

Emergent Visions in Film and Screen Media from Contemporary Catalonia

Visions emergents al cinema i l'audiovisual contemporanis a Catalunya

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Cinema produced in Catalonia has been at the forefront of global filmmaking since its inception at the turn of the twentieth century. From the magical short films of Segundo de Chomón to the documentary-style works of Fructuós Gelabert, Catalan artists helped pioneer a medium that would continue to evolve across various cultural, geopolitical, and commercial landscapes over the following century and a half. In fact, more than half a dozen other filmmakers from Catalonia and Valencia—figures such as Ricardo Baños, Albert Marro, Joan Maria Codina, Ángel García Cardona, and Adrià Gual—were instrumental in the days of early cinema, producing numerous short films that shared and/or interrogated characteristics of *film muet* in France.¹ Crucially, as Tatjana Pavlović has argued, their output “reflect[s] a collective drive, illustrating most of the traits that marked filming, production, and distribution” that, while relatively short-lived, would forever shape the culture of the industry in Catalan-speaking contexts (2009, 4). The emphasis on collective labor practices resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s, when filmmakers associated with the Escola de Barcelona largely relied on cooperative networks and self-financing to circumvent the cultural and linguistic repression of the Francoist regime (Riambau and Torreiro 1999, 77). In this climate, directors like Pere Portabella sought to craft “an ethical cinematic language” through team-driven efforts (qtd. by Martín-Peralta 2006, 94), maneuvering around the ideological and aesthetic constraints of a state-controlled film industry.² This ethos of collaborative

¹ Nevertheless, the establishment of the Maison Lumière in Spain, as Jean-Claude Seguin has demonstrated, meant that French filmmakers such as Alexandre Promio and Francis Doublier shot dozens of films in the Peninsula between 1896 and 1900 (1998, 11–33). For this reason, critics such as Leigh Mercer contend that cinema “first reached Spain in the form of foreign operators” such as the ones sent by the Lumière Brothers or Robert W. Paul of the United Kingdom (2023, 302).

² All the same, as Steven Marsh has argued, artists linked to the Escola de Barcelona “were marginalized by the Spanish State for their formal experiments and by Catalan nationalism for their failure to reference the aspirations of the underground independence movement” (2020, 20).

production —with a focus on formal experimentation— runs throughout Catalan film history, from its inception to the present, providing a template for contemporary directors who continue to push the boundaries of audiovisual expression.

The indelible legacy of collaborative filmmaking and artistic innovation remains evident in the work of contemporary audiovisual artists born or based in Catalonia and its surrounding areas today. Directors such as Neus Ballús, Isaki Lacuesta, Albert Serra, and Carla Simón have garnered acclaim both domestically and internationally, yet film scholars often find themselves playing catch-up, with many still fixated on Castilian-language frameworks. In the meantime, a new wave of directors, both established and unestablished, are plotting new itineraries, defying narrative and/or national classification in the twenty-first century. The present Special Issue, entitled *Emergent Visions in Film and Screen Media from Contemporary Catalonia*, engages this evolving current of audiovisual output from the past two decades, exploring path-breaking trends while acknowledging the longer history of visual culture in Catalan-speaking contexts. Bolstered by the financial support of the Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals (ICEC) and other institutions like TV3, screen media has come to represent a strategic investment for the autonomous region, eager to promote its cultural output to an ever-expanding global audience. Postgraduate programs at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), and the Escola Superior de Cinema i Audiovisual de Catalunya (ESCAC), among others, have further supported a new generation of artists, encouraging innovative cinematographic techniques from directors born inside and outside of Catalonia. Unlike the state-wide management of the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA), which has faced criticism for its “insufficient” backing across Spain (Heredero and Reyes 2017, 353), industrial and educational support in Catalonia has fostered a cinematic mecca that is somewhat less vulnerable to the pressures of the neoliberal marketplace.³ At the same time, *Emergent Visions* also recognizes other forms of creative expression reverberating throughout Catalan audiovisual culture today, including those that transcend institutional spaces, such as interactive media formats online.

Over the past two decades, artists from Catalan-speaking contexts have propelled their work to new heights, driven by this creative effervescence. Experimental films by Simón (*Estiu* 1993, 2017; *Alcarrás*, 2022) and Lacuesta (*Un año, una noche*, 2022) have won prestigious awards at the Berlin International Film Festival. Ballús (*La plaga*, 2013) and Moray (*Suc de síndria*, 2019) have earned nominations at the European Film Awards. Serra received a special jury prize at the

³ As Jordi Balló —one of the pioneers of creative documentary training in Barcelona— and Manel Jiménez-Morales contend, “creative freedom and the recognition of this freedom by various public funding bodies have enabled the expression of an authentic plurilingual landscape” that is “not subject to market pressures” due to institutional support (2022, 172).

Cannes Film Festival for *Liberté* (2019), and *Història de la meva mort* (2013) won the Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival. Domestically, between 2017 and 2022, Simón, Belén Funes, Pilar Palomero, and Clara Roquet were awarded Best New Director at the Goya Awards, underscoring the depth of talent within the Catalan film circuit and highlighting the growing prominence of female-driven perspectives, which have historically been marginalized in cinema from Spain.⁴ Seven of the essays featured in this dossier examine output by this new wave of women directors, extending the critical discussion “bypassed” in Anton Pujol and Jaume Martí-Olivella’s *Catalan Cinema: The Barcelona School and the New Avant-Garde* (2024, 34). One scholar has even dubbed this generation of female auteurs the “Nova Escola de Barcelona” given its penchant for collaborative production methods and team-crafted screenplays (Vilaró Moncasí 2021, 97).⁵ While *Catalan Cinema* offers incisive analyses of the “original” Escola de Barcelona and its influence on later generations of filmmakers, our collection addresses the evolving directions of Catalan audiovisual cultures from 2008 to the present. As such, these essays ponder the future of film and screen media, while imagining (non-)narrative expression that transcends what Meritxell Colell calls “la construcció del mito propia de muchos relatos que presiden la historia del cine” (qtd. by Vilaró Moncasí 2021, 101).

Surfacing in the midst of a global financial crisis, this new crop of artists has interrogated a range of political and cultural questions —both local and international— over the past two decades. And while the Recession of 2008 led to disastrous consequences for the production, distribution, and consumption of cinema in Spain,⁶ younger auteurs have fomented “spaces of resistance” against the brutalities of neoliberal praxis (Fibla-Gutiérrez 2019, 38). As a result, they have maintained creative independence through collaborative filmmaking, while adopting a decidedly critical stance toward what Marina Garcés has described as “la condición póstuma” pervading Western societies across the planet (2019, 16).⁷ At the same time, many of the audiovisual works featured in this special issue recall the historical tensions tied to Catalonia’s dual status as both an “in-between” within the Spanish state and a transnational metropolis in the broader global marketplace (Martí-Olivella 2011, 203). They also reflect the longer history of post-fictional experimentation by visual artists such as Jaime Camino, Joaquim Jordà, and

⁴ While their films were produced in other parts of the Spanish state, female directors such as Arantxa Echevarría (*Carmen & Lola*, 2018), Alauda Ruiz de Azúa (*Cinco lobitos*, 2022), and Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren (*20.000 especies de abejas*, 2023) have also won this prize recently.

⁵ Although he never refers specifically to the “original” Escola de Barcelona, Vilaró Moncasí points to the work of directors such as Mar Coll, Liliana Torres, Nely Reguera, Celia Rico, Meritxell Colell, Elena Martín, Clara Roquet, Simón, and Funes who “comparten procesos [y] proyectos educativos” (2021, 99).

⁶ See García Santamaría and Maestro Espínola, for instance, who claim that, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry experienced a nationwide collapse that left more than 40% of the population without commercial movie theatres because of the economic crash (2015, 77).

⁷ For Garcés, “la condición póstuma” can be understood as “el signo de la catástrofe de la tierra y de la esterilidad de la vida en común” that condemns us all “a la precarización, al agotamiento de los recursos naturales, a la destrucción ambiental y al malestar físico y anímico” (2019, 23).

Ventura Pons, whose legacy can be detected in pre-crisis films such as *En construcció* (José Luis Guerín, 2001), *Cravan vs Cravan* (Lacuesta, 2002), and *El cielo gira* (Mercedes Álvarez, 2005).⁸ Whether aesthetic, cultural, linguistic, or political, the projects discussed here embody what Quentin Papapietro terms the expression of a “dynamique communauté liée à l’expérimental et au documentaire” [dynamic community linked to experimental and documentary filmmaking] (2017, 64). Taking a deliberately exploratory approach to the study of audiovisual discourse from the region, *Emergent Visions in Film and Screen Media from Contemporary Catalonia* aims to stimulate dialogue around these issues and more.

Divided into four sections, *Emergent Visions* opens with a cluster of essays that interrogate the ongoing prominence of rural imaginaries in contemporary cinema from Catalonia. This reorientation of socio-spatial experience engages what Joan Ramon Resina has characterized as “a critical form of disenchantment, or better yet detachment,” which challenges modernity’s privileging of the urban and questions “culture’s alleged dependence on the city’s tempo and intensity of exchanges” (2012, 17). As a result, these twenty-first-century encounters with the natural world serve not merely as a backdrop for contemporary Catalan cultural production, but also as protagonists that demand careful analysis in their own right. In “Rural Imaginaries and the Ecocritical Turn,” authors weigh up issues as diverse as climate change, renewable energy, itinerant labor, and the mythification of natural landscapes in Catalan culture. Crucially, they also underscore the predominance of female perspectives in both literature and film, claiming that retreats from urban contexts often evoke ambivalent sentiments for women who are forced to grapple with complex dynamics in rustic settings.

Each of the three essays consider, to some extent, how globalization has irrevocably transformed the Catalan countryside and reshaped artists’ perceptions of a rural sphere which, as Edgar Illas has recently argued, has “become an unstable space of postsubjective experience and magmatic violence” (2024, 1). In “L’imaginari rural català en el cinema i la literatura d’autora a les primeres dècades del segle XXI,” Margarida Casacuberta and Ramon Girona interrogate the so-called (re)turn to the countryside over the past three decades. Tracking the recurrence of rural spaces across a broad spectrum of cultural production from Catalonia, they query affect-laden representations of the great outdoors in works by female writers and directors in twenty-first-century Catalonia. Their essay engages the myth of the *Muntanya catalana*, linking the female body to this geological symbol of Catalan nationalism in both the past (Víctor Català’s *Solitud*, 1904) and the present (Trapé’s *Els encantats*, 2023). Casacuberta and Girona reflect upon this phenomenon in contemporary literature (Irene Solà; Anna Ballbona; Mercè Ibarz) and cinema alike

⁸ See Gozalo-Salellas for more on audiovisual post-fiction and its “opposition to the traditional aestheticization of politics historically linked to fictional genres from the post-dictatorship period such as the so-called ‘historical memory cinema’” (2022, 303). As Balló and Jiménez-Morales claim, experimentation with “the documentary genre, *cinema du réel*, and/or autobiographical fiction” in Catalan cinema reveals “an ongoing search for authenticity” for both “the filmmakers and the world, or worlds, they wish to portray” (2022, 184).

(Ballús; Simón; Carla Subirana; Eva Vila), probing the cultural implications of rural getaways and the efforts of these artists to understand a complex and highly polemical reality in the present.

Neus Penalba's "Camp i bosc: protagonisme del territori en el cinema català contemporani" analyzes the representation of bucolic imaginaries in Ballús's *La plaga* (2013), Pau Calpé's *Tros* (2021), Simón's *Alcarràs* (2022), and Mikel Gurrea's *Suro* (2022). Juxtaposing close readings and an engagement with spatial politics in modern Catalonia, she contends that the prevalence of rural settings in these four films reveals anxieties about cultural and linguistic erasure in an increasingly globalized society. In an era marked by the threat of climate change and the push for an accelerated energy transition, Penalba argues that these films should be viewed as extinction narratives. Just as these filmmakers deconstruct romanticized notions of the countryside, they also grapple with the decline of Catalan nationalism and linguistic hegemony in the region, alongside the extractive pressures placed on the environment by the global marketplace.⁹ In "Landscapes of Crisis: Gender, Interiority and Rurality in Recent Catalan Cinema," Sarah Thomas traces two interrelated phenomena in Catalan film cinema, comparing the rise of rural settings and the increase in female-centered productions over the past decade. Focusing on Roser Aguilar's *Brava* (2017) and Trapé's *Els encantats* (2023), she argues that both films present the Catalan countryside as a space for revitalization and reinvention, where female protagonists tussle with gendered parameters related to belonging and community. Attending to demographic shifts within the Spanish State from 2008 to the present, Thomas asserts that these narratives provide alternative settings — removed from the materialist trappings of urban centers — for female protagonists to process trauma, grieve, and move toward self-discovery. Nevertheless, while these rural imaginaries may initially promise a form of escape for their female leads, both *Brava* and *Els encantats* remind viewers that the countryside is also a space in which the labyrinthine topographies of the self may evoke harrowing memories or emotional distress.

"Evolving Representations of Queer and Female Subjectivities Onscreen," the dossier's second cluster, examines the re-articulation of gender and sexuality in contemporary Catalan cinema and television. Signaling newfound perspectives on intimacy and motherhood, the first two essays explore a discernible shift in the portrayal of the women and/or their female offspring. At the same time, they echo the kind of arthouse cinema produced in the Spanish State by directors such as Josefa Molina, Pilar Miró, and Cecilia Bartolomé in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas the subsequent generation of female *cineastes* (Marta Balletbò-Coll, Icíar Bollaín, Isabel Coixet) sought to balance "the artistic and commercial imperatives" underpinning the industry in the 1990s (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 123), contemporary auteurs are now drawing inspiration from more experimental forms

⁹ See Miguélez-Carballeira for more on "emerging work on ecocide, extractivism and culture" and "environmental violence in the Spanish twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (2024, 552).

of audiovisual expression.¹⁰ Similarly, the current crop of women filmmakers in Catalonia is working to dismantle traditional notions of authorship, as well as hierarchical structures within the production process (Vilaró Moncasí 2021, 99).¹¹ The final piece in this cluster shifts focus to the evolution of queer male representation on Catalan television, underscoring the pedagogical mandate of Catalonia's TV3 and the commercial reach of streaming services like Movistar+. Whereas the auteur-driven films of Martín, Simón, and Torres are less concerned with profit-driven models, *Merlí* (Héctor Lozano and Eduard Cortés, 2015–2018) and its spinoff, *Merlí Sapere Aude* (Héctor Lozano, 2019–2021), tap into narrative formulae associated with the romantic comedy to make queer characters more palatable to a mainstream audience. The result—similar to other “homonormative” productions such as Netflix's *Smiley* (Guillem Clua, 2022)—is a dilution of radical queer politics from generations past (Duggan 2002, 179).¹² What all three essays share is an exploration of the interstitial spaces between pre-existing and/or prescriptive categories of gender and sexuality. Each imagines alternative modes of lived embodiment for women and queer male characters in Catalan screen media—albeit with differing commercial and, therefore, cultural commitments.

In “Sexuals, sexualitzades: Cos i urticària com a estratègia feminista a *Creatura* (2023), d'Elena Martín Gimeno,” Anna Casas Aguilar re-evaluates the male gaze, both in terms of filmic analysis and of its continued presence within the phallogocentric hierarchies of Catalan society. She examines issues of desire and sexual objectification, claiming that *Creatura* problematizes the female body through unsettling interrogations of skin and sexuality. At the same time, Casas Aguilar argues for the emancipatory potential of exposing one's body onscreen, with an awareness of its aesthetic and ethical implications in a medium historically defined by visual pleasure and the male gaze—and how this gaze has forever (de)formed the subjectivity of its recipients. Sandra Galván's “De mares, filles i ficcions: Imaginaris de la maternitat a *Family Tour* (Liliana Torres, 2013) i *Carta a mi madre para mi hijo* (Carla Simón, 2022)” outlines a growing interest in maternity in Catalan cinema, interrogating themes of pregnancy, parenting, and the bond between mothers and daughters. As she demonstrates, several recent films celebrate the creative power of female (re)production, spanning everything from documentaries to (auto)biographical fiction while querying the power of blood-based relations. Galván explores the blurring of *autoficció* and the documentary

¹⁰ Elena Martín has conveyed her admiration for Maren Ade's *Alle Anderen* (2009), Julia Ducournau's *Grave* (2016) and *Titane* (2021), and Joachim Trier's *Thelma* (2017), citing them as films that she and Clara Roquet—her co-writer—viewed while preparing the screenplay for *Creatura* (Ligero 2023). Simón, on the other hand, has alluded to influences such as Claire Denis, Víctor Erice, Lucrecia Martel, and Carlos Saura in interviews (Rozas 2018).

¹¹ All the same, the post-2008 cohort interrogates female-centered themes such as “la sexualidad de la mujer, los deseos, el lugar de la mujer en la familia, la maternidad, su percepción de la violencia sexual) y también su versión de la historia” (Zecchi 2012, 126).

¹² As Duggan contends, homonormativity reifies heteronormative conceptions of the world by depoliticizing queer culture and relegating it to “a perceived mainstream, primarily through a rhetorical remapping of public/private boundaries designed to shrink gay public spheres” (2002, 179).

mode in both productions, claiming that these directors prompt reflections on the very nature of filmic representation and directorial subjectivity in audiovisual media today. In “New Visions of Queer Teenage Subjectivity in *Merlí* and *Merlí Sapere Aude*,” Toni Maestre Brotons tracks the commercial reach of these series while also acknowledging their capacity to engage with Catalan culture and language in the global marketplace. Maestre Brotons claims that the identity politics espoused by *Merlí* and its spin-off are both ambiguous and contentious, as each show applies a homonormative script to young male millennials. In line with recent scholarship on queer media, he demonstrates how these homonormative representations may ultimately depoliticize gay culture, rooted as they are in patterns of consumption and fantasies of domestic harmony.

The third section, entitled “The Ethical Gaze in a Decade of Disobedience,” interrogates the directorial gaze in recent Catalan cinema, arguing for its potential to generate new frameworks for social and/or political activity in an era shaped by state oppression and the constrictions of contemporary neoliberalism. Also defined as a “ciclo destituyente” (Gozalo-Salellas 2022, 32), this decade began with a global economic crisis that was particularly devastating in Spain and concluded with a pandemic that spiraled into a broader socio-cultural crisis (2020–2022).¹³ In the intervening period, a heightened sensitivity to these intersecting crises gave rise to widespread popular defiance. Indeed, phenomena such as the 15-M, or the *Indignados* Movement, the Catalan Secessionist *Procés*, and, conversely, the rise of conservative discourse by Vox, all illustrate disobedient responses to neoliberal logic by envisioning “a democratic order undergirded by a conflictual consensus between adversaries” (Cameron 2014, 2). This ethical turn toward an overtly political cinema among young Catalan filmmakers is no accident, as influences of Jordà’s avant-garde project, especially during his last documentary stage in the 2000s, can be discerned in the filmography of several directors analyzed here. Ballús and Lacuesta, for instance, witnessed Jordà’s mastery as students at the UPF. For these younger auteurs, Jordà’s subversion of the documentary mode, particularly in works like *Mones com la Becky* (1999), *De nens* (2004), and *Más allá del espejo* (2006), embodies a cinema of social commitment that continues to shape their own artistic practices. Other filmmakers, such as Carolina Astudillo, Marc Crehuet, and Simón, express distinct responses to the socio-cultural malaise permeating Spain today, working across genres ranging from black comedy to the historical memory documentary. Nevertheless, all of these artists critique accelerationist neoliberalism, imagining the cinematographic device as a politicizing apparatus or *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense.¹⁴

In “La mirada inquisitiva: Brutalidad policial y violencia institucional en *El rei*

¹³ See Cameron for more on the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which left “more than a quarter of the population [...] at risk of poverty” following “the biggest [economic] nose-dive since the Civil War” (2022, 279).

¹⁴ As Agamben writes, the *dispositif* constitutes “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (2009, 14).

borni (Marc Crehuet, 2016) y *A tu què et sembla?* (Pau Poch, 2015),” Raquel Martínez-Martín analyzes two audiovisual representations of institutional repression in Catalonia during the second decade of the twenty-first century. Her essay zeroes in on two key political events that transpired during this period: the 15-M Movement (May 2011) and the Catalan *Procés Constituent*, which was launched in April 2013. Arguing that both films project a critical gaze toward pervasive depoliticization and the suppression of public protest, Martínez-Martín centers her analysis on imaginaries in which the mutilated eye and/or protagonists’ loss of sight serves to unlock spectators’ recognition of state-sponsored violence in Spain today. Bryan Cameron’s “Neoliberal Frictions: Intimacy and Inconvenience in the Films of Neus Ballús” explores conflictive relations in the workplace in Ballús’s three feature-length films. Underscoring her commitment to capturing the professional lives and social experiences of lower- and working-class characters in contemporary Catalonia, Cameron argues that Ballús’s films ask viewers to recognize the suffering of others, thereby challenging existing structures of privilege and entitlement. He tracks the evolution of Ballús’s filmic gaze across the very different genres of naturalist drama (*La plaga*, 2013), coming-of-age melodrama (*El viatge de la Marta [Staff Only]*, 2019), and cringe comedy (*Sis dies corrents*, 2021). Ultimately, the essay proposes inconvenience as a recurring affective strategy in Ballús’s films, as each conjures social frictions to cultivate forms of emancipatory solidarity and intimacy for characters and audiences alike. In “Motius visuals del cinema de la transmissió desobedient: Pedagogies transformadores i revoltes íntimes contra la esfera pública en el cinema contemporani a Catalunya,” Ivan Pintor Iranzo looks at the work of three filmmakers who are either natives or transplants to the Catalan context—Lacuesta, Simón, and Astudillo. He claims that their output represents a powerful and varied cartography of what he terms a cinema of “disobedient transmission,” advocating for social transformation through the use of visual motifs in the public sphere. Pintor Iranzo also notes that these filmmakers share a common set of influences and references—reinforced within the Catalan educational circuit—which have coalesced into a kind of pedagogy for assembling more ethical visions of the world.

To close the Special Issue, “The Politics of Forms,” offers formal readings of recent Catalan films, new media, and installation art produced from 2011 to the present. This final section recalls the enduring legacy of the original Escola de Barcelona from the 1960s and 1970s. Once referred to as an “invisible tradition” that emerged under Francoist rule (Nadal-Melsió 2010, 465), the revival of the avant-garde reflects a historical engagement with experimental art and the dissensual politics shaping Catalan visual culture today. Characterized by disorienting aesthetics and the negation of narrative and/or mimetic forms of representation, contemporary artists like Lacuesta and emerging artists collaborating at Barcelona’s Centre Cultural La Capella channel the influence of auteurs such as Jacinto Esteva, Jordà, José María Nunes, and Portabella. As a result, they unveil previously undetected connections between the screen, cutting-edge technologies, and

dissent-driven politics. The two essays featured in this cluster find echoes of the subversive impulse driving the original Escola de Barcelona, alongside the necessity for innovative responses to technocapitalism in the twenty-first century.¹⁵ Evincing the Catalan avant-garde's engagement with conceptual art as a mode of escaping a suffocating Francoist-run film industry,¹⁶ the first essay reflects upon the daring work of Lacuesta in his African films —*Los pasos dobles* (2011) and *El cuaderno de barro* (2011). In “Spaces, Surfaces, and the Secret: the African films of Isaki Lacuesta,” Steven Marsh proposes a theoretical reading of “surfaces” in two of Lacuesta's films: *Los pasos dobles* and *El cuaderno de barro*. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's approach to “face” as both surface and cavity in *A Thousand Plateaus*,¹⁷ the author compares Lacuesta's experimental output with the part-ethnographic, part-*cinéma vérité* films of Jean Rouch in Mali. In the end, Marsh concludes that *Los pasos dobles* and *El cuaderno de barro* form a filmic diptych that interrogates the production process, the historical presence of European filmmakers in Africa, and the long-lasting legacy of the avant-garde in contemporary art and audiovisual media.

The dossier concludes with a pioneering study of three experimental transmedia works, produced under the aegis of the Barcelona Producció program, each adopting a critical stance toward technology in an era of digital control. Laura Torres Bauzá's “Contra-dispositius o com subvertir les regles del joc: La reprogramació com a pràctica a *El mal alumne*, *Maze Walkthrough* i *Sindicat virtual de Mods*” examines three new media projects produced by Barcelona's Producció del Centre Cultural la Capella between 2014 and 2021. Situated between video games and experimental visual art, *El mal alumne: Pedagogia crítica per a intel·ligències artificials* (2017–2018), *Maze Walkthrough* (2014), and *Sindicat virtual de mods* (2021) offer critical reflections on the digital apparatus as well as its internal programming. For Torres Bauzá, La Capella's projects represent “counter-dispositifs” that facilitate the ethical re-appropriation of algorithmic tools, querying the highly subjective methodologies at the core of Artificial Intelligence. Her essay evaluates the logics governing societies in Catalonia and across the globe, arguing for new types of programming, both ideological and technological, to combat the further expansion of technocapitalism in the digital era. Although the two articles analyze different formats —digital cinema versus multiscreen, website, and Artificial Intelligence— they both explore the formation of alternative imaginaries through these artists' search for hidden treasure in an age marked by both creative and ideological stagnation.

¹⁵ Luis Suarez-Villa defines technocapitalism as “a new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity” (2009, 3).

¹⁶ See Fanés, for instance, who tracks Portabella's collaboration with Grup de Treball and the “l'actitud de refús a les institucions amb el propòsit de trobar refugi en espais nous, que obrin camins alternatius” (2010, 484).

¹⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari, the “face is generated by an abstract machine they call ‘faciality.’ The abstract machine of faciality (as with any abstract machine) organizes the components of both the signifying and postsignifying regimes. There are two aspects to the way this abstract machine organizes: normality and deviance” (Adkins 2015, 109).

Emergent Visions aims to provide a comprehensive and timely survey of the current state of Catalan audiovisual culture, capturing the mutations of film and screen media through an analysis of the themes, approaches, and structural elements that underpin contemporary productions. To this end, we have divided the collection into four sections, each reflecting current trends and those likely to shape the future of Catalan audiovisual arts. “Rural Imaginaries and the Ecocritical Turn” follows the ongoing turn from urban imaginaries to rurality as a part of a broader ecocritical movement. “Evolving Representations of Queer and Female Subjectivities Onscreen” registers the impulse of disruptive narratives crafted by a younger cohort of feminist and/or queer artists in Catalonia. “The Ethical Gaze in a Decade of Disobedience” reviews a variety of narrative films that respond to widespread discontent through socio-political defiance between 2011 and 2022. Finally, “The Politics of Form” sheds light on innovative practices in contemporary transmedia formats such as dual cinema, digital art, and artificial intelligence-based productions. In short, this Special Issue seeks to demonstrate that the enduring legacy of audiovisual representation in twentieth-century Catalonia is being carried forward by a bold new wave of younger artists. Their voices, perspectives, languages, and experimental approaches evince a redefined relationship between creation, authorship, and audiences, while committing to the ongoing exploration of alternative cartographies in film and screen media.

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