigate political and social contestation during those years. In the following pages, I will take some particular films as examples of such narrative of discomfort between 1953 and 2002, trying to stress this continuity in the entwining chronicles of disenchantment.

For example, in *That merry couple* (*Esa pareja feliz,* Bardem & Berlanga, 1953), Juan and Carmen, a young newly weds, overwhelmed by economic difficulties (Juan's wage as electrician is too short), do participate in a radio contest where the prize consists of 24 hours of happiness by getting all sorts of gifts for free. They won, but the combination of Juan's labour difficulties and the artificiality of their temporary social improvement gradually undermined couple's confidence in each other and put their marriage at a stake. Finally, they renounced all gifts and went back to their living from hand to mouth, according to the precariousness of the times. In this film, brief hints of scarcity and allusions to the artificial nature of the happy promised life could be read as metaphorical criticisms to the broad political situation.

By the end of this same decade, *The little apartment* (*El pisito,* Ferreri & Ferry 1959), shows again the daily struggle of young working-class couples to make out their living after marriage. Such constraints forced some couples to look for, so to speak, less normative strategies to earn a living, such as presenting an infatuated love between a man and a elder lady owner, with the connivance of the man's fiancé, in order to inherit the apartment at the lady's death. In this case, subliminal critique could only be apparent if all situations were properly channelled towards a normative resolution. But at the forefront, the spirit for overcoming tough times and the triumph of love and mutual commitment, let us glimpse a blurred background where allusions to misery and the post-war social devastation lead to a daily effort for getting along. In both cases, contestation of success patterns and the frail promise of a better life had to be refracted under the shelter of double entendre dialogues and the complicity of predisposed audiences.

The Stabilization Plan of 1959 opened a half-hearted liberalization, which, among other interests, aimed at the international scene that tried to soften and –if possible– improve the Fran-

[6] By refraction I mean the intentional distortion of a particular situation in order to suggest something else between lines (Grau Rebollo 2013).

[7] During all that time the hegemonic power did never underestimate the strategic value of fiction in mainstream films. Quite the opposite: one of the most prominent tasks of different governmental authorities was to stay alert about any improper depiction that could lower the moral and patriotic standards of those who attended the exhibition theatres.

coism image abroad. However, the tight grip upon filmmaking was far from being relaxed. Quite the opposite: the determination of keeping proper representation of Spanish essences under control led the government to promulgate a new set of censorship directions (Normas de Censura Cinematográfica 1963). They blatantly expressed the underlying interest of the hegemonic political instances. According to Gubern et al. (1995), they were the plain expression of the firm will of exerting a total religious, moral and political control. However, at the beginning of the sixties, *Plácido* (*Plácido,* Berlanga, 1961) tackled with the thorny issue of misery and disenchantment both at the background and at the forefront of the film. As summarized by Pablo Montoya: "In a small Spanish town, a group of old ladies decide to celebrate Christmas Eve with a "Sit a poor man at your table" dinner: each wealthy household of the town will have a homeless person dining with them that night. The celebrations also include a parade, and in it we find Plácido, the humble owner of a three-wheeler, whose family is forced to live in a public lavatory because of the lack of money to pay the rent, and who has to pay the second bill of his vehicle before midnight or else he will lose it" (*www.imdb.com/title/tt0055310/*).

In this context, the quality of a film was not considered upon artistic or technical criteria. Rather, 'Spanish movies are good, bad or a mixture of both, depending on the extent to which they fit into the structural, technical, and narrative patterns that are consensually accepted as models' (Talens and Zunzunegui 1998: 36). These models were shaped according to hegemonic patterns and later on encapsulated into the film's diegesis. Hence, the higher quality films carried the imprint of excellence as the result of the careful distillation of the scripts that ideally lead the film to be distinguished as 'of national interest'.

In the seventies, after the death of Francisco Franco, much more explicit allusions to disappointment arises. The generation that grew up after the post-war period, hearing constant promises of future good days and a life of fulfilment, face the political, economic and social instability of the early transitional period. Far from considering the past a mere anomaly, this framework is presented as a whole set of lies and fakes. Thus, films as *The disenchanment* (*El desencanto*, Chávarri, 1976) a documentary biopic based on the testimonies of the widow and sons of one of the most renown poets within the Francoism, Leopoldo Panero, brings audience to an blatant discussion about lies, moral decadence and false hope. Being this particular family setting turned into an allegory of a whole political period, Chávarri exposes the broad feeling of uncertainty and disquiet of a young generation that experiences the confusion of living between what it really was and what they were told it was going to be.

But in my opinion *The green prairies* (*Las verdes praderas*, Garci, 1979) is one of the most significant films in this respect (image 1). Jose is a humble middle-aged man who becomes a brilliant high executive in a large insurance company by means

FIGURE 3 - JOSE (ALFREDO LANDA) AND CONCHI (MARÍA CASANOVA). MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE GREEN PRAIRIES. PICTURE COURTESY OF VIDEO MERCURY FILMS.

of a hard work, dedicated life. He is happily married to Conchi and both enjoy a family life with their two children until something in his life seems not to work out properly. Despite he may be taken as the perfect example of a self-made entrepreneur, owning a large house, a luxury car and having the benefits of a generous wage, Jose does all of a sudden realize of his incompleteness. A disastrous weekend in his chalet brings a shadow of self-consciousness upon the entire family: something does not go as it should. His wife perceives that and approaches him in order to find out the reason of his uneasiness.

In the selected excerpt (film clip 1) Jose's attitude shows an unconcealed bitterness towards present time and the forthcoming future. Deeply concerned, Conchi enquires him about his inner feelings as Jose recalls a chain of unaccomplished promises of a better life. Looking straight into her eyes, Jose explains that:

> For 42 years I've been thinking that what I experienced was not important since it was like something... something provisional... as if I were waiting for a final post. I thought I was going towards a wonderful life... and while I was queuing I studied and worked hard because it was supposed to be that way because later on my life would finally arrive. My true life...and you know what? It has arrived... [...] And now, I don't like it.

After projecting his envision over the future of his family life, Jose comes to his concluding remarks:

> And suddenly you die... and you feel really stupid... And in the last minute you say to yourself: come on... come on... Because they lied to you all the time and you never did what you really wanted to do... [...] That's what happens to me... I was wrong, damn it! I was wrong.

Despite apparently Jose's complaints do not explicitly allude to unemployment or to any sort of income shortage, as he rather refers to the ludicrous consumptions habits of middle-

upper classes in the 1970's Spain and the preposterous kind of life they lead to, his deepest reasoning addresses the dissatisfaction of an unfulfilled life due to a succession of failed promises and expectations.

As we may appreciate, this upsetting feeling is gradually spreading over higher social strata, thus trespassing the lower layers of working classes and reaching wide sections of middle and even upper-middle class citizens. Hence, social improvement is no longer shackled to just a higher material income since it does also require emotional comfort. That is the reason why the notion of disenchantment is crucial for the sense of betterment.

During the 1980s the Spanish filmic panorama was plenty of films that presented a critical view on the present and the past in several ways. Firstly, we could find film production associated to the Spanish *Movida*, a broad cultural movement covering different branches of popular art such as music, photography or cinema that broke the boundaries of previously repressed artistic expressions and moral taboos. One of its main exponents was Pedro Almodóvar, whose production soon became the most internationally renowned at that time (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*, 1980; *Labyrinth of Passion* [Laberinto de pasiones], 1982; *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* [¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?], 1988 or *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* [Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios, 1988, among others). Secondly, there were a clump of films focusing on controversial issues such as drug consumption and crime among certain sectors of Spanish youth (as José Antonio de la Loma started to show in the late seventies and Eloy de la Iglesia developed in the eighties). Thirdly, the Civil War and the long period of subsequent dictatorship came at last under a critical scrutiny (from as different filmmakers as Luis García Berlanga, Fernando Fernán Gómez, Antonio Mercero, Francesc Betriu, Jaime Chávarri, Antonio José Betancor or Jaime Camino).

Therefore, the social and political atmosphere was at that point a combination of artistic exploration,[8] profound changes in the labour market, active protests in several social groups affected by such transformations and a mixture of expansion on the one hand (from the welfare state system to renovated structural policies oriented to expand the economic growth and the modernization of the country's image[9]), and an increasing sense of deception in those wide social sections that could not fully benefit of the appointed benefits on the other hand.

Needless to say, the confrontation between prosperity narratives and less-optimistic countervisions is not characteristic of a particular historical or political period. Thus, even during the Spanish "miraculous decade" (1997-2007), as Royo (2009) has ironically referred to the seemingly unstoppable economic growth in Spain since the second half of the 1990s, we could find several examples of disillusion, specially among working classes and the less favoured social layers. For example, *Suburb* (*Barrio*, León de Aranoa, 1998) follows three young pals who

JOSE EXPRESSES HIS DISENCHANTMENT TO CONCHI. FILM CLIP COURTESY OF VIDEO MERCURY FILMS. TRANSLATION ADDED. PASSWORD TO WATCH THE CLIP= confronting.

[8] It must be noticed that the freedom of expression was only recovered with the promulgation of the Spanish constitution in 1978, 3 years after the death of Franco.

[9] Which, to some views, came to a symbolic conclusion with the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the World fair in Seville and the designation of Madrid as European cultural capital (Sánchez 2004: 10, 21).

loaf around at the outskirts of Madrid talking about live, future, sex and work, as well as their common dreams and problems while coping with a dissatisfying environment. They are all well aware of how far out of reach might prosperity and fulfilment be, according to the hegemonic narratives about success: to own a house, a car, to be happily married and to earn enough money to live a comfortable life.

From the same filmmaker, *Mondays in the sun* (2002) turns the audience attention towards the dark side of that very same success and to the absolute truncation of dreams. León de Aranoa dives into the devastating effects of unemployment among former shipyard workers who lost their job after the closure of the dock company where they were employed. As time goes by and the hope of getting another job gradually vanishes, they find themselves fighting to keep their marriages alive, doing their best to overcome alcoholism or trying to avoid jail after turning their frustration and bitterness into active participation in street protest demonstrations. As the film motto warns: "this film is not based on a real story. It is based on thousands".

The opening scene shows the confrontation between groups of Shipyards workers demonstrating against the industrial restructuring that would send tens of thousands of them to the unemployment, while police riot squads try to prevent an escalation of the conflict. As Florido, Roca & Gutiérrez Molina (2013) have pointed out, the restructuring of the Shipbuilding Industry –along with the deep changes in the iron and steel production– brought onerous consequences to the Spanish labour market during the 1980s. According to them:

> [...] restructuring was not just the dismantling of a sector in crisis, but the disappearance of an organizational model that had been molded for over a century and that affected the way of life of workers and their families. The shipyard was characterized by guild-like kinship, with a built-in social support system, and workers and their families had partial access not only to work but also to housing, training, and even some basic services. This way of life was engrained in the memories of the actors in the conflict of the 1980s (and in those of their ancestors, most of whom also worked for the company) to such a degree that restructuring could be called the dismantling of a community and a lifestyle, a whole world, limited in scope but with a long history (2013: 895).

Certainly, as the authors assert, part of the conflict lied on the refusal of a new structural frame that entailed an entirely new social situation for them (Florido, Roca & Gutiérrez Molina 2013: 916), but it also made visible the final stage of an old misconnection between the appointed fate and social reality. Santa, a former shipyard worker in his forties raises his voice against the current situation they are enforced to live in and its foreseeable consequences. In the midst of an acrimonious discussion about the (in)convenience of having signed the agree-

ment that finally sent his workmates and himself out of work, he utters a painful statement:

> What could you do at 49-years-old, early retired, two children and 8 million [pesetas –about 48.000 €–]?... Nothing... That's what you can do [...] you signed the job layoff of your offspring, damn it, it was their jobs we were discussing there... and we lost them.

It is this very sense of loss towards the future due to to a deceptive existence that has in different ways pervaded various generations during most part of the 20th century in Spain as well as the first decade of the 21st. Hence, although the arise of protest movements in the spring of 2011 could be considered and investigated as a contemporary expression of distress in connection with previous uprisings in other countries (as the wave of demonstrations known as "the Arab Spring", for example),[10] a more diachronic approach considering a *long*-durée history of unfulfilmment among certain socials sections would certainly shed a different – and necessary – light on the matter.

CONCLUSION

As in the *Time* magazine approach to the protesters, it is noticeable in many films how: "History often emerges only in retrospect. Events become significant only when looked back on" (Time 2011). Every context weaves a network of promises and a set of narratives of success that for many reasons do not always fulfil. Actually, many times things do not happen as expected and the frustration for the unaccomplished expectations overlaps with the concern for a disappointing reality.

At the beginning of this article, I referred to the *Times* magazine celebration of the protester and to a lively civil movement that blossomed in Spain in 2011, which came after the so-called "Arab spring" and before other public demonstration in the United States and other parts of the world. Certainly, hope and disenchantment somehow met in many diverse ways in all these movements. But in the particular case that I have tried to expose here –how filmic narratives do play a crucial role in confronting uncertainty, exposing social disenchantment but also in promoting active contestation– there lies a troublesome fact: the characters of *That happy couple* were the civil war children that expose the broken hopes in the 1950s; the main characters of *Plácido* state even more crudely the impossible completion of the so vividly advertised Spanish prosperity at the beginning of the 1960s; *The green prairies* overtly claims against the pernicious effects of success narratives in the late 1970s and *Mondays in the Sun* faces a limit situation for many workers who felt themselves lost in an existential cul-de-sac.

In some way, all these films offer a continuous tale of broken hopes and unaccomplished promises and the audiovisual milieu provides us with precious examples of blatant contes-

[10] A comparison that should however be properly nuanced, both in its inner dimension as a seemingly homogenous movement and it its alleged outer resemblance with other social movements (Anderson, 2011; Howard, Duffy, Freelon et al, 2011; Lotan, Graeff, Anany, et al., 2011, Péña-López, Congosto & Aragón, 2013).

tations of narratives about social success as the main path towards personal attainment.

In this light, fiction may serve as a fundamental ethnographic source. Films dispose different modes of expression (Ferro 1988) that provide the researcher with specific and intentional narratives that convey cultural assumptions through visual representation. Certainly, as Ferro states, it is difficult to measure and evaluate the real influence of cinema upon audiences, but "[...] at least certain sequences of cause and effect can be observed" (1988: 15). And an accurate scrutiny of the volitional disposition of events and situations on the screen can lead to a better understanding of interactions as well as the creation of new human knowledge, as MacDougall (2005) properly emphasizes.

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