

## **Historical Memory and Family Metaphor in Catalonia's New Documentary School**

**Jaume Martí-Olivella**  
University of New Hampshire

### **The emergence of a new Catalan documentary: A few critical observations.**

The title given to this article begs an immediate explanation since, in a classical sense, most documentary films deal with reality, that is, use history as their basic reference. And yet, in the case of Catalan cinema, historical actuality was not easy to represent during the Franco years since his regime had proscribed, to all extents and purposes, the relating of any story outside the official one. This long discursive monologue, or to put it more accurately, this long absence of a real historical discourse, was compounded in the Spanish and Catalan cases by the pact of silence that was more or less explicitly underwritten by the main political actors in the transition to democracy once the physical presence of the dictator disappeared in 1975. In short, it may be safe to say that the bulk of the best new documentary cinema to emerge in Catalonia since Franco's death runs counter to both historical silences: the one imposed by the dictatorship and the other one upon which the entire precarious building of Spain's new democracy was built. The words of Carla Subirana, one of the youngest filmmakers to appear in the context of the new Catalan documentary with her remarkable feature film *Nedar* (To Swim, 2008) are quite clear in this sense:

I don't agree with the message from the transition that all we can do is to forget. I don't want these stories to remain forever in the shadows of the past. The pain and fear felt by my grandmother was more than enough. As somebody told me, this is "*the rebellion of the grandchildren*". (Subirana in Marimon, *Time Out*. Translation and emphasis mine.)

These grandchildren have decided to break that silence deal once and for all. What I want to emphasize in this essay is the dual reality

expressed in Subirana's words, the need to recover historical memory and the need to achieve this by rearticulating the family metaphor. Elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> I have described the persistence of this trope in all the four most representative genres in contemporary Catalan cinema, namely, the urban comedy, the literary adaptation, the documentary and the new avant-garde. Here, and to go back to my title, I need to add that there is not a unique and new documentary school in contemporary Catalan cinema. In fact, the documentary genre has a solid tradition in Catalonia.<sup>2</sup> What is new is the cultural centrality achieved by a number of significant films and filmmakers working in or around the parameters of the documentary genre.

What is also new is the convergence of cultural institutions in their support of the production and exhibition of documentary films, which had been traditionally relegated to marginal venues. Local and national televisions, major museums, new academic programs in the most prestigious universities, and even a few commercial theaters have consistently sponsored and promoted this refashioning of the documentary tradition in quite an unprecedented way. Among this new wealth of venues, when trying to map out the current richness of the Catalan documentary genre, one should emphasize the formation of three more or less independent schools: the creative documentary backed by the new academic programs at the Pompeu Fabra and the Universitat Autònoma in Barcelona, the variations upon the traditional journalistic formats practised by many professionals working for television stations and the most experimental output of new filmmakers working from and with new technologies. Needless to say, not all those filmmakers are concerned with issues related to Catalonia's cultural and political identity and its historical memory.

My focus here will be on the already mentioned confluence between the reclaiming of historical memory and the articulation of that claim using different variations on the family metaphor. In the context of Catalan cinema and of this study, the first use of the family

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, my essay 'Tradició i modernitat al nou cinema català: El cas d'*Elisa K.*' (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Esteve Riambau (2010) provides a brief but well informed summary of this tradition.

metaphor is to be seen in the clear lineage established by many new directors with their predecessors in the documentary genre. Formally and even thematically, there seems to be a clear link between the current output of historically and politically committed documentaries with some of the groundbreaking documentaries produced during the Transition by a select group of Catalan directors whose careers have not necessarily been built around their non-fiction films. This is the case, for instance, of Pere Portabella's *Informe general* (General Report, 1978), of Jaime Camino's *La vieja memoria* (The Old Memory, 1977), or of Ventura Pons's *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*, (Ocaña, An Intermittent Portrait, 1978), all of which constitute true cinematic landmarks in their own right.<sup>3</sup>

There seems to be critical agreement, however, in considering the turn of the century as the historical moment that marks a before and an after in the Catalan cinematic scene as far as the documentary genre is concerned. There is also a large agreement in terms of proper names that point towards the figures of Joaquim Jordà and José Luis Guerin and of their films *Mones com la Becky* (Monkeys like Becky, 1999), and *En construcció* (Work in Progress, 2000), as the clearer markers of that before and after. The fact that both directors have played a fundamental role as teachers and creators also reinforce their prominent position as the forerunners of that cultural construction we now refer to as the new Catalan documentary school. Such a position may be crystallized by an essay written by Esteve Riambau, significantly entitled: "Cuando los monos aún no eran como Becky. (El documental catalán antes de 1999)". Besides offering a brief history of the development of the genre in Catalonia, Riambau's essay clearly posits the production of Joaquim Jordà's film as the dividing line while duly emphasizing the importance of some documentaries made during the transition years that already contributed to blur traditional limits between reality and fiction, which was to become a trademark of the current boom of the genre in Catalonia:

---

<sup>3</sup> Esteve Riambau (2010: 27) considers these and a few other documentaries from the Transition as 'cuñas' or wedges against the traditional separation between reality and fiction in this cinematic genre.

The generic break introduced by Jacinto Esteva's *Lejos de los árboles* (Far from the Trees, 1972,) Pere Portabella's *Informe General* (General Report, 1978), Joaquim Jordà's *Númax presenta* (Numax Presents, 1979), Gonzalo Herralde's *El asesino de Pedralbes* (The Pedralbes Assassin, 1978), or Jaime Camino's *La vieja memoria* (The Old Memory, 1977) progressively weakened the rigid frontier that had traditionally separated documentaries from fictional films thus opening the way to the formal promiscuous nature that characterizes the bulk of the genre in contemporary Catalonia. (Riambau, 2010: 27)

What many of those films also blurred, and that is something I truly want to emphasize here, is the frontier between the private and the public spaces, a frontier masterfully travelled by José Luis Guerín's *En construcción* and Joaquim Jordà's *Mones com la Becky* which, besides their status as historical markers, also combine a brilliant blending of the personal and the collective in their analysis of the limits and transformations of the Catalan urban self. Further proof of that familiar linkage may be seen in the hybrid nature and the strong authorial presence that characterize many of the new documentaries, a fact that has called attention to the critical reappraisal of, and the aesthetic connection with, the Barcelona School and its own experimental brand of filmmaking.

Ultimately, it is this historical link with the Catalan cinematic Avant-garde that has offered the new Catalan documentary a critical subject position that claims a direct lineage with that 'invisible tradition'<sup>4</sup>—a position that sets it apart from the narrative filmmaking still quite hegemonic in Spain at large— thus echoing the cultural schism brought about by the appearance of the Barcelona School in the sixties and seventies of the last century. The fact that Joaquim Jordà was both the main ideologue and one of the most important practitioners in that Barcelona School while assuming one of the

---

<sup>4</sup> This term was employed by Sara Nadal-Melsió (2010) in the preface to the *Hispanic Review* special issue on the Barcelona School. Despite its attraction the qualificative is also problematic as has been discussed by Gonzalo de Pablo and Elena Oroz (2010).

leading roles in the theory and practice of the new documentary mode offers a tangible bridge that helps sustain such historical linkage.

It will be the figure of Joaquim Jordà, precisely, the one that looms larger over the new Catalan documentary devoted to the recovery of the country's historical memory. As if echoing the transnational nature of Catalan cinema as a whole, this new documentary will point inwards and outwards. In both cases the family metaphor will remain the central structuring device. This essay is concerned with the internal gaze, the one that looks into Catalonia's own loss of memory while performing the Alzheimer exercise in private and public terms. The second cinematic direction of this new Catalan documentary casts its gaze across the Atlantic in order to intervene in the current debate over the historical memory in many Latin American countries. Jordà's presence in both of these cinematic directions is not only symbolic. In fact, he appears on screen as mentor and friend, almost as surrogate father, in Carla Subirana's *Nedar* (2008), the first film to introduce the Alzheimer association in the Catalan body politic.<sup>5</sup>

Jordà's last cinematic contribution, on the other hand, was his participation as co-screenwriter in Germán Berger-Hertz's *Mi vida con Carlos* (My Life with Carlos, 2010), a documentary that tells the story of Carlos Berger Pizarnik, a leading supporter of the Allende regime who was killed by Pinochet's death squads in Chile. Berger-Hertz's political exile brought him to Barcelona where he studied film with Jordà whose support and collaboration helped the young Chilean director to produce his remarkable testimony. Last, but certainly not least, Jordà was also Isaki Lacuesta's teacher, friend and, together with José Luis Guerín, helped shape the daring vision of the most acclaimed of the new Catalan documentarists. In this context, Lacuesta's *Los condenados* (The Damned, 2009), reads almost as a counter-image of Berger-Hertz's family reunion by presenting a challenging vision of the family clashes surrounding the actual

---

<sup>5</sup> The importance of *Nedar* and *Bucarest, la memòria perduda* as collective inscriptions of the Alzheimer metaphor has been also noted by Sonia García López (2014).

process of trying to recover the body of the lost father in the jungles of an unnamed Latin American country.<sup>6</sup>

### **Family Portraits: Performing the Alzheimer Metaphor**

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. I want to describe, not what it is really like to emigrate to the kingdom of the ill and live there, but the punitive or sentimental fantasies concocted about that situation: not real geography but stereotypes of national character. (Sontag, 1990: 3).

Susan Sontag's remarkable starting paragraph in her volume *Illness as Metaphor* offers an excellent platform to start the analysis of three recent Catalan documentary films that inscribe the personal and public tensions of that dual citizenship. I am referring to Carla Subirana's *Nedar* (To Swim, 2008), to Albert Solé's *Bucarest, la memòria perduda* (Bucarest, The Lost Memory, 2008), and to Carles Bosch's *Bicicleta, cullera, poma* (Bycicle, Spoon, Apple, 2010). The appearance of three films dealing with the ravages of Alzheimer's disease in this historical moment does not seem to be a mere coincidence. In fact, if taken together, these three documentaries create a narrative that bespeaks a national claim, Catalonia's claim neither to forget nor to be forgotten. Beyond this collective gesture, however, each film constitutes a different statement regarding the boundaries of the private and the public, of the national and the international.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of Berger Hertz's and Lacuesta's films as part of the Catalan transatlantic gaze, see Martí-Olivella (2010).

<sup>7</sup> The Spanish and international contexts of Subirana's and Solé's films are very thoroughly delineated in García López (2014) which, nevertheless, does not foreground their gendered structure nor their link with the Catalan body politic, two aspects that are central to my approach.

Unlike Bosch's more journalistic and ultimately more ambitious attempt at presenting all the different sides of the illness, Solé and Subirana chose a much more private path, although clearly trying to merge the personal and the collective in different ways. Both *Nedar* and *Bucarest, la memòria perduda*, moreover, foreground the "performative" category of the documentary genre since their directors play themselves as both object and subject of their films. And yet, despite that initial commonality, the two films take quite different approaches both formally and conceptually.

Thus, Solé's *Bucarest* becomes a true family portrait, the term family understood both in its biological and its political sense. His remarkable montage of archival footage, interviews with the most prominent members of his father's political family, such as Santiago Carrillo, Jorge Semprún or Francesc Vicens, and his own conversations with Annie Cruset, his French biological mother and with Teresa Eulàlia Calzada, his father's second wife, all combine to produce at the same time a remarkable and uncommon family album and an important history lesson about Jordi Solé-Tura's clandestine years both at home and in exile, first in France and then in Romania, where he became one of the physical voices behind Radio España Independiente, La Pirenaica, doubtlessly the most mythical and efficient of international broadcasts against the Franco regime.

At the heart of Solé's project there is a double goal, to further establish his own sense of identity and to be able to transmit the historical memory of an entire generation. Concerning the first, Solé has frequently mentioned the fact that he believed he was French for quite a while until his parents told him first that he was Hungarian, and, finally that he was born in Romania. The secrets of his family's clandestine life became the mystery of his own history.<sup>8</sup> A mystery that is unveiled with this film. Concerning the generational aspect of his portrait, it is worth quoting his own words:

---

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, the candid interview with David Barba: 'A ver si me aclaro, usted nació en París...' 'No, no! Ahí empieza lo sorprendente: de niño pensaba que era francés, pero a los seis años me sentaron a la mesa y me dijeron que era húngaro' (2009: 88).

També en paraules d'Albert Solé el documental neix d'una constatació dolorosa: 'Sento que la imatge del meu pare s'està desdibuixant. Cada vegada que la malaltia avança una passa més, m'adono que l'immens capital acumulat al llarg d'una vida intensa s'està perdent. Sento la frustració de no poder capturar els seus records, de no poder-li explicar a la meva filla petita i a les noves generacions la riquesa i la complexitat que envoltaren la vida d'aquesta generació d'idealistes.' (Solé a Merino, 2010: 63).

Thus, Solé spells out quite clearly the need to do both, to preserve the fading image of his father's life and to be able to pass that knowledge to the next generations who, more often than not, are the direct victims of the almost complete erasure of historical memory carried out in Catalonia and in Spain not only during the Franco years but, more dramatically, during the years of the democratic transition. In fact, it feels like a historical irony that Albert Solé, the son of one of the Fathers of the Spanish Constitution and, thus, one of the major political actors in the years of the Transition, is the one taking care of breaking the silence deal that constituted the very basis of that political transition.

Unlike Solé, Carla Subirana starts from a profound lack of patriarchal history in her most immediate lineage. Making a virtue out of necessity in her film *Nedar*—by turning the near complete absence of traditional familiar souvenirs (photo albums, letters, family films, etc.) in her family into a cinematic recreation of the way she had always imagined her grandfather— she thus produces a film-within-a-film in which she fictionally reconstructs the romantic encounter between her grandmother Leonor Subirana and her mysterious grandfather, Joan Arroniz, who was shot by the Franco regime in 1940 accused of having perpetrated three armed robberies.

The black and white shadowy technique employed by Subirana in these segments clearly evokes American films noirs and the figure of Humphrey Bogart. In the context of Catalan new documentaries, moreover, this technique strongly recalls the same usage made by Carles Balagué in his fictional portrayal of Faceries and his group of maquis in their assault on the eponymous bordello, the real protagonist of his filmic essay, *La casita blanca. La ciudad oculta*

(The Little White House. The Hidden City, 2002).<sup>9</sup> Unlike Balagué, and perhaps learning from the acting difficulties seen in his inserted black and white fictional recreations, Subirana chooses to diversify their function offering thus a completely silent version in her own romantic reconstructions of her grandparents' encounter while using a cold and officially sounding voice-over to tell the Franco police story written in the summary judgement that the images try to illustrate. In this case, Subirana's technique recalls the one employed by Pere Portabella in his *Informe general* where he used fictional recreations of police chases and beatings which visually inscribed Francoism's own crime. Ultimately, though, Subirana's black and white film-within-a-film inscription constitutes a very restrained performance of her family drama of ghostly male absences and shadows. Early into her film, while explaining the community of women that surrounds her mother, Anna Subirana, the director says:

Són dones separades, divorciades o, simplement, dones soles. (...) Els meus pares es varen separar quan jo tenia mesos. El meu pare se'n va anar a Puerto Rico, per això ell és només una creu en un mapa. Per això no hi ha fotos familiars amb ell, tampoc no n'hi ha del meu avi, només una. (...) Potser l'absència del meu pare pesava massa, així, no em vaig preocupar mai d'aquesta altra absència. (*Nedar*, film script)

Thus, Subirana, unlike Solé, will not so much search for her true origins or try to restore 'the name of the father'. Her attempt seems more related to a personal rebellion against fear, in both biological and historical terms. In terms of context, I have already mentioned how she clearly positioned herself as a member of 'the rebellion of the grandchildren' — those who stand against the silence deal during the transition years and who lead the way into the recovery of their own and the country's historical memory.<sup>10</sup> It is the biological fear, however, which acts as a catalyst as Casimiro Torreiro suggests:

---

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of this film and its place in Catalan cinema, see Martí-Olivella (2011).

<sup>10</sup>See, for instance, Bernat Salvà's essay and, especially, this paragraph: 'Unes reflexions personals que entronquen amb el moviment general de

Apparently, the film refers to her grandparents (to her genealogy, as it were). Deep down, though, it hides till almost the very end what truly obsesses the director, the ultimate reason that took her to show herself and her own experience so openly: the fear of a tragic genetic design that, in the shape of Alzheimer disease, confronted her grandmother (whose degradation, so delicately shown by her granddaughter's camera, is nevertheless quite obvious) and that, in the very midst of shooting the film, reappears tragically on her mother. (Torreiro, 2010, 187. My translation).

The degenerative mental disease diagnosed in another family member while shooting the film is also a fundamental occurrence in Albert Solé's *Bucarest, la memòria perduda*. Just like Subirana, Solé will include this new appearance of the illness in the body of the narrative. In both films, the two mothers will, in fact, replicate the performative gesture of the directors by letting their illness be represented diegetically and by incorporating their efforts into the historical reconstruction which the films are depicting. There are, in this sense, two sequences that become quite significant. One shows Carla and her mother Anna visiting the cemetery where a series of tall stone columns lists all the names of those killed by the Franco regime after summary military trials. Anna seems surprised to discover the name Joan Arroniz among those listed. From that moment on, the deep silence surrounding the figure of the grandfather seems to be lifted and substituted by a vivid interest in her daughter's attempt to reconstruct his history.

In Solé's film, the memory trip will not be one of discovery but of recovery, perhaps even of vindication, when the director and his French mother, Annie Brusset, who is literally recovering from five surgical interventions on her brain, travel back to Bucarest, forty-five years after their initial stay in the Romanian capital. Annie, who fled Bucarest with little Albert in tow, seems ironically vindicated in this return trip when they find another significant stone column, the one

---

recuperació de la memòria històrica que s'està produint a tot l'Estat, i que Margalida Capellà, professora de dret internacional públic de la Universitat de les illes Balears, defineix com "la rebel·lió dels néts" (Salvà: 2008, 38).

that proclaims the historical death of an ideology that had brought Solé-Tura and his family there in the first place: 'Romania. Km. Zero. Free zone of neo-communism'. A possible vindication that adds an additional twist when they find out that the old studio of the Radio España Independiente, La Pirinaica, had been taken over by the 'Securitate', Ceaucescu's feared secret police.

Through real fear and real embodiment, the Alzheimer disease becomes the true protagonist of the three films. In this sense, it might be worth recalling again Susan Sontag's words:

My point is that illness is not a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness —and the healthiest way of being ill— is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking. (1990: 3)

These words, however, seem to beg Susan Sontag's own immediate qualification: 'Yet it is hardly possible to take up one's residence in the kingdom of the ill unprejudiced by the lurid metaphors with which it is been landscaped' (1990, 4). It is against this prejudiced landscape, precisely, that the three films analyzed here construct their performative gestures. In this sense, Pasqual Maragall, appears as the most unprejudiced of the Alzheimer performers and the one who directly confronts those "lurid metaphors" by alluding to the notion of a social contamination attached to the malady. He is extremely aware that by breaking the private/public divide, by publicly announcing his being diagnosed with Alzheimer, he is allowing many other less prominent, and probably less privileged people, to also break the barriers of social prejudice and go public.

'Trencar el silenci és trencar la por'. These words uttered by Carla Subirana in *Nedar* are at the heart of the three films. From Carla Subirana's fear of a congenital destiny of memory loss in a family already plagued by the silence over the spectral absent presences of their masculine members; to Albert Solé's personal search of identity through the generational disclosure of the secrets surrounding the clandestine years of his father's —Jordi Solé-Tura— early political life to Pasqual Maragall's attempt to break the silence and to broaden social awareness at a global scale, the three films offer a progressive extended metaphor for the individual, the generational and the global

need to recover the historical memory. In fact, the very global nature of the illness, so effectively illustrated by Carles Bosch's inclusion of the main researchers' work worldwide, seems to suggest a broader metaphorical reading: one that points towards the political and economic globalization of our world as another possible manifestation of a process of total memory loss. While commenting, precisely, on the multifaceted nature and structure of Carles Bosch's *Bicicleta, cullera, poma*, Imma Merino remarks:

La naturalesa de *Bicicleta, cullera, poma* és híbrida. Per una part, hi ha el pes de l'encàrrec que s'entreu en el caràcter explicatiu i fins en la dimensió didàctica que adquireix el documental a través del testimoni de diversos metges especialitzats en la malaltia d'Alzheimer. A la vegada, però, compta amb la desbordant presència de Pasqual Maragall i, així, doncs, amb el que li aporta la seva carismàtica i a voltes desconcertant personalitat. (2010, 63).

The basic difference between Carles Bosch's film and those by Carla Subirana and Albert Solé will not be the "naturalesa híbrida" which, in fact they share, as we will see immediately. The difference is that 'presència desbordant', Pasqual Maragall's overflowing presence, since, as noted by María Teresa Isla, Maragall's doctor: 'de seguida em vaig adonar que ell era un malalt especial no només per ser qui era sinó per ser una persona especial' (*Bicicleta*, film script). Unlike the spectral parental (and patriarchal) presence in Subirana's *Nedar*, or the absent presence of Albert Solé's decaying father in *Bucarest*, Maragall's charismatic presence endows the film with a special force, with an added sense of urgency. Here, the defense of "the name of the father," of the father's image and legacy is mainly undertaken by the father himself. He is in more than one way the star of the film, as even a film critic so little prone to public exegesis of anything Catalan as Carlos Boyero has proclaimed.<sup>11</sup> However —and

---

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, this passage: 'Pasqual Maragall, ese político imprevisible que ha dignificado una profesión en la que frecuentemente todo responde a lo previsible, la mediocridad, el discurso hueco y la impostura, también posee el magnetismo de una estrella de cine' (Boyero, 2010: 32).

this will also be a common element in the three films—, the ultimate ‘curator’ of that legacy will be the family, especially, the female members of the family who will become the true voices of memory and preservation. It is in this sense, therefore, that the confluence of the family metaphor with that of historical memory achieves its truest meaning.

I would like to finish with an analysis of the trope of the family as ‘curator’, paying attention to the double meaning implied in that word, that of caring for a cultural legacy and that of procuring a cure, of tending to the needs of an ill person. Before doing this, though, I want to reprise for a moment the hybridity of these films. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, these films are all examples of a documentary mode that has established its trademark by transgressing generic boundaries between reality and fiction; or, in other words, between cinematic documentary and social document. Formally, as has been already indicated, the composite nature of these films underlines their lineage with reference to their predecessors; and that is another instance of their will to inscribe a historical memory which is often obscured: that is to say, the memory of a Catalan cinematic tradition. Perhaps, the most obvious fictional element employed in these films is the use of visual metaphors, beyond the overarching use of Alzheimer itself as the defining metaphor.<sup>12</sup> Think, for instance, of the recurrent use of water imagery in Carla Subirana’s *Nedar*, from the very title onwards, which is illustrated in her frequent submersions in the swimming pool, to the initial credit sequence where we see and hear the amniotic fluids of a gestating fetus, to Carla’s trip to the source of the Flamisell river, near Mont-Rós, the small rural village in the Vall Fosca near the Pyrenees, where her grandmother Leonor was born and where she comes back with her mother Anna to try and follow the traces of Leonor’s romance with the always elusive grandfather, Joan Arroniz. It is this extended metaphor, ultimately, the one that better

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Albert Solé’s own reference to this metaphoric use of the illness: ‘¿España padece Alzheimer? El Alzheimer de mi padre es una metáfora muy fuerte de la pérdida de nuestra memoria. Hemos preferido olvidar porque ni derecha ni izquierda saben muy bien qué hacer con nuestro pasado’ (Barba, 2009: 88).

expresses Carla's fears and hopes, as these words by Imma Merino point out:

Durant el llarg procés de creació de *Nedar*, la mare de Carla Subirana també va començar a patir Alzheimer. Aleshores, havent-hi tanta implicació, la directora se'n va adonar que havia de narrar el documental en primera persona, tot mantenint els seus dubtes sobre si podia interessar a ningú més una història tan personal: "Però veig que l'oblit que pesa sobre tota una època és compartible." Subirana va treballar en favor de la memòria amb el convenciment que aquesta pot fer mal (a cada revelació, es capbussa en la piscina havent dit que nedar sempre li ha alleugerit el mal d'esquena) però que a la vegada també cura i, en tot cas, és un acte de resistència davant de la propagació multiforme de l'oblit. (2010: 64)

In the case of Albert Solé's *Bucarest, la memòria perduda*, there is not such a leading extended metaphor but the entire film is presented as a home video, as a film within a film, that recreates visually the events that are fading from Jordi Solé-Tura's memory as his Alzheimer disease progresses. And this technique is further used as an intertextual homage to an entire generation—and to the figure of Jorge Semprún specifically—with the diegetic inclusion of Alain Resnais' film of 1966 *La guerre est finie*. The screenplay was written by Semprún and captures that very moment of the exiled politician's decision to return to Spain despite the Party's directive and the possibility of being arrested by Franco's secret police—as indeed happened in real life to Jordi Solé-Tura—whom we now see at home watching Resnais's film, in a *myse-en-abîme* that further underlines Solé-Tura's incapacity to recognize himself.

The use of other media icons also embedded diegetically into the film's narrative may be seen in Solé's both endearing and ironic reference to the legalization of the Communists and their official coming out of the closet: 'Un dia el PCE i el PSUC varen ser legalitzats. Ja podíem sortir del nostre armari ideològic. I vaja si ho vàrem fer!' Here, Solé's words are illustrated with a series of photographs and historical footage but also with a close-up of a poster by Víctor Mora, another prominent closeted Communist, where we read: 'El Capitán Trueno también habría votado PSUC!' Besides the

obvious homage to Víctor Mora, creator of that popular comic-book hero, Albert Solé is inscribing his own direct homage to his father, whom he had previously identified with that famous fictional character.<sup>13</sup>

This series of internal references metaphorically inscribed culminates in Solé's film with the sober and moving epilogue where the camera gently glides over the green symmetrical lines of the Horta labyrinth, while we listen to the voiceover of his daughter, Noa, who is telling her grandfather, Jordi Solé-Tura, also inside the labyrinth: 'No ens tenim que perdre aquí. Que si ens perdem!' The moving sobriety of this closing sequence underlines the restrained economy of the entire film, which never falls prey to sentimentalism or sensationalism. It also encompasses the three levels of Albert Solé's cinematic legacy since it posits his daughter as the true repository of the family memories, stressing the female 'guardianship' that Solé spells out in the film's dedication: 'To my princess Noa, the guardian of the secrets!'<sup>14</sup> It presents his father being lost in the labyrinth of his mind, rendering homage to Joaquim Jordà who also performed his own mental illness on screen in *Mones com la Becky* —the groundbreaking documentary mentioned earlier that also starts with a shot of the same labyrinth— on that occasion, full of scientists, sociologists, and artists trying literally to find an answer and an exit to their own mental entrapment.

To conclude, I want to go back to the notion of the family, and, especially, the female members of the family as the 'curators' of the father's legacy. Although a common trait in the three films, this aspect

---

<sup>13</sup> See, again, Albert Solé's direct reference when asked by David Barba: '¿Quién es Jordi Solé Tura? Mi padre y mi héroe. De niño, cuando comencé a leer los tebeos del Capitán Trueno, lo identifiqué con él' (Barba, 2009: 88).

<sup>14</sup> This female guardianship is clearly assigned throughout the film to Annie Bruset, Solé's French biological mother, that's why her own mental breakdown was so important: 'Mentre rodava, Annie Bruset, la seva mare —'el guardià dels records de la meva infància'— assegura Solé, testimoni clau de l'exili a França i a Romania, va patir una triple embòlia, de la qual, després de cinc operacions s'ha recuperat admirablement. 'Vaig aturar el rodatge, però al final vaig decidir gravar una intervenció pel valor simbòlic que tenia: s'està perdent la memòria' (Savall, 2007: 16).

begs a critical distinction in the case of Carla Subirana's *Nedar*. Indeed, at the end of her real and cinematic research into the true history of her grandfather, what Carla discovers is that Joan Arroniz did in fact have another family. He was married to another woman and had a child with her. Instead of pursuing her inquiry into this new history, which betrays an old patriarchal history of deceit, the director decides not to include the testimony of that old woman in Gavà who may further her true knowledge of Joan Arroniz because, as she tells us and herself: 'La meva, la nostra, era ja una altra història!' Another history that in metaphorical terms not only questions the country's memory loss but its dubious patriarchal lineage.

Such female questioning receives centre stage in Carles Bosch's *Bicicleta, cullera, poma*, as is crystallised by these words uttered by Cristina Maragall, Pascual Maragall's oldest daughter:

Un dia la doctora em va dir que el difícil no és el dia que el pare deixa de reconèixer-te, sinó el dia que tú deixes de reconèixer el pare. I jo hi ha dies que no el reconec! (*Bicicleta*, film script).

This process of estrangement is essentially felt as the impossibility of actually taking care of the father who, as we have seen repeatedly, refuses to admit the need for a care that he perceives as an 'overprotection that kills'. Pascual Maragall will use this phrase in his public address during the week devoted to the Alzheimer's disease that takes place in the Casa Milà, Gaudí's famous *La Pedrera*, in one of the many examples of the film's and Maragall's use of Barcelona's most iconic landmarks to deliver a global appeal to help the launching of his Alzheimer Foundation.

What the film immediately underlines at that moment, however, is not the collective appeal but the very private confession made in front of the camera by Diana Garrigosa, Maragall's wife and lifelong companion: 'Per què em vaig sentir molt enfadada? Perquè la seva exigència de llibertat, m'està matant la meva de llibertat!' Garrigosa's heartfelt complaint illustrates quite neatly the enormous difficulty to play that double role of 'curator'. It is hard to be both the curing and the caring person when the object of such cures and cares publicly rejects your input. Ultimately, as the film so adeptly illustrates, it is

the very public persona of Pasqual Maragall that makes ‘curating’ him and his image such a difficult task.

This aspect is remarkably dealt with throughout the film and finds a true performative moment when Carles Bosch interviews Queco Novell, the actor who impersonated Maragall in the popular TV3 political sitcom, *Polònia*: ‘Hi va haver un moment en què vàrem decidir eliminar el personatge, podent-se despedir i per la porta gran!’ (*Bicicleta*, film script). Maragall’s public farewell, which we have seen enacted and resisted many times in the main film’s narrative is now performed in this tender mise-en-abyme that, among other things, reflects the extension of Maragall’s ‘curating’ family to include the members of *Polònia*’s cast, while adding an almost humorous dimension to his dramatic plea.<sup>15</sup> This extended family ‘cure’ also includes, as the film makes clear, the members of the ex- president’s office, as the following conversation between the film’s director and Fidel Bellmunt exemplifies:

Quan la Cristina va dir: ‘el pare està malat’ allò va caure com una llosa al mig del Palau. És la constatació que alguns perceben més o menys, però que ja és una realitat.

‘Feia falta que ho digués?’

‘Sí, sobretot a nivell públic!’ (*Bicicleta*, film script).

Once again, the public/private divide reappears, here in the form of a ‘curating’ dilemma, illustrated in Bellmunt’s acknowledgment of the need to announce publicly what is most private: that is, the progress of Pasqual Maragall’s illness, so that the president’s legacy and his public image are not damaged by further public appearances which

---

<sup>15</sup> The importance of such an inclusion has often been noted by critics, as is the case in Bonet Mojica’s review: ‘En el cine puede impresionar más una ficción, por sus trucos dramáticos, que un extracto de la realidad. Esto no acontece en *Bicicleta*, *cullera*, *poma*. El hecho de que aparezca en el film Queco Novell, que en el programa *Polònia* parodiaba las *maragalladas* de alguien que aquí evidencia un enorme coraje y sentido del humor, desdramatiza este valioso, emocionante documento sobre la progresiva pérdida de uno mismo. De los recuerdos que conforman nuestra identidad’ (Bonet Mojica, 2010: 48).

still require 'aquells del seu entorn que diuen que l'estimen'. That is why Cristina's plain and dramatic words 'El pare està malat' epitomise the duality of the family's role. In Pasqual Maragall's case, every statement, even the most private needs to be publicly articulated in order to make it literally and metaphorically intelligible.

Ultimately, the public performance of the Alzheimer's metaphor in the three documentaries studied here may be read as the cinematic inscription of Catalonia's double need to exorcise the country's historical ghosts and to articulate a public self beyond any genetic or political restrictions.

## **Works Cited**

- Barba, David (30/1/2009). 'Intento conjurar el Alzhéimer', *La Razón*, p.88.
- Bonet Mojica, Lluís (1/10/2010). 'Bicicleta, cuchara, manzana', *La Vanguardia*, p.48.
- Boyero, Carlos (20/9/2010). 'Mientras puedas, habla memoria', *El País*, p.32.
- De Pedro, Gonzalo and Elena Oroz (2010). 'Centralización y dispersión. Dos movimientos para cartografiar la "especificidad!" del documental producido en Cataluña en la última década', in Casimiro Torreiro (ed.) *Realidad y creación en el cine de no ficción. (El documental catalán contemporáneo, 1995-2010)*, Madrid: Cátedra, pp.61-86.
- Cerdán, Josetxo and Casimiro Torreiro, eds. (2005). *Documental y vanguardia*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- García López, Sonia (2014). 'Filling the voids of memory: Alzheimer's disease and recent history in *Nedar* and *Bucarest, la memòria perduda*', *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*. 6:1: 19-33.
- Marimon, Sílvia (7/11/2008). 'La rebel·lió de Carla Subirana', *Time Out Barcelona*, p.44.
- Merino, Imma (1/11/2010). 'El cine enfront de l'oblit', *L'AVENÇ*, pp.62-64.

- Martí-Olivella, Jaume (2011). 'Catalan Cinema: An Uncanny Transnational Performance', in Dominic Keown (ed.), *A Companion to Catalan Culture*. London: Tamesis, pp.185-205.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2010) 'El nuevo cine catalán y la memoria histórica transatlántica', in José María Murià and Angelica Peregrina (eds.), *Presencia catalana*. Jalisco, México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, pp.177-212.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2013) 'Tradició i modernitat al nou cinema català: El cas d'*Elisa K*', in Maria Carreras, Nuria Puigdevall, Patrizio Rigobon and Valentina Ripa (eds.). *Ciutat de l'amor: scrivere la città, raccontare i sentimenti*. Edizione elettronica. *RISCAT/ Rivista Italiana di Studi Catalani*, 3. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, pp. 53-74.
- Nadal-Melsió, Sara (2010). 'Editor's Preface: The Invisible Tradition: Avant-Garde Catalan Cinema under Late Francoism', *Hispanic Review*. 78.4, 465-68.
- Riambau, Esteve (2010). 'Cuando las monas aún no eran como Becky. (El documental catalán antes de 1999)', in Casimiro Torreiro (ed.). *Realidad y creación en el cine de no-ficción*. Madrid: Cátedra, pp.11-31.
- Salvà, Bernat (7/11/2008). 'Bussejar en la memòria', *Avui*, 38.
- Savall, Cristina (23/12/2007). 'La memòria de Jordi Solé Tura', *El Periódico de Catalunya*, 16-17.
- Sontag, Susan (1990). *Illness as Metaphor. Aids and its Metaphors*. New York: Doubleday.
- Torreiro, Casimiro (ed.) (2010a). *Realidad y creación en el cine de no-ficción. El documental catalán contemporáneo, 1995-2010*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2010b). 'De tendencias y autores. La configuración artística del documental catalán contemporáneo', in Casimiro Torreiro (ed.), *Realidad y creación en el cine de no ficción. El documental catalán contemporáneo, 1995-2010*. Madrid: Cátedra, pp.33-59.