

The contemporary representation of otherness. Llorenç Soler, a filmmaker at the margins

La representación contemporánea de la alteridad. Llorenç Soler, un cineasta en los márgenes

A representação contemporânea da alteridade. Llorenç Soler, um cineasta nas margens

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ABSTRACT

Llorenç Soler deserves greater recognition for his fundamental role in documentary filmmaking, as a critical testimony about contemporary Spanish society, and for the revision of the audiovisual perspective regarding the social construction of the Other, as otherness. Within the framework of the sociology of communication and dialogical anthropology, we applied a qualitative methodology of film analysis to three emblematic works in the margins of hybridization between fiction and documentary. The results indicate the validity of his authorial discourse in the subjective function of documentary as a territory where poetics surpass reality.

Keywords: documentary; reality; authorship; otherness; hybridization; experimentation; sociology; anthropology.

RESUMEN

Llorenç Soler merece mayor reconocimiento por su rol primordial en el cine documental, como testimonio crítico sobre la sociedad española contemporánea, y por la reactualización del sentido del audiovisual respecto de la construcción social del Otro, en tanto que alteridad. En el marco de la sociología de la comunicación y la antropología dialógica, se aplica una metodología cualitativa de análisis fílmico a tres obras emblemáticas en los márgenes de la hibridación entre ficción y documental. Los resultados indican la vigencia de su discurso autoral en la función subjetiva del documental como territorio de la poética sobre lo real.

Palabras clave: documental; realidad; autoría; alteridad; hibridación; experimentación; sociología; antropología.

RESUMO

Llorenç Soler merece maior reconhecimento pelo seu papel primordial no cinema de documentário pelo olhar crítico sobre a sociedade espanhola contemporânea, e pela atualização do sentido audiovisual em relação à construção social do Outro como alteridade. No âmbito da sociologia da comunicação e da antropologia dialógica, aplica-se uma metodologia qualitativa de análise cinematográfica a três obras emblemáticas a partir da hibridização entre ficção e documentário. Os resultados indicam a validade de seu discurso autoral sobre a função subjetiva do documentário como território da poética sobre a realidade.

Palavras-chave: documentário; realidade; autoría; alteridade; hibridização; experimentação; sociologia; antropologia.

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INTRODUCTION

Llorenç Soler (Valencia, 1933 -) is one of the active Spanish documentarians with one of the most extensive and fruitful careers, a trajectory that started in the sixties and continues until today with numerous documentaries awarded at festivals, both nationally and internationally. A quick look at his beginnings shows him documenting the suburbs of the city of Barcelona, willing to make a cinema of denunciation; later, during the transition from dictatorship to democracy, he practiced a militant cinema; he was a supporter of independent films and of distributing them outside of the official industry circuit, and a pioneer in incorporating video into his documentary productions. In them, Soler shows us characters that, on occasions, have been relegated to the margins of society. His universe as a cinematographic author has to do with the experiences of his protagonists –often those without a voice (Francés, 2012, p. 16)–, rather than with the need to reaffirm his creative universe and his own style. In addition, Soler has a broad experience in the communications sector, from a cultural and an educational perspective. He participated in several cultural programs when the public television of Catalonia (TV3) started, alternating his professional work with the teaching of audiovisual media on television, and at academies and universities; he has also published several books on documentaries and film language, and has collaborated periodically with specialized magazines. His long career as a director makes him living history of the contemporary Spanish audiovisual genre.

However, mainstream film critics have been reluctant to consider him as a leading author of the Spanish documentary scene, as he is almost exclusively linked to the militant cinema of the sixties and seventies. The aim of this research is, precisely, to contextualize Soler's work within the broader and more current historical paradigm, showing that his political commitment does not exclude other themes and protagonists, but, instead, forms a critical authorial testimony about contemporary Spanish society's updating of the audiovisual function regarding the social construction of the Other as alterity.

As an object of study, the audiovisual work of Llorenç Soler allows us to rethink the forms of representation of the real in documentary film and, from anthropology, the visual representations of otherness. Based on a postmodern theoretical approach, both disciplines (anthropology and cinema) have reflected on the

common territory of the audiovisual communication of alterity, giving rise to discourses and documentary practices that dissolve the boundaries of each discipline and provide a 21st century reinterpretation through their mutual influences (Piault, 2002).

At a time when documentary film is enjoying increasing popularity as the productions of the grandchildren of the Spanish Civil War are being analyzed (Quílez Esteve, 2013), it seems even more necessary to revise the documentary work of Llorenç Soler under a common denominator, that is, the representation of otherness. Through documentaries isolated from the hegemonic narrative and expressive model of mainstream Spanish cinema, Soler's work shows us situations and people who, in the 21st century, maintain an attitude of resistance against the current social, political, and economic systems. Margins, and marginality, are the territories from which Llorenç Soler maps the visualization of social alterities.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC AND AUDIOVISUAL TEXT AUTHORITY CRISIS

Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci are essential thinkers when addressing research on mass communication in society with a focus on its social and cultural dimensions. Their contributions and reflections allow us to see more clearly the roles of the author, producer, and intellectual in terms of their commitment to social and political intervention; the importance of new technological means in the construction of collective memory; and the notion of hegemony in the elaboration of a critical vision of the cultural and know-how (media) discourses that are elaborated for the construction of social and political consensus.

From the emergence of the artistic avant-gardes to the crises of postmodernity, documentary and anthropology have had (dis)encounters that have conditioned their positions, both at the theoretical level and within their audiovisual practices. The different crises of image, representation, and authorship have led to theoretical, aesthetic, and ethical approaches elaborated from reflexivity and subjectivity, which express a relationship with the Other and with the world that is different from what we had known before Postmodernity.

It was Geertz (1989) who posed the role of the anthropologist as (literary) author of ethnographic texts. He did so by establishing similarities and differences

with other scientific and humanistic texts, where the presence of an authorial-self approaches literary theory. Consequently, we can observe that the (ethnographic or filmic) text crises of authority anticipated the crisis of the representation of the Other. Whose story is it? Of the author of the documentary or the subjects that appear in it? We can speak of co-authorship, as proposed by anthropologist David MacDougall (1998). Postmodern anthropologists propose a dialogical anthropology based on the intersubjective conversation among those involved, as proposed by Reynoso (1992). It is about substituting the Subject-Object (Other) relationship for that of a Subject-Subject (Other) relationship that arises from *recognizing* oneself in the Other as an equal, making the exchange of knowledge and the communicative flow bidirectional.

In the same vein, James Clifford (1995) seeks a parallel between the attitudes of artistic avant-gardes of the twenties and postmodern ethnographers, with an open mind about the ways of knowing and expressing knowledge, maintaining a social commitment throughout the entire process. Thus, the proposal of experimental ethnography arises from the avant-garde inspiration and the crises of postmodernity, and involves a change in the way of expressing the filmmaker's relationship with the Other in ethnographic texts. It also implies a stronger social commitment on the part of the ethnographer during the research process, in the phase of narrative creation of the text, and in the reception. This commitment is, first of all, with the social actors that have participated and, secondly, with the documentary's target audience. The notion of reflexivity presides over the new ethnographies, because the awareness of the anthropologist allows for his presence in the ethnographic text to evidence the subjectification of knowledge and the process of construction of that text, be it ethnographic or audiovisual. This self-awareness is what allows "structuring a product so that the audience assumes that the producer, the process, and the product form a coherent whole" (Ruby, 1995), as Walter Benjamin (2004) claimed in 1934, in his speech *The author as a producer* at the Parisian Institute of Fascism Studies

In this regard, we are interested in the contribution of Elisenda Ardèvol (2006) who recognizes that the visual is part of our contemporary culture and of the way we communicate and construct social imaginaries. Therefore, any knowledge about the representation of otherness today should include an analysis of the audiovisual.

In a way, Cultural Studies has covered the territory that (visual) anthropology has not dared to or could not occupy –the role of the visual in modern societies– by analyzing the production and reception contexts and looking beyond the text (Hall, 2001): from Marie Gillespie's (1995) analysis of the communicative relationship established by immigrants in London with their relatives residing in Pakistan through video tapes, to, including, among others, David Morley (2007) with the analysis of the new alterities arising from globalization and the updating of visual anthropology conducted by Jay Ruby (2007) and Sara Pink (2005).

A globalization that, as Néstor García Canclini points out (1999), rethinks the vision of mass society; a new society that cannot be understood from a fixed and stable identity, but derives its meaning from a plural, unstable, and constant flow. Our identity can only be experienced as a matrix of personal, social, and cultural identities in constant movement. Despite this, in these liquid times (Bauman, 2004; Bauman & Donskis, 2015), Gramsci's cultural hegemony notion survives, and the communicator Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1999) applies it to the media: social imaginaries are also nourished through the generation of consensus and the construction of categories of analysis. In this regard, Mary Douglas (1973) suggests that the notions of purity and danger allow us to build elements of social differentiation in the construction of otherness. While the media allows the cultural and political hegemony of the leading groups, there are forms of resistance against those dominant discourses. As a form of resistance, militant cinema has been confusingly labeled under different names and intentions, both in Europe and in Latin America and the United States (Pérez-Perucha, 2005): from independent cinema (Romaguera & Soler, 2006), underground, poor cinema ..., until the successful proposal of dissident cinema (García-Merás, 2007). This is a type of cinema that has often been linked to a form of artistic resistance within certain cinematographic groups but which, in the Spanish case, has the specificity of spreading just as militant cinema decays outside the border, precisely due to the circumstances of the late-Franco period (García-Merás, 2007, pp. 18-19). The internal tensions within these film groups, grouped around their common rejection of the Hollywood model, reveal an underlying debate on the alternative validity of an author's cinema –criticized by some sectors for its

permeability to bourgeois values— and on the very notion of the representation of the real.

THE DOCUMENTARY AS A WAY OF REPRESENTING THE REAL

Within the theory and aesthetics of documentary film, Bill Nichols (1997) provides a reflection on the representation of reality or, as he calls it, on the mastery of documentary, which covers three axes: the author, the text, and its relationship with the viewer. In our opinion, its importance lies there, although some of his critics have focused on the evolving and imprecise character of some of his proposed categories (Bruzzi, 2006). Nichols' proposal is mainly restricted to documentaries with a strong empirical principle, where the image is constituted as proof about the world, and transparency becomes its most outstanding characteristic. From our perspective—which, as we will see later, is, above all, in line with the most recent works of Llorenç Soler—, the documentary works as a poetic expression of the world, as a form of discourse that recognizes a personal point of view.

In this regard, we are closer to other authors, such as Carl Plantinga (2011), who proposes that a documentary is a communicative act where the relationship between author and spectator is constructed based on the ethics and the degree of authority that the latter attributes to the *voice* of the documentary. Michael Renov (1993) has also reflected on the role of the documentary as a cultural text and its links to other, more experimental ways of dealing with the real. From more radical positions, taken from postmodern anthropology, Catherine Russell (1999) proposes to conceive the documentary as an experimental ethnography, an open and unstable research process, where video becomes the backbone of the process of ethnographic research and the artistic creation through audiovisual montage.

In short, any approach to documentary must face the concept of cinematographic realism (Stam, 2000). The changes in the ways of understanding reality due to the digital technological progress have conditioned the ways of representing it; consequently, these ways do not say much about reality itself, but they show us the authors' vision of it.

In the Spanish-speaking sphere, we also find current contributions on the ways of representing reality. The appearance of new forms of the documentary raises

new theoretical reflections, as studied by Antonio Weinrichter (2010), and others on the methodological foundations of visual anthropology (Febrer, 2013). Regarding documentary theory in Spain, Ángel Quintana (2003) offers arguments about a cinema committed to the real and that, therefore, moves the limits of the documentary in time or even questions the need to separate fiction and documentary, a stance with which we identify and which we consider aligns with Llorenç Soler's thought and practice of hybridization.

In the analysis and critique of the documentary, Josetxo Cerdán and Casimiro Torreiro (Català, Cerdán, & Torreiro, 2001; Cerdán & Torreiro, 2005, 2007) stand out for their arguments about Soler's personal point of view, contributions also present in his coordination and editing of texts reflecting on the documentary. Finally, there is Josep Maria Català (Català, Cerdán, & Torreiro, 2001; Català & Cerdán, 2007; Català, 2012), who reflects on the image and the leading role that the documentary has gained in the contemporary Spanish scene, and who participated precisely in a monographic book about the work of Llorenç Soler (Francés, 2012), which emphasizes his resistant and combative character that—however—does not sacrifice formal creativity.

There is a vindication of the documentary linked to recent theoretical contributions in the Ibero-American context, for example the reflections of Carolina Urrutia (2010) on documentary and film; Javier Campo's (2012) analysis of Argentinean documentary as a product between science, culture, and politics; the study of the political documentary that Rubén Dittus (2013) links to the device-cinema as constructor of meaning, or Pablo Piedras' (2014) reflection on the documentary in first person.

LLORENÇ SOLER, HYBRIDIZATION BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION

As pointed out above, our main objective is to analyze the work of Llorenç Soler in the context of what we define as cinema of the real, being conscious that the real always surpasses its representation and it is not possible to contain it; the world contains the stories. Despite this, we believe that it is possible to place it on the margins of realistic cinema, built on the frontiers of the documentary, experimental and ethnographic genres, just as the artistic avant-gardes began in the 1920s and continued over the 1940s with Italian neo-realism, with free cinema later, or with

filmmakers such as Rouch, Mekas, Godard, Marker, Varda, Solanas, Getino, Kierostami, Di Tella or Carri, until today.

It follows that Llorenç Soler's work corresponds to an authorial cinema of the real –and not strictly militant–, deliberately open to the encounter with otherness; from that complicity some moments arise loaded with authenticity and political meaning. Català (2012) reflects on the following terms when referring to Soler's work:

Thus, the documentary maker is no longer separated from reality by the distance of the spectatorial and voyeuristic functions, rooted in cinema, but he is linked to it by an analogous emotional condition from which the corresponding aesthetic derives... More than a political aesthetic, it now requires a policy of aesthetics that produces close, intimate images of reality. An aesthetic that manages to penetrate the complex heart of the real and, from there, to start a real political action (p. 101).

The case of Llorenç Soler exemplifies, as we intend to demonstrate later, the evolution of a filmmaker in which an initial dominance of a transparent political message coexists with a growing formal innovation. Contrary to what this would seem to indicate, he achieves in his most recent productions an evident expressive forcefulness derived from experimental resources, without losing the human-interest perspective. In his work, the hybridization between documentary and fiction becomes an authorial mark and, at the same time, it shows his stance on the modes of representation of the real.

Within the tradition of the documentary, Soler stands out for his contribution to the marginal cinema or frontier cinema, which we consider relevant both for the approach to themes related to exile and social exclusion as well as for its authorial will, which occurs on the margins of the dominant film-codes.

From the thematic dimension, in Soler's work some themes or social groups repeat themselves; his personal commitment keeps him from abandoning them, even if he changes the formal approach in each situation. This is the case with immigrants or the Gypsy people; both have been documented by him several times. In addition, Soler is a member of the *Presencia Gitana* association; on three occasions he has approached

their reality: *Gitanos sin romancero* (1976), *Gitanos de San Fernando de Henares* (1991) and, as we will analyze in more detail, *Lola vende Ca* (2000).

From the expressive dimension, we group together several documentaries that have an essay approach as a common denominator, although with different forms and contents: *Veinte proposiciones para un silencio habitado* (2007), *Historia(s) de España* (2008), *Fragmentos de un discurso* (2008), *El poso de los días* (2009), and *Monólogos de un hombre incierto* (2010). All of them are short works, they do not have main characters or a narrative development, but, on the one hand, they represent the most personal, intimate, and reflective Soler –also the most ironic– and, on the other, they clearly show the dialogue between documentary and fiction. Even without analyzing them in depth, we consider that they contribute to diversifying and complementing the selection of the methodological section.

In *Veinte proposiciones para un silencio habitado* (2007), Soler speaks to us from within, showing us his home during a day, through the changes of light, and its spaces, accompanied by everyday sounds, sometimes from the outside, other times decontextualized from the images that accompany them. We go through different rooms, sometimes with his presence or that of his wife, Anna Turbau, and in different situations. Silence and solitude are part of the director's landscape.

In *Fragmentos de un discurso* (2008), Soler resumes the thought of an entire generation that fought forty years before against the dictatorship of the system and in favor of utopia. He shows how time has affected some of those revolutionary speeches, depleting them of meaning, through the reading of fragments of Karl Marx's *Capital* by a teenager who does not understand anything of what she reads. However, Soler does not lose hope, and his documentary ends with a sign of May 1968 that called for the end of the consumerism society.

Historia(s) de España (2008) reflects on our most recent history, approaching the filmic essay through his own archival footage, using sequences from other documentaries, but re-signifying the value of these images by also mixing current images of depopulated villages with those of the immigrants of the sixties arriving to big Spanish cities, using the speech of the

dictator Francisco Franco as the soundtrack. The rural exodus and the depopulation are present due to an ironic editing, in which present and past dialogues interact through physical and emotional territories.

El poso de los días (2009) and *Monólogos de un hombre incierto* (2010) are two documentaries built from micro-stories, most of them in the form of diaries, with Soler's own presence or narrated by him, where –through small fragments–the filmmaker's daily life and perspective, critical of the forms of power and in solidarity with the poor, are shown. In both cases, the frontier between fiction and documentary is diluted, and even the value of the image as a vision of the truth is brought into question. The soundtrack creates new meaning, for or against the image, which allows for a greater dimension of the concept of editing through the use of different levels of meaning.

Finally, we consider that Llorenç Soler's work deserves to be rescued since it has suffered from exhibition difficulties and there is a certain reluctance to recognize his cinematographic authorship due to the discomfort generated by his independent character and his eclectic style, direct and without intellectual adornments, which is not in line with the dominant Spanish documentary canon. His conception of the documentary is essentially honest, based on the recognition of the selection processes that always occur when documenting reality. According to his own words (Soler, 1998, p. 25), "the documentary genre is the cinematographic genre where there is a greater possibility of manipulating reality and where this is less perceptible by the viewer. (...) The documentary builds a fiction based on real elements".

Therefore, this study has two main objectives: to vindicate the work of Soler beyond the militant cinema and show his commitment to the representation of otherness, and to emphasize the centrality of the cinema of the real as a dialogue that the author establishes between political cinema and everyday cinema, and that Soler builds from the rhetoric of formal hybridization.

In a way, his ethics materialize in aesthetic proposals that arise from his encounter with the Others. Like an ethnographer, the center of his interest is alterity; through fieldwork and his perseverance he manages to give voice to others without losing his own. As stated by Guardia (2012):

Soler never understood cinema as a world of technical/aesthetic possibilities in search of a preciosity *per se*,

but instead he focused on a methodology that is almost close to that of an anthropologist who asks himself about his environment, who observes it patiently to understand and interpret it (p. 307).

METHODOLOGY

Of his more than fifty audiovisual works, we are interested in addressing only some, given that approximately half have been produced so far in the 21st century; from this period, we are interested in documentaries of a more personal and essayistic nature, as well as works that deal with collectives or people that Soler wants to place value on (give voice) and bring closer to the public.

As we have pointed out, a fundamental element to consider in Soler's work is the narrative construction of his films, conceived as documentaries, but using strategies that are specific to fiction; not only are we referring to docufiction or the construction of characters, but also to rhetorical forms such as reflexivity, subjectification, appropriation, fragmentation, and hybridization.

Thus, the selection of works that we intend to analyze responds to the desire to show his thematic and stylistic variety, in order to recognize Soler's contribution to the treatment of otherness and his way of transmitting it, where the frontier between documentary and fiction becomes more permeable, and hybridization becomes an important resource. In any case, we do not intend to establish definitive categories.

Within the various classifications that can be applied to the universe of Soler's contemporary productions, in this study we have chosen the following selection criteria: 21st century productions; thematic focus on the notion of otherness, attributed by the resident population or perceived by the immigrant population; diversity of styles, guaranteeing the inclusion of fiction, documentary, and docufiction, and presence (expressive or literal –voice-over, in front of the camera...–) of the author, not only from the traditional point of view.

Using these criteria, the resulting corpus of analysis covers three works: *Lola vende Ca* (2000), *Apuntes para una Odisea Soriana Interpretada por Negros* (2003), and *Los naufragos de la casa quebrada. Retratos* (2011).

Lola vende Ca (2000) is a fiction feature film, but with a treatment so close to the documentary that it turns out to be closer to the reality of the Gypsy people than most television works. It tells the story of a young

Gypsy woman who is torn between her traditional relationship with her boyfriend and her interest of going to a university, with the conflict that this entails within the Gypsy community.

Apuntes para una Odisea Soriana Interpretada por Negros (2004) is Soler's first documentary during his Sorian period (as a progressive retreat, Soler moves to Calatañazor, a town in Soria, alternating it with stays in Barcelona). In this documentary, he takes up the theme of the rejection of African immigrants who he had settled in Barcelona in *Ciudadanos bajo sospecha* (1993) and in his first documentary fiction film, *Saïd* (1998). In this case, the author shows the arrival of sub-Saharan Africans to the province of Soria, one of the most unpopulated provinces in all of Spain as a result of rural migration to cities (Caparrós Lera, 2009, p. 241). Paradoxically, nowadays Soria, from where so many people migrated, has become a welcoming land to many sub-Saharan immigrants, but also to Latin Americans, Maghrebians, and Eastern Europeans.

Los naufragos de la casa quebrada (2011) is a docufiction that shows Soler's interest in the stories of losers, people who are trapped at the margins of the cultural, social, and economic system. The filmmaker continues to center his attention on marginality to give voice to those who do not have one. The story focuses on a block of houses built in the fifties in the city of Soria, currently deteriorated and inhabited by only three families. The city council plans to build a new urban complex and those families who still live there oppose it. Soler articulates the story as an intriguing docufiction that allows him to investigate the neighborhood and meet its inhabitants, making a portrait of forgotten characters and a critic of real estate speculation.

According to our objectives, the methodological design, of a qualitative nature, has focused on the filmic analysis of the selected corpus according to its narrative structures and adapting previous models (Casetti & De Chio, 1991; Gómez Tarín & Marzal, 2007). More specifically, we propose a discursive film analysis, which takes into consideration variables that essentially correspond to the narrative structure, the rhetorical resources, the stylistic expression, the technical options, and the authorial device, all within the framework of sociology of communication, with contributions from dialogical anthropology. This allows for an interdisciplinary approach, as has been

pointed out in the theoretical framework, according to our object of study.

(...) the sociological approach to cultural phenomena derives from the fact that sociological studies have gradually assumed the contributions of anthropology and cultural studies, semiotics and literary critique; and that the so-called linguistic turn of philosophy has been incorporated into other fields of social thinking, resulting in a greater focus on the productive dimension of culture, the imaginary and the discursive dimensions of social reality (Sabsay, 2007, p. 206).

Despite the scarcity of written documents about the author, we will complement our analysis with previous studies on Soler, in particular with the three documents that analyze his bio-filmography monographically: *Llorenç Soler*, by J.M. García Ferrer and Martí Rom (1996), *Los hilos secretos de mis documentales*, by Soler (2002), and the already mentioned *La mirada comprometida*, a set of contributions coordinated by Francés (2012), as well as two chapters that deal with his work, *Imagen, memoria y fascinación*, in Català, Cerdán and Torreiro (2001), and *Al otro lado de la ficción*, in Cerdán and Torreiro (2007), and Tassi's (2017, 2018) academic articles on the work of Llorenç Soler.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lola vende Ca (2000) is the second fiction feature of the two that Soler has directed, although its approach derives from a rhetoric that is typical of the documentary. From the plot about the difficulties that a young Gypsy woman faces to study at the university and the relationship with her boyfriend, also a Gypsy, the story shows the tension between her desire to be a modern woman and the traditional vision of her community. One of the most interesting elements is the fact that the actors are Gypsies that interpret themselves, except for the female protagonist, whose role is portrayed by actress Cristina Brondo. An authorial decision that connects to Italian neo-realism, where we seem to recognize a tribute to Paisà (1946), by Rossellini.

The structure of the story combines the fictional plot with interviews with the protagonists about the situations that arise in the film; in addition, the editing includes images of the making-off that condition the

fiction itself. Therefore, fiction becomes secondary, and the real situations are the ones that appear spontaneously, concentrating the discursive force on the responses of the protagonists without renouncing the conflict proposed by Soler. On this occasion, we can consider a certain co-authorship of the script, since the protagonists participate in the previous stage, but above all in the shooting.

From the perspective of the viewer's reception, the interruption of the fiction through the interviews implies that returning to the fictional sequence demands a resignification of the scene by the audience. Soler, thus, engages the spectator and commits him to a certain level of reflection by using a strategy that is inherent to the documentary form: including himself in the fiction plot. As he explains:

I wanted to make a fiction film, yes, but one in which the tenuous barrier that separates fiction from documentary constantly shifted. I wanted the viewer to not know, in many moments, which of the two hemispheres he was in (Soler, 2002, p. 168).

Technically, the film was recorded with handheld Mini DV cameras, with hardly any lighting, and with a technical team reduced to the minimum, to minimize interference and make the *actors* feel as comfortable as possible.

As in most of his works, editing plays a decisive role in the narrative construction of the film, by having different recorded materials, fiction sequences, interviews with protagonists, and images of the making-off.

The film was well received at festivals, and even won some awards from the public, such as the one in Alcalá de Henares.

As already mentioned, in 2003 Lorenç Soler moves to a town in Soria, alternating it with stays in Barcelona, which will allow him to develop his projects on Soria's land. However, it is not just a physical displacement or a foreign look: just as an ethnographer conducts participant observations in his field work, in Soler we will speak of a participant camera.

Consequently, *Apuntes para una Odisea Soriana Interpretada por Negros* (2003), made shortly after arriving in Soria, is not only the portrait of the experiences of four African immigrants isolated in Soria. The documentary shows, through the resource of contrast, traditional festivals and ceremonies and the present situation of characters who are waiting

to be fully admitted into society. The documentary expresses itself as a film genre, but, above all, it does it as a function (Plantinga, 2011): Soler very critically shows a closed society full of racism and xenophobia, where the fear of the different, the unknown, and a stereotyped imaginary manage to dominate society and hinder cultural encounters.

The documentary offers an image of an aging Soria population who is suspicious and afraid of the arrival of strangers, forgetting how its inhabitants felt when they had to emigrate to the industrial cities of Spain in the fifties and sixties. But this image, in Soler, has no claim of transparency, it is not an image of the world, but an expression about the world. Soler's criticism expands and especially addresses politicians who publicly associate immigration with crime. The editing has, once again, a value beyond the narrative; it is expressive and emotional: in this work, the in-parallel editing serves to place the political arguments in crisis, giving rise to the reflection of the viewer by showing slowed-down images of black citizens walking through the city and scenes of local religious ceremonies, while gathering conversations among the people of Soria. Tassi (2018) expresses the value of Soler's visual proposal:

The paused close-ups inscribe the film metaphorically: Soler explores the minimal gestures and the physical gazes to value the presence of the immigrants when they walk, observed as if they were walking naked through the middle of Soria during their traditions and holy festivities (p. 54).

The documentary explores, through the different levels of the story, testimonies of the immigrants, the recent history of Soria, the representations of the imaginary and a critical voice-over. The parallelisms, the counterpoints, express a conflict between the forms of resistance to preconceived ideas and those persistent ideas regarding the immigrant, prejudices constructed from the social imaginary. Soler, also an immigrant, raises immigration as a possible solution to the depopulation suffered by Soria, especially due to childhood. Not in vain does the documentary begin and end with a shot of a sub-Saharan child reading Machado's poem, *Parábolas*.

In *Los naufragos de la casa quebrada. Retratos* (2011) Soler returns to social denunciation, in this case of three families who live isolated in a building complex in the city of Soria. We could say that the plot seems to

have a descriptive character: the town council plans to build new housing and has no interest in rehabilitating the area, now abandoned and full of dirt.

On this occasion, Soler constructs the documentary as a docufiction of journalistic investigation, with his own physical presence and a voice-over that simulates him and that leads the story. The plot allows us to meet those inhabitants and Soler can subjectivize their portrayal.

The conversations with families bring us closer to their lives and memories, to their little or no hope. As if he were a painter, Soler finds in the close-ups of his protagonists the dignity that society has taken away from them when abandoning them to their fate. Larraz (2012, p. 265) comments on women:

They had to marry young since they did not have the opportunity to study a career; they raised their children, they became widowed, and when they speak with Lorenzo Soler these fighters state that if they must leave the neighborhood they want to do it with maximum dignity.

Whenever Soler shows the testimonies and the neighborhood he does it in black and white, as opposed to the color images of the city and the television screens.

As in some of his other documentaries, the story is composed of different levels: the conversations with the protagonists allow him to talk about the past, especially about the female and the difficulties of being a woman in the fifties in a provincial town like Soria. There are also reproaches between mothers and children about the education received in the religious school. These levels confirm the approach that Soler makes in his profession, since he does not portray ghosts as passing tourists. He manages to gain the trust of his protagonists, and their testimonies are generous, full of sincerity, but also anger and disenchantment.

Soler ends the documentary with color images of a parade of giant big-headed puppets passing through the streets of the city and the voice-over that expresses pessimism about the future of the neighborhood.

The whole story is impregnated with a certain decadence, the images of the uninhabited neighborhood and the walls with vindicating graffiti, opposing the obscenity of the urban plans and the waiting of some protagonists for whom there is no hope left.

A poetics of despair dominates, although there will be other perspectives within the framework of the field of poetic commitment.

In short, the documentaries of the contemporary period (especially from 2003) are an opportunity to analyze the physical movement of Soler and his partner, the photographer Anna Turbau, as they settled in the uninhabited province of Soria; it is a double migration, physical and vital, which we consider is reflected on the cinematographic (but also on the literary and pictorial) productions of this last stage.

In more general terms, the three works analyzed arise from the cultural encounter between Soler and different alterities. Soler knows that the encounter between the image-record and the allegorical image occurs in the same way in which the cultural encounter between subjects takes place; the relationship that the author establishes among those subjects is what allows him to work with different levels of meaning, converting the documentary-fiction dichotomy into a matter of style and defining the voice of the documentary in the terms stated by Platinga (2005).

Our interpretation is that Soler's dialogic and poetic discourse connects with the notion of ethnographic allegory proposed by Clifford (1995), according to which the author's ideas are expressed as stories on the text, which in turn generate other ideas in the spectator, thus increasing their level of significance. This is similar to what is stated by Català (2012) when he says that images are always allegorical, because their visibility is split between the literal and the figurative, and these levels of meaning coexist with the interpretation that the viewer makes from his personal and social imaginary. Soler is aware of this, and we are of the opinion that this consciousness is the reason why most of his works are impregnated with an emotional poetic that derives from his protagonists, their lives, or from the editing of images and the selection of the soundtrack. Soler wishes to show and accompany the spectator in his encounter with the Other, as a way of re-cognition of otherness.

CONCLUSIONS

Llorenç Soler is a director still barely known in documentary theory and history. Usually framed within the boundaries of militant documentary, and contemporary to the generation of Spanish filmmakers committed to the critique of the late Franco-period, it was not until a few years ago that his original contribution began to be recognized.

As we have pointed out, he is one of the few active authors who has not only maintained his conviction of the documentary as fiction about the real—in a similar way to the postulates of experimental ethnography, as shown by Reynoso (1992) in his compilation of articles of the foundational authors of postmodern anthropology, such as Clifford, Marcus and Tyler—, with a personal commitment to the most forgotten citizens, but who has also progressively incorporated an authentic dialogue of voices, including his, to the review of contemporary representations of the otherness, particularly identities on the social and economic margins, witnessing with his camera the changes and transformations of Spanish society.

The limitations of this study only allow us to point out Soler's persistence and future contributions from the possibilities offered in the 21st century to overcome the classic idea of the documentary as a mimetic representation of reality, based on the principle of transparency between the image and its referent. The emergence of other creative ways of making documentaries which seek to express or affirm something about the world without being limited by genre conventions somehow transport us

to the artistic avant-gardes of the previous century, where the author's freedom and social commitment allowed for a creative treatment of reality, as noted by Grierson (1926).

In the same way that photography liberated painting from its mimetic function, and television did the same to the documentary of the sixties, as stated by Ortega (2005), the digital revolution of the image and the emergence of social networks can produce a new shift, and Soler will be attentive to it because we will continue to talk about the Others from our own perspective. We have seen it in his extensive film universe, from which we selected a corpus of films that articulate, in a relevant way, the questions about the treatment of otherness and the hybridization of documentary and fiction. Both through the essay works and through the most intimate and personal portraits, Soler constructs a narrative about the Other from the cultural encounter, in a dialogical process with the protagonist subjects, as postmodern ethnography maintains, elaborated with some certainties and, increasingly, uncertainties, but without renouncing to exploring the margins of the human condition.

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