

Between Méliès i Lumière: Conversation between the Directors Joaquim Jordà and Marc Recha

Joaquim Jordà (Santa Coloma de Farners, 1935) is a director, scriptwriter and translator. A student of the Official Film School (the former IIEC), a young member of UNINCI (the production company linked to the Communist party) and a key part of the Barcelona School, in 1969 he moved to Italy for three years, during which time he directed militant films for the Italian Communist Party. Upon returning to Barcelona in 1973 and out of touch with the film world, he turned to what would become a regular fixture in his life: book translation, principally for Anagrama. *Numax presenta* (1980) marked his return to filmmaking after an absence of nearly 10 years. It was followed by a number of scripts for different directors, including Vicente Aranda, and the four feature-length films he has made to date: *El encargo del cazador* (1991), *Un cos al bosc* (1996), the award-winning *Mones com la Becky* (1999) and *Joc de nens* (2003), about the case of a paedophile in the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona, which has yet to be released. In 2000, the Generalitat of Catalonia awarded him the National Film and Audiovisual Award. He has also been a professor in Audiovisual Communication at Pompeu Fabra University for a number of years.

The recent appearance of the formal and conceptual dichotomy between fiction and reality in film practice has not only generated numerous discussions and reflections among filmmakers and theorists but led to new forms of visual language just beginning to be explored. People often say that since the early days of cinema there has been a clear line between the real and the fictional. Despite the fact that when this line is crossed today, everybody seems to know which side they are on, the debate has expanded to include the most intense fields of freedom in film practice and, subsequently, to attract interest both within specialist

Marc Recha (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, 1970) is a filmmaker. He first began to work in the industry with short films such as *El darrer instant* (1988), *La maglana* (1991), *És tard* (1994) and *L'escampavies* (1997). In 1988 he moved to Paris, where he worked as an assistant to Marcel Hanoun. His passion for landscapes and visual poetry is noticeable in the four feature-length films he has made: *El cielo sube* (1991), *L'arbre de les cireres* (1998), the award-winning *Pau i el seu germà* (2001) (entered in the official section of the Cannes Festival) and the recently released *Les mans buides* (2003). The 2002 winner of the National Film and Audiovisual Award from the Generalitat of Catalonia, he has also been a professor in Audiovisual Communication at Pompeu Fabra University for some time.

theoretical circles and among the general public.

Quaderns del CAC has brought the filmmakers Joaquim Jordà and Marc Recha together to compare two examples of creative trajectories along the aforementioned line: beginning from the field of the documentary (i.e., that which we could call real) and allowing exploratory freedom by introducing all types of representation without affecting the credibility of the work, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, moving unmistakably within the field of fiction but imbuing it with elements of reality that make the viewer feel it in a different way.

Joaquim Jordà (J.J.). I think this situation is typical of times of crisis, of real crisis. A while ago people were talking about the death of film. Although it may be a somewhat unfortunate metaphor (talking about death), we could talk about a severe crisis, one of the many crises that film has gone through in the hundred-odd years it has been around. And this crisis no doubt has many origins, both old and recent, e.g., I think the arrival of new technologies has created a new way of making films. But this crisis is being resolved in a way (or will be resolved, if it is) through a type of death and resurrection, a kind of Phoenix will rise from the ashes and which at the same time is uniting the dichotomy (which I consider erroneous) created at the time film was born, i.e., the false division between Melies and the Lumiere brothers. The thing that marked the two different paths (Melies, fiction and the Lumieres, reality, or the belief in reality) has never really been true. In fact, Godard said that when it boiled down to it, filming a magic show was no different to doing a show, or making a documentary about a magic show. And the same thing the other way around: the Lumieres absolutely manipulated this reality, the reality they operated with.

The scene in *Workers Leaving The Lumiere Factory In Lyon (La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon)* was shot various times to make the ending coincide with the moment when the door closes, and the characters were organised according to their height, i.e., the physical things they had in common or didn't have in common. The scene was arranged in a way that somewhat contradicts the idea that a documentary involves simply putting something in front of the camera. If there was something put on camera (and it is very bold to define the limit between putting something on camera and arranging the scene) the borders were also very imprecise.

One example of that is what Marc has been doing, particularly in his last two films. In other words, while his first two films (if you don't agree with me, please say) were much more firmly rooted in the fictional camp, *Pau i el seu germà* and the latest one are moving in an area much closer to the border and in a very liberal fashion. The desire to add a landscape, for example. You could say, "Film has always had a landscape desire", but that's not true. For a long time, fictional cinema had lost all landscape desire, i.e., it used it as an architectural background. But you (Marc) use the

landscape, and I mean 'landscape', not architectural background, as another element of the storyline. And that must come directly from a particular concern.

Marc Recha (M.R.). Something strange happened to me: when I first began to make films, I was in that dichotomy. I don't know if I was aware it existed, because I don't think I was even truly aware of the Lumiere brothers. I began to make films very much in the vein of Melies, i.e., along the lines of a will of, if I could put it this way, inventing and to some extent recreating the whole history of film. It is true that I later began to look at the Lumieres, something you can see if you look at the early short films I did in 35 mm, practically including *El cel puja*. Then there was a long period without doing anything and then came another will, the will of getting up close to reality and observing it, which I suppose was more indebted to the Lumieres. It was a desire that evidently involves not just putting the camera somewhere but also playing with the possibility of manipulating the elements.

However, it is true that, following *Les mans buides*, something happened that personally made me look at many things in a different light and I still don't know which road I'll take. Suddenly, with *Les mans buides*, for the first time I had a script that had been thoroughly developed, i.e., it fell within the standards of a genre that could be located (even if it only flirted with it) within the comedy. So what should I do with the script? Should I shoot it as was, as if it was a newspaper serial and I was to film each page? Or should I do what I'd begun to do in *Pau i el seu germà*? That was the situation I found myself in when I arrived on the shoot. There was a moment of panic when I found myself alone - of course, nobody else could tell me what to do. It was a very personal decision, but I found myself alone with a number of elements that I didn't control. I had a very detailed and tightly linked script but at the same time I had a reality surrounding me that I had chosen expressly and which was disposed to destroy it for me. But was I able to get cope with it or not? It was a very big problem. Also, of course, the script had a great sense of humour, the sort of thing that would make people fall off their chairs laughing. In fact, if the film had been made the way the script was written, it might even have got a release in a thousand more cinemas, but I didn't do it. Why not? Because I had in some way set myself

a trap without realising it: I had chosen Port-Vendres, and Port-Vendres is the most depressing place on earth. How can you combine that state of depression and disillusionment with comedy? So I threw myself in the deep end and, to be honest, sometimes I thought I wouldn't get out of it, and sometimes I still think I didn't.

J.J. What happens is the production can direct everything else but what it cannot direct is the script.

M.R. Exactly.

J.J. I don't know the script, but I'm sure you had to skip pages and pages.

M.R. Yes, of course.

J.J. And that you had to leave out (people have told me this) loads of characters, i.e., characters that had a place in the written script and then you realised you weren't going to use them once you had put the actors in, who are the people who really take part in the filming. The actors, who aren't really actors, either (they are because there is a particular statute) but they are not intervened with, acted with, manipulated as actors; they are manipulated, intervened with and directed as corporal spaces moving within a physical space, they have a job to do, obviously. And from that moment on, I think you must have skipped whole pages of the script and no doubt left out entire characters. However, I am making this hypothesis about something I only know one part of, i.e., the film, but I don't know the other part, i.e., the script - although I like to imagine that once you found the characters, there were some that there wasn't room for.

What does that mean? It means that in these times of crisis something very important has been conquered: escaping from the tyranny of the script, which has encroached on the big times of crisis. Until now, all film crises have been resolved by saying, "let's standardise the script" - we create a presidential-type film where the script is president, it does and doesn't do what it likes. And the crisis is thus resolved. But now we are facing the first crisis, a real and strong crisis (that will probably leave a great many people out of the game), which is being resolved in the opposite direction. In other words, it is being solved not by favouring the script but the production, or what we could call the production of reality, the production of the situation. I

think that is very important, because it is the first crisis that has found a way out by looking ahead, not back. All the crises have been met by recovering the past, patching it up and so on, except for this one. It is very good that many different people are doing it - I can see it in films like yours and also in Rosales' works. It is a type of film with a careful and very rigorous production and yet there is an input of directing the actors which means that the actors themselves and the very story structure (this almost metronomic structure, in which each unit has a weight equal to the others) are very clearly influenced by the documentary. Does that mean they are hybrids? No, I think what is really being broken is the hybrid concept. There are works based more closely on documentaries and others based more on fiction, but overall people are beginning to make a number of films based on the two. The label doesn't make sense.

Chance, which is very closely related to the force that reality has repressed, should be an element of the production. There should be a production department called 'chance' and it should be nourished every now and then so it can flourish; it should be cultivated and given a space.

M.R. I think chance can't occur if you don't arrive on the shoot with everything thought out and prepared before you begin. In other words, the only thing demanded from the producers is that they have the vision or ability to fit the elements into what you call the 'chance department' or whatever; it means simply that if the film can be done in 10 weeks, then in 10 weeks you film chronologically and the whole technical crew and team of actors know they are being exposed to that. That is why I also insist on doing an extra three or four weeks of rehearsals with the actors on location, on the locations where we will be filming, and then gradually add the camera and sound. However, I must stress that I still have my doubts. I had a very bad time with it, because the reality that surrounded me was so violent and it impacted so forcefully on the fiction I had created (a fiction which at the same time was based on a reality I had seen) that I didn't know where to turn. In other words, there is a time when you fall into the whirlpool of chance and let yourself flow with it and I don't think that's the answer. There is a thread you have to follow, otherwise why bother making the script.

J.J. They say that giving birth is painful.

M.R. Yes, it is painful but, let me just say, I will continue to wonder about this film, *Les mans buides*, which, I insist, had to be lively and that when you read the script, and when we wrote it too, it made you crack up laughing. It was madness. So why did it suddenly escape? You can see it before you, you can see the reality that surrounds you and you go, "Well, I'll let it in". When I let it in, I had to change the whole edit. I even had to put in Dominique A's music, which came along in the final phase of the editing and which hadn't been planned. But that's because the film... I remember that, even during the editing phase, as a joke we took the soundtrack from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Trouble With Harry*, stuck it on the film and it fitted it beautifully. But, because we filmed it in a way that was closer to the reality that surrounded us, it wasn't right. So from that point on we had to change everything, we even had to create the flashback of the old woman which didn't exist in the script, and from then on we got a film about lack of communication, a film that was slower, a film that had a particularly black sense of humour but which didn't... Well, is that a failure? Is it a mistake? What happened? I don't know, but in any case I felt that I was inside a number of borders that had completely disappeared, they became invisible and I found myself alone in the middle of the landscape.

J.J. And what did that feel like?

M.R. It was completely disorienting, although I was sure I felt comfortable when I'd entered that landscape. But I also thought, "Marc, you've done it now, why don't you do other things? You already feel safe in this landscape". What I wanted was to not enter the landscape that said to me, "come here and begin to film", because I already knew how to do that. For me, the challenge was whether or not to combine this type of attempt at entering the genre, which in this case was dramatic comedy and, from that point on, see what happened. And that is the big doubt I have when it comes to continuing to make films. What should I do? I agree with you, and this is something I have always thought, that the script is a working guideline, and I also agree with what you say about a crisis. People talk about a crisis in films but (and I have never understood this) the fact is that what you say is right: when something isn't going well,

everyone says, "The scriptwriters have to make good scripts!", when the script is only a guideline.

J.J. The script is a censorial measure, it always has been. It is directly censorial when there is an official, established censorship and in a more profound way nowadays. It is a censorship element of the producer. The producer decides he is going to do something and determines the possibilities based upon the script. The script gets passed around and everybody puts their two-bobs worth in, in such a way that it becomes the facility you give to censorship, the door you open to censorship. In the production during the shoot, regardless of how many incompetent producers you have, you can save the shoot (as you very well know) because you can do what you want. The producer can stop you from doing something, but he can't stop you from adopting the solution that you find for *the thing*. You have freedom on the shoot. On the other hand, everyone gets their word in on the script and everyone has something to say about it. So in that sense I think it is important to overcome the crisis in this way. Does that create conflict? Yes, of course it does, loads of conflict. In some ways, if somebody is professional and has a good production structure, filming a script is the easiest thing in the world, as you know. He might say, "I want to do four shots instead of three": OK, that might be a conflict, but making three pages of a script together during a shoot is something for which you only need a bit of professionalism and something else. And what is the result? Well, as they say, if the script is good it will turn out well, or it will be only OK... I think that making a film is not about filling out a script, it is about making a film. The script has to play an auxiliary role, it has to be a guide, because we need guides. I personally have shot without a guide, which is why I've had the problems I've had.

M.R. JWhat I do is make a type of very literary script, i.e., one that is quite different from the script. And because it is so literary, no one thinks of it as a script, but it can sometimes win people over. And in a very global way, all the team feels involved because they don't read it as a script but as if it were really a story or a book. So from then on, all the sound is meticulously described, or the light, or the landscape... Of course, I remember that with *Pau i el seu germà*, they said to me, "What do you want us to film? That

snail crawling along here, or that sound you refer to?" And I would say, "No, you don't have to film that, but I've written it in because I want you to take it all in" and so we made a small step forward. Later, in the rehearsals, we could build the sets within the reality, etc. I think it is also necessary to work on scripts (at least it suits me) that are very literary, that might have very little dialogue, that's true. Normally, you see the script of a made-for-TV film and it's made up entirely of dialogue.

J.J. It's like the text of a theatre piece. You have some characters, they come in, they go out...

M.R. So, faced with a script like that, where everything is dialogue, what can the director of photography do? Nothing. On the other hand, I think that a director of photography like H el ene Louvart reads what I have written, which might be pure literature and badly written but in any case at least there is an attempt at communication, and she gets what I am trying to say. So when she picks up the camera I just tell her a couple of things and then we can work in a choreographed way. With a script in which everything is dialogue, what can the camera operator do? He just stands there and say, "Ok, what will we do now?"

J.J. I understand perfectly. It is a type of script you can use to guide you. The producer is probably shitting himself (and I think the assistant director wouldn't like it either), but the camera operator, the actors and the sound technician think it's great because it gives them ideas. But I don't think your producer would like it at all, because what can he do with it? He wouldn't know what to do. As a scriptwriter, I know what is being asked, I know that your scripts would be acceptable, as a scriptwriter. Fundamentally, they are acceptable to you, but if one day you were to give that type of script to someone else they wouldn't be able to do anything with it. But for you, it's not exactly a script, what you are doing is a type of written preparation of the ambience, the scene, the situations, the air you want to find in the shoot and, because it is also literature and literature is imprecise, you'll know how to change it and you don't have to stick to what you've written. It can be good both for the camera operator and the sound technician as well as the actors, because they can arrive on set and be inspired by an idea,

i.e., they can move within a number of words, within a number of actions and spaces. In that sense, it's fantastic to write scripts. However, if you want to turn professional some day, you'd better wave goodbye to that type of writing or you'll be in trouble...

As a scriptwriter (I'm currently writing a fictional script for I ciar Bolla in), I put myself at the service of the director. What I give is professionalism and ideas related to it. I never put suppositions of that type. I will never say to I ciar, "The script has ended, the script is dead", I wouldn't say it and she knows that. But I wouldn't say it to her when I am working because that is different.

In *Mones com la Becky* I found that my own illness formed part of the film and so I had to introduce myself into it. It wasn't that I was happy about it, but once it was found I took advantage of it because I could see it was the only way of creating a real relationship with the characters, the actors, the protagonists of the film. The answer was to be there, to be there for them to see me like just another person, from the beginning. On other occasions, it has been as a joke, a private joke in which you are there for a little role. But in the case of *Mones* it was very significant, because if we move within the area of the documentary, unlike what is traditionally thought, I think the physical presence of the filmmaker, the director, is almost essential: he has to show his face. If you are making a documentary, you are saying that this is real, so if it is real you have to certify it by being there on the inside in a certain way. There can be different objectives, but that's how it has to be. However, I am not dogmatic on this point. I have a project that hopefully will get under way next year, which is a musical, the genre that you would think is the furthest removed from the documentary. However, I think you can also find a hybrid, you can make a musical that includes the elements that arise from the situation, but of course you would be working in a different manner altogether.

M.R. . Do you think films are heading in a certain direction?

J.J. It's not so much that I think films are heading in a certain direction. Films can move in many directions, and if we are talking about the path marking the current crisis, it doesn't mean there aren't exceptions. There are exceptions and I would love to be able to cultivate the exceptions instead of

having to end up in this situation, because it almost always has very different objectives, sometimes concerning exhibitionism and sometimes of necessity.

What I mean to say is that sometimes things don't happen by themselves and it is important to provoke them in some way. Sometimes they do happen by themselves, I try to work with things that happen by themselves. You have to channel them and channelling them of course is artificial. I mean, things don't channel themselves. You channel them a little, marking tendencies, you go right and see if something follows you, you go left and see if something follows you, you stay still and see if something follows you.

On the other hand, as a filmmaker I am not terribly concerned with the way something is framed. I think that is the job of the operator you rely on. I don't care very much if there is more weight here or there. Or better said, I do care, but I care when I see it in the rushes, I don't worry about framing it beforehand. I can forget that concern and pass it on to the operator. I have made four films with Carles Gusi. Now, I don't like everything that Gusi does. He has made films with other people where with regard to framing I don't agree with what he's done, but I know that when we work together he knows exactly what I like. However, we don't talk about it much. We talk, but I don't have to worry about it, I don't have to be there suffering about if the camera moves a centimetre more or a centimetre less, like other people do. I think that is a way of making a film that again unites the old or conventional concepts of fiction and documentary. It's a different way of blocking. We said before that there is a setting of scene, a setting of images and reality, but it is a mix of all that.

For example, I loved Rosales' last film. I saw it three times in ten days. I went to see it one day by chance and then I went to see it again three days later, and then I went back again four days after that. I found it fascinating because of the sacrifices in it. It was the first time I've seen Spanish spoken as it really is spoken here, that type of Catalanised Spanish. That wasn't what fascinated me and that isn't what it was really about, but I thought it was a good idea, a good contribution.

M.R. I think that in Barcelona there is a tendency, which is the consequence of many things, to conceal the linguistic reality that exists here and I find it absolutely incomprehen-

sible. If I go out on the street, people speak Spanish, they speak Catalan, they speak Arabic, English, whatever they want. And the people who insist on making films in which people only speak in Spanish... I just don't get it. I mean, it's like what used to happen before. We only make films where people speak in Catalan. No. Reality is very diverse. It's one thing to say, "Welles also made *Othello* and everyone spoke in English", that's another story, but if the aim of the game is to reflect the reality that surrounds you it doesn't make sense. I mean, I am beginning to find it really suspicious (it used to surprise me) that everybody expresses themselves in Spanish. And don't even get me started on made-for-TV films. Even when they say it's a conditioning factor of a co-production, I still don't understand it.

And it's not just a linguistic issue, it's an issue related with the fact that if you want to reflect the reality that surrounds you, people express themselves in all sorts of ways. When I go down to the square to do the shopping, I speak with everyone in Catalan and Spanish, and if I knew other languages I would speak them, too. What I don't accept is that you stick a camera somewhere and everyone speaks in Spanish. And you say, "Well, look, I don't want to get involved here".

J.J. The Catalan language, which is so admirable when it is written by someone like Ruyra, and I would even say someone like Espriu, is horrible when it appears on TV3, it looks like it's a language spoken by the illiterate: no-one knows how to conjugate verbs, they only have one way of conjugating them, i.e., with an auxiliary; they don't know how to use the indefinite tenses; they don't know how to use anterior tenses; they don't know how to use the subjunctive - because it's not what they're used to. TV3 is vulgarising the Catalan language at certain levels.

In my latest film, *Joc de nens*, you realise that in the judicial environment, the only person who speaks in Catalan is the main defendant, the man who theoretically is the most hated character in Catalonia and who will be shut away in prison for decades. This character speaks in Catalan but the judge, who is Catalan-speaking, answers him in Spanish. The only people who the judge allows to speak in Catalan are the defendant and Armand de Flavià, because he is an aristocratic genealogist and an illustrious homosexual. And he is the only person whom the judge answers in Catalan.

M.R. When I made *Les mans buides*, I arrived to Port-Vendres with an idea and it turned out that nobody spoke Catalan, it was a lie. There were four people with terrible complexes about it, who had repeatedly been criticised to the point they wouldn't speak it. So what did I do? I didn't worry about the fact that the people didn't speak Catalan. What I did was re-cut it and it ended up that 10% or 15% or so spoke Catalan. And what's more, the people who speak it are the people from outside the area, who speak it among themselves. But I can only be guided by reality. Now, I could have made it that everyone spoke in Catalan. And that is the feeling I have with many people who are making films here who show people in their films where, I insist, everybody suspiciously speaks in Spanish.

Transcription: Laia Aubia de Higes