



ROUTES OF DESIRE. **A CHART FOR** **NAVIGATING THROUGH** **THE ARCHIPELAGO**

Mostra Internacional de Films de
Dones de Barcelona and Cloe Masotta

Ever since 1896, women have contributed to the realm of cinema an abundance of creations worthy of admiration stemming from their particular experiences in the world. The discovery of this surprising, inspiring and significant archipelago of female culture has been the *raison d'être* of the work of the Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona during the thirty years that it has been running.

Constructing, reconstructing, restoring and weaving genealogies of film on the basis of pleasure, enjoyment and creativity. Subverting the dictates of academia, the androcentric narratives of the History of Film—with capital letters, naturally—those carefully refined lists, polished and repolished, that indicate who deserves to appear, to feature in textbooks—very few of them women and often limited to a specific chapter. Resurrecting the pioneering women, establishing connections between them and women filmmakers today, discrediting the narrative of exceptionality—women filmmakers as mythological beings, Amazons who emerge suddenly over the course of history to the surprise and fascination of the public.

This was the basis from which we convened the first edition of the Archipelago Project in 2017. Which woman filmmaker would you pay tribute to with a piece of your own creation? We sent our proposition out into the world and the response was not long in coming: we received dozens of audiovisual proposals (videos, gifts, photographs and texts). An archipelago that has gradually grown over the years and that we have decided to use to construct a collective tribute to the women filmmakers who have shaped our universe, a tribute that also signifies that we accept the legacy they have bequeathed us and that constitutes evidence that we have taken up their baton and that there is a continuity.

In this spirit of enjoyment and collective creation, we invited Cloe Masotta—the thinker, theorist, teacher and a reference for us—to imagine a route through this Archipelago. This is her proposal, one of many possibilities, her navigation chart. Thank you to all of you for accompanying us on this voyage.

Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona

ROUTES OF DESIRE, HISTORIES OF FILM

Cloe Masotta

'Here many representations and images jostle in an expanded archive across time and space, prompting other resonances and opening out unexpected pathways through an archive of the image in time and space.'

—Griselda Pollock

'Audiences are not pulled or manipulated into a sense of completion according to the needs of the filmmaker or to the demands of commercial cinema. Avoidance of closure ensures openness of form, entrance to the work via critical thinking stimulated by the audience's physical involvement in the viewing process.'

—Barbara Hammer

By resurrecting and championing so many women filmmakers, many of them missing from books on film, and from screening rooms too, the Archipelago Project is an invitation through audiovisual creation to question a certain canon of film history, in which many women filmmakers have been systematically rendered invisible. So, we might think of this film-loving geography as an archive that grows thanks to the new awareness of the women filmmakers selected each year, those to whom we pay tribute, and thanks as well to the many gazes of women creators who reflect themselves in their images in order to imagine new ones.

In cities, pathways or lines of desire emerge in unexpected places. They are routes designed by intuition and the footsteps repeated day after day by men and women passing through places not necessarily intended to be traversed. And what if the history of film as it is written was like the major highways that thousands of people drive along each day, without either perceiving them or realising that they are the product of a series of decisions, and alongside these highways there were these other paths that are the fruit of the desire and care of those who travel them each day?

I propose that we think of these invisible lines between the various Islands in the Archipelago Project as maritime routes that guide us across a new map and which invite us to discover all those women who have often been silenced by the official account. Because there is not just one history of film but many that are written or drawn on the basis of the paths of desire of women viewers who, in the Archipelago Project, are creators, who are viewers who are creators... Routes of desire that we trace from one film to another, from one woman filmmaker to another and from one woman filmmaker to ourselves when we become viewers-creators.

A chart for navigating through the archipelago

I too found myself one summer afternoon recording on my mobile phone, capturing the dance of my bare feet and the pink of my dress blowing about over the green of a meadow in Galicia, capturing the sunbeams

glimmering on the Tâmega River, and paying tribute with *El agua acaricia mis pies, el sol mece mi vestido* (2019, *The Water Caresses My Feet, the Sun Rocks My Dress*) to three women filmmakers who all passed away in 2019, Agnès Varda, Barbara Hammer and Carolee Schneemann, three leading figures who have influenced my gaze and my writing. Archipelago invites us to experiment, to play and to discover film. And it suggests that there is not one history of film but as many as we can imagine and desire through our fascinated gaze, and proposes that we discover numerous routes for navigating through the memory of images. Of all those you can imagine, it is a matter of identifying a map open to as many routes as the gazes that look at it. I propose five.

Harvesters of images

'If we don't ask ourselves questions, if we don't interrogate ourselves, if we don't represent ourselves, we remain invisible.'

—Marina Siero

There are women filmmakers who gather memories in their work, who, through film, give visible expression to the memory of those who have perhaps been insufficiently represented or even ignored. In her *Carta a Agnès Varda* (2017, *Letter to Agnès Varda*), and its tribute to women who gather in the harvest, Marina Siero looks at the work of women in the fields. Her piece is structured on the basis of a combination of archive materials, photographs from different periods, group portraits of peasant women and present-day film footage of two women gathering olives under olive trees, accompanied by a choreography of voices that recollect working in the fields. María Romero García also seeks to film the memory of farm labour in *Lucía* (2017), the title of which comes from the name of the woman who provides her testimony in it. In this instance, the protagonist is depicted as if in a painted portrait of her on a summer afternoon, lying in a hammock, recalling working on the land, but also in the city and in a factory.

In her tribute to Alina Marazzi, Marga Almirall revives the memory of Elena Rull Mur through her diaries, incarnating a voice that exposes the taming of the body and of desire by society. The handwritten pages throb to the rhythm of music overprinted on the footage recovered from film shoots by Jaume Rotés of a woman enjoying herself swimming in the sea and on the beach.

The filmmaker Carolina Astudillo also upholds the memory—in history and film—and the visibilisation of largely unrepresented women in her tribute to the Soviet pioneer Esfir Shub. Her piece *Fanny* (2017) features the voice of Fanny Jabcovsky (also known as Fanny Edelman, her married name), a political participant in the International Brigades who defended the Second Spanish Republic, and who was president of the Communist Party of Argentina. Over footage from *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the political militant narrates her childhood memory of Sergei Eisenstein's film

and describes how it went on to become an influential factor in her life.

And lastly, on this first route of proposals based on images retrieved from archives, which pose the question of how we should raise the visibility of those women outside the frame of the historical account or the histories of film, we find the testimony of the Catalan woman who was a pioneer in animated films, the painter and illustrator Pepita Pardell, in the portrait of her by Maria Pagès, *Pepita Frame a Frame* (2019, Pepita, Frame by Frame). Her testimony raises the question of how it is that so often film credits conceal the true work done by artists like her.

The ages of skin

'Age isn't my enemy, perhaps it's my friend.'
—Raquel Marques

'How do we portray bodies, and in particular those bodies of women who have been so repressed yet so displayed and exploited commercially?'
—Agnès Varda

Some of the women filmmakers included among those we pay tribute to, such as the aforementioned Agnès Varda, Barbara Hammer and Carolee Schneemann, offer us in their films a look at the female body far removed from the fetishisation of the male gaze so present in the history of art and film. In their films, the camera records the pleasure of a body that celebrates its existence, a body that is always beautiful by virtue of the sole fact of being alive and breathing, of being a body, thereby rejecting every imposed canon of perfection or idealisation. The portrait and self-portrait recur in their films, often directly facing the camera.

A hand opens and closes, attempting to grasp an image, the choppy sea and waves. Raquel Marques's tribute to Agnès Varda revives this gesture often employed by the Belgian-born French film director. In *Esa cosa incontrolable que es el tiempo* (2017, This Uncontrollable Thing Called Time), Marques places herself in front of the camera and reflects on a body on which the passage of time is inscribed. 'My hair and hands tell me that time is passing, that there is already an inscribed history'. The filmmaker does not show her face but uses the sense of touch, caressing her hair while the intertitles set before us her reflection on an ageing body.

The same Vardian gesture of a hand framing the world features in *Recol·lectant* (Harvesting) by Cristina Mora Cobos, in which Mora gleans fragments of reality that she enumerates as the images pass before our eyes, projecting her gaze fascinated by life. We find shots of the sea, which recurs in this route through the Archipelago, again in *Bec l'aigua de Margaret Tait* (2017, I Drink Margaret Tait's Water) by Salut Baldirà Martí, who also positions herself in front of the camera in her ritual communion with the forces of nature. This work ushers in a new series of films that also celebrate, as we shall see, the moving body that plays, sings and dances.

Playing, singing and dancing

'Letting go to have the unhaving [...].
Letting go to retain the love in me.'
—Eva Ortega Puig

'And if talking of a *flâneuse* has any meaning, it is not to simply define her as a woman sauntering through a city, but as a woman who occupies the city, occupy taken here to mean occupying as well as strolling as a form of insubordination.'
—Ana María Iglesia

Playing, singing and dancing to turn the world upside down, to rock the established structures and also to celebrate life, and art too. Questioning the reclusion of many women in the home environment and overturning it. When the body dances, the course of the world is suspended in the state of transit of a moving body, and the desire of the body that has surrendered to the joy of dancing is released. This occurs in pieces such as the tribute to the filmmaker Andrea Arnold entitled *Carta a la Mía de Fish tank* (2020, Letter to Mia in Fish Tank) by Eva Ortega Puig. In this work, the rhythm of the dancing body in transit accompanies the voice that whispers, recites or perhaps sings the letter referred to in the title.

The moving body also features in *Flâneuse* (2019), by Laura Ginès, a piece linked to her reading of Ana María Iglesia's book *La revolución de las flâneuses* (Wunderkammer, 2019), in which the author reveals a little-known figure, that of someone who saunters about the city, a figure always seen as a man, for example Baudelaire's *flâneur*. In her piece, the visual artist and filmmaker transforms the aprons owned by her mother, Pura Bataller Vila, into objects associated with domestic work, into a plastic landscape or chromatic dancefloor on which the maternal figure becomes a dancing silhouette.

In *A Fairy Film in Shadow Show* (2017), Martina Rogers' tribute to the German film director Lotte Reiniger, Rogers uses animation techniques and presents the silhouette of a body which, like a puzzle seeking its shape, becomes distorted, fragmented and transfigured, eventually reconstructing or reconfiguring itself on the dancefloor. In the closing credits, we discover another textile piece associated with women's work in the home, a crocheted table runner transformed in this audiovisual piece into a beautiful graphic ornament.

Caressing the landscape

'[...] take another example, *News from Home*: How much time should we take to show this street so that what's happening is something other than a mere piece of information? So that we can go from the concrete to the abstract and come back to the concrete—or move forward in another way. I'm the one who decides.'
—Chantal Akerman

In this chart for navigating through the Archipelago, we also find images of a mutating space observed, for

example, through the window of a moving train, taking us back to the early days of the history of film. Thus we travel with Paulina Quiroz Navarro, Allison Figueroa Rojas and Elda Isavelina Ortiz Rivas to the centre of the images of a moving landscape in their short *Angel Storm Path* (2018), a tribute to the filmmakers Tatiana Huezo and Paz Encina.

Or, as well, a gaze that caresses an urban landscape in pieces such as the one by Diana Toucedo in tribute to Chantal Akerman and her documentary and sometimes dreamlike approach to urban landscapes. In her untitled short made in 2017, the Galician filmmaker invites us to observe a group of buildings in New York, allowing time to pass as we immerse ourselves ever deeper into the image of them.

Metamorphosis-transfiguration

[...] no tripod has yet been built which is as miraculously versatile in movement as the complex system of supports, joints, muscles, and nerves which is the human body, which, with a bit of practice, makes possible the enormous variety of camera angles and visual action. You have all this, and a brain too, in one neat, compact, mobile package.'

—Maya Deren

This roadmap also encompasses proposals centred on experimentation with the plastic, material potentialities of the analogue and digital image. For example, in *Fata Morgana* (2019) Anne Murray alludes to the name of an atmospheric phenomenon, a mirage, as the artist puts it, 'seen from the perspective of a rock in Cappadocia, Turkey. The rock as a witness to the movement of an insect questions its own memories confusing present, past, and future, it is in a dream space.'

In *Adhèrencies* (2017, Adherences) by Francesca Llopis, a consideration of the films directed by Kathryn Bigelow, we experience a sense of strangeness in response to a body that becomes a hallucinated landscape by means of various postproduction techniques applied to the video image and the camera's microscopic approach to the skin.

We now come to a possible end to this route for Archipelago with a tribute to Maya Deren, included in this essay as a filmmaker and as a writer through her consideration of experimental film. In *A dream* (2020), María Paton Martínez turns to found footage, evoking the hypnotic and oneiric power of film in an operation close to that of Surrealism's free association of images and meanings.

The urge to film can make itself felt in any place or time. At random or also following an invitation to do so, like the one issued every year by the Archipelago Project to raise awareness and to pay tribute to the many women film directors who have played a part in the past and today in the histories of film. This route, this possible map, does not end here but instead hopes to invite you to continue making your way through this archive that is constantly changing and to encourage you to take part in future editions with your creative gazes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Deren, Maya; Martínez Carolina (prologue, compilation, editing and translation). *El universo dereniano. Textos fundamentales de la cineasta Maya Deren*. Cuenca: Servicio de Publicaciones of the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2015.
- Hammer, Barbara. *Hammer! Making Movies Out of Sex and Life*. New York, Feminist Press, 2010.
- Iglesia, Ana María. *La revolución de las flâneuses*. Girona: WunderKammer, 2019.
- Merino, Imma. *Agnès Varda: espigadora de realidades y de ensueños*. San Sebastián: Donostia Kultura, Euskadiko Filmatagia, 2019.
- Rosen, Miriam. 'En su propio tiempo. Entrevista con Chantal Akerman'. Published in *Lumière* magazine. Available at <http://www.elumiere.net/especiales/akerman/akermanentrevistaartforum.php> (accessed 29 April 2022).

SELECTED WORKS:

- El agua acaricia mis pies, el sol mece mi vestido* (2019), Cloe Masotta to Agnès Varda, Barbara Hammer and Carolee Schneemann
- Diario de rodaje: Carta a Agnès Varda* (2017), Marina Siero to Agnès Varda
- Lucía* (2017), María Romero to Virginia García del Pino and Naomi Kawase
- Sense títol* (2017), Marga Almirall to Alina Marazzi
- Fanny* (2017), Carolina Astudillo to Esfir Schub
- Pepita Frame a Frame* (2019), Maria Pagès to Pepita Pardell
- Esa cosa incontrolable que es el tiempo* (2017), Raquel Marques to Agnès Varda
- Recol·lectant* (2017), Cristina Mora Cobos to Agnès Varda
- Bec l'aigua de Margaret Tait* (2017), Salut Baldirà Martí to Margaret Tait
- Carta a la Mía de "Fish tank"* (2020), Eva Ortega Puig to Andrea Arnold
- Flanêuse* (2019), Laura Ginès to Carolee Schneemann
- A fairy film in shadow show* (2017), Martina Rogers to Lotte Reininger
- Angel Storm Path* (2018), Paulina Quiroz Navarro, Allison Figueroa Rojas and Elda Isavelina Ortiz Rivas to Tatiana Huezo and Paz Encina
- Sense títol* (2017), Diana Toucedo to Chantal Akerman
- Fata Morgana* (2019), Anne Murray to Carolee Schneemann
- Adhèrencies* (2017), Francesca Llopis to Kathryn Bigelow
- A dream* (2020), María Paton Martínez to Maya Deren

