

who most deserves consideration in the panorama of Italian cinema of the 1990s. Born in 1945, Amelio began working for RAI television in the 1970s. As a feature film director he came to public attention with *Colpire al cuore* ('To strike at the heart', 1982), one of the few and one of the best Italian films on the theme of terrorism. *Porte aperte* ('Open doors', 1990) dealt with the problems of justice in Sicily, but it was with *Il ladro di bambini* ('Child snatcher', 1992) that Amelio managed to adjust his refined and almost aristocratic idea of cinema to the needs of an emotional and painful story poised between sentiment and social concern and thereby to score a significant popular success.

At the end of 1992, at the instigation of the Turin International Youth Festival of Cinema, a survey of critics, journalists, and scholars was set up to identify 'five young directors for the year 2000'. Of the five winners to emerge, two—Bruno Bigoni and Silvio Soldini—live and work in Milan; a third, Daniel Segre, is based in Turin; and a

highly rated young theatre director Mario Sesti whose first film was *Morte di un matematico napoletano* ('Death of a Neapolitan mathematician', 1992), works in Naples. Only the Venetian Carlo Mazzacurati, who has directed three films, lives in Rome, the traditional home of the greater part of the film world. It may be that the rebirth of Italian cinema will come from precisely such a shift away from Rome and towards the decentralized variety with which it began.

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Spain After Franco

MARSHA KINDER

Just as the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9 has frequently been called a rehearsal for the Second World War, so Spain's surprisingly rapid transition from Francoism to democracy can be seen as prefiguring the sudden collapse of the Cold War paradigm which followed in 1945. Spanish cinema played an important role in figuring Spain's move to democracy, not only after Franco's death in 1975, but in the years preceding it. From the 1950s onwards a hermetically sealed Spain began to be opened to foreign influence and a new Spanish cinema emerged on the world scene.

LOOSENING THE BONDS OF DICTATORSHIP

According to historian Stanley Payne (1987-8), Spain underwent a three-stage process of defascistization, which began when Franco realized that Hitler and Mussolini would lose the Second World War; was accelerated at the height of the Cold War (1945-57) when Spain began moving toward the new European democracies whose resurgence was partially financed by the US Marshall Plan; and was formalized in the 1960s through a policy of *apertura* ('opening up') that was actively promoted by Franco's new Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga Iribarne. This drive toward liberalization contained a double irony. First, despite its overtures to foreign investors, the Francoist regime continued to impose a monolithic culture at home. This contradiction provided a focal point for film-makers who wanted to create a cinema of

opposition that could project a different image of Spain both at home and abroad. Yet equally ironically, these film-makers helped accomplish Franco's goals, especially when their films won prestigious awards at international festivals, demonstrating that a modernized Spain was now capable of generating (and tolerating) an articulate oppositional culture.

These contradictions were dramatized in *Bienvenido, Mr Marshall!* ('Welcome, Mr Marshall!', 1952), which was Spain's official entry at the Cannes Film Festival. This clever satire (co-written by Luis Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem) shows inhabitants of a small Castilian village competing with other Spaniards for their share of the Marshall Plan by dressing up as gypsies and matadors, complete with fake movie sets. This illusion evokes the *españolada*, a popular genre that promoted regional images of an exotic Andalusia as a cultural stereotype for all of Spain. The film exposes the dual address of every so-called 'national' cinema—a fictional unity imposed at home at the cost of cultural and regional difference in order to be successfully promoted abroad as a distinctive 'national' commodity. The villagers do have 'real' needs, the kind that were then being depicted in Italian neorealist films; yet they turn to Hollywood fantasies which get them only deeper in debt. In a series of humorous dreams, we see how they refigure their needs through foreign movie images they have internalized. The mayor dreams he is a sheriff in a saloon doing what cowboys

typically do in Hollywood Westerns, but when the saloon's star singer reverts back to the *españolada*, he is left clinging to the old stereotype. A peasant dreams of a tractor being dropped from heaven by a plane. Although both vehicles carry a USA label, the style in which they are represented clearly comes from Soviet Socialist Realism. The film demonstrates how foreign conventions can be reinscribed through hybridization to forge a new filmic language that is capable of challenging the monolithic Francoist culture.

The opposition's critique of Francoist cinema was formalized in May 1955 at a four-day national congress in the university town of Salamanca. Like the meetings in Oberhausen that led to the Young German Cinema of the 1960s, these 'Salamanca Conversaciones' generated a harsh diatribe against the current state of cinema: 'After 60 years of films, Spanish cinema is politically ineffective, socially false, intellectually worthless, aesthetically non-existent, and industrially crippled.' Although written by Bardem (a member of the Spanish Communist Party), this judgement was widely shared by participants at the congress of all political persuasions, including José María García Escudero, the government's former undersecretary for cinema. Escudero had been forced to resign in 1952 for having denied the 'national interest' category to *Alba de América* (1951), a big-budget historical drama personally backed by Franco, while granting it to Spain's first neo-realist film *Surcos* ('Furrows', 1951), which was directed by former Falangist José Nieves Conde.

At Salamanca film-makers from both the left and the right looked to Italian neo-realism as a model, setting it in opposition to Hollywood conventions and using this dialectic to structure many of the key films of the period. In 1971 this dialectic was evoked by Basilio Martín Patino (one of the organizers of the Salamanca congress) in his subversive compilation film on popular memory, *Canciones para después de una guerra* ('Songs for after a war'). Patino includes a resonant image from De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, one of the neo-realist films shown in Madrid in 1951 during an Italian film week that deeply influenced Bardem and Berlanga. It shows the working-class protagonist hanging a movie poster featuring Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, a glamorous image that distracts both him and the spectator away from the street where his bicycle is soon to be stolen. This image was emblematic of the choice facing Spanish film-makers in the 1950s: whether to emulate the neo-realist documentation of pressing socio-economic problems or to follow Hollywood's escape into spectacle, melodrama, and stardom.

Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista* ('Death of a cyclist', 1955), one of the first Spanish films to win a major prize at an international festival, uses this dialectic between Italian neo-realism and Hollywood melodrama to express a political discourse that was otherwise repressed from representation. The film adopts the language of the classical

Hollywood melodrama—its editing syntax, its strategies of binding the spectator to the text, its glossy surface, and its emphasis on glamorous close-ups to privilege the star. Yet it exaggerates these conventions to expose their ideological implications, especially their privileging of the bourgeoisie. Then it ruptures that style with neo-realist sequences whose deep-focus long shots reduce the size of the protagonist and reposition him within a broader context of class conflict.

The film opens with an off-screen collision between a car carrying an adulterous bourgeois couple and a bicycle ridden by a worker. It takes place on a desolate road that was formerly a battlefield in the Civil War, enabling both the present and past violence of this terrain to function as a structuring absence. Yet as soon as the film cuts to a close-up of the lovers in the car, the spectator is firmly positioned within the narrative vehicle of bourgeois melodrama and drawn into identification with the individualized killers rather than with their anonymous victim whose face and corpse we never see and who is left to die in the road. We see only the wheel of his broken bicycle spinning in the foreground, an image that evokes *Bicycle Thieves*.

This dialectic opposition between the two foreign aesthetics helped to forge the subtle, indirect language of the New Spanish Cinema, a term that García Escudero introduced in the 1960s when he was reappointed by Fraga as the new general director of cinema and when he would officially promote this art cinema abroad, claiming, 'a film is a flag. . . We must have that flag unfurled. . . If you can't beat Hollywood on its own ground [a commercial cinema], you can. . . on Europe's home ground: intelligence.' Yet to the film-makers of the opposition, the primary enemy was still the Francoist regime, which continued imposing censorship at home.

The film-maker who pushed hardest against the official censorship in the 1960s was Basque-born producer Elías Querejeta, who assembled a collaborative team which created a distinctive style of indirection that could subtly address political issues. His team included the brilliant cinematographer Luis Cuadrado, who was known for cultivating the 'blackness' of the great seventeenth-century Spanish masters like Murillo, Ribera, Zurbarán, and Velázquez; editor Pablo G. Del Amo, who developed an elliptical style that served a wide range of narrative functions; and composer Luis de Pablo, whose expressive, minimalist scores frequently suggested musically what could not be verbalized.

Querejeta's best-known works in the 1960s were directed by Carlos Saura, who soon became Spain's most respected international *auteur*. Adopting Buñuel as his model, Saura expanded the language of cinematic violence, which had been censored during the Francoist era along with politics, sex, and sacrilege. In *La caza* ('The



Drawing on traditional forms of Spanish culture, Carlos Saura's *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de Sangre*, 1981) follows the rehearsals of a dance version of the Lorca play

hunt', 1965), the ritualized violence of the hunt substitutes for the Civil War and its reciprocal savagery. Although the hunt is a common trope in many cultures for narrativizing violence allegorically, it had special meaning in Spain, where it was a favourite pastime for Franco and his cohorts. Everything in *La caza*—its claustrophobic narrative, its spare landscapes, its emotional rhythms in dialogue and *mise-en-scène*, its percussive music and montage, its oppressive silences and ellipses, its interplay between extreme close-ups and long shots, and its blatant specularization of the violent gaze—moves inexorably toward the final explosive shoot-out and heightens its intensity once it comes. This powerful orchestration of violence had a major impact on American director Sam Peckinpah, who reportedly told Saura that seeing *La caza* changed his life; and in films like *The Wild Bunch* and *Straw Dogs*, Spanish modes of representing violence were culturally reinscribed.

In *Peppermint frappé* (1967), a psychological thriller dedicated to Buñuel, Saura exposes the legacy of brutality that lay hidden beneath the surface beauty of the Fascist and neo-Catholic aesthetics. We see little violence on screen. Instead we see how objects are fetishized in the dual con-

texts of orthodox Catholicism and post-modern consumer capitalism with their clashing discourses of repression and liberation—a combination that drives both Spain and its repressed protagonist Julian to psychopathic excesses. Like the poisonous drink named in the title and the modern image of Spain then being promoted by Franco's technocrats, the surface of this lushly coloured melodrama is pleasurable to the gaze but its deep structure proves deadly.

The early 1970s were known as the *dictablanda*, those five or six years of soft dictatorship that immediately preceded Franco's death, a period when Spanish artists were making new inroads against government censorship and when the New Spanish Cinema enjoyed some of its biggest successes world-wide.

Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973) is structured around a child's reinscription of images she has seen in James Whale's 1931 version of *Frankenstein*. She uses them to deal with the painful experiences in her own Spanish context (a small rural village in Castile shortly after the end of the Civil War, especially her interactions with a republican fugitive who is captured and murdered by local authorities and with

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Lola Gaos as the devouring mother Martina finally rejected by her son in José Borau's *Poachers* (*Furtivos*, 1975)

her father who is suffering from a state of inner exile. The film implies that the children of Franco would turn out to be the children of Frankenstein—precocious yet emotionally stunted by historical traumas that could still not be directly represented on screen. The opening sequence details, with an almost ethnographic interest, the cultural specificity of the distribution and exhibition of a Hollywood import—revealing the evocative power of the foreign cinematic image for a culture that had been forced into hermetic isolation. In Erice's film it is the process of cultural reinscription that is emphasized more than the particular conventions being reinscribed—a process that relies heavily on elliptical editing, sound-image relations, and cultural and historical reverberations.

A different approach to reinscription was pursued by director-producer José Luis Borau in *Furtivos* ('Poachers', 1975), which he co-wrote with Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón. Opening in Madrid two months before the death of Franco, it was the first film to be exhibited in Spain without a licence from the censors, which helped it become one of the top-grossing Spanish films up to that time.

Furtivos exposes the harsh reality that lay beneath Franco's false description of Spain as 'a peaceful forest'. In depicting extreme acts of treachery, incest, and murder, the film dramatizes the chain of brutalization that passes

from authority to subject, hunter to prey, and parent to child. All the main characters are both emotionally stunted adults and victimized children, including the civil governor evoking Franco (who is played by Borau himself) and the infantilized protagonist Ángel who is trying to break an incestuous bond with his mother. Borau claims the germinal idea for the film was the actress Lola Gaos, who played Saturna in Buñuel's *Tristana*: 'Like Saturn devouring his son in the painting by Goya ... Saturna is devouring her son in a forest. That was the origin.'

Despite the deeply Spanish specificity of the film's sources and thematics, Borau adopts the stylistic conventions of the Hollywood action film—its transparency, linearity, pacing, and economical editing. This combination is especially effective in the powerful sequence where Ángel literally throws his mother out of her bed so that he can sleep with his new bride. There is a direct cut from the young lovers in bed to the displaced mother Martina, seated at a table drinking and crying and then restlessly pacing the room as if seeking some way to vent her rage. The sound-track combines the wind with the cries of a she-wolf chained outside. These cries express Martina's pain and also reveal the target on whom it will be displaced. When the film cuts to a long shot of Martina entering the cave-like site where the wolf is restlessly pacing, we know what is going to happen. Yet we are still shocked by the brutality of the beating and by the

matched close-ups of the dying beast and of Martina's face. This matching helps us foresee that the she-wolf functions as a surrogate not only for Ángel's bride (whom Martina will later murder) but also for Martina herself (who will share a similar fate at the hands of her son). From the extreme brutality of this wordless action sequence, the film cuts directly to a long shot of a beautiful pastel landscape, the false image of Franco's 'peaceful forest' whose deceptiveness has been exposed through purely cinematic means.

FREEDOM, CRISIS, AND TRANSGRESSION

In 1978 (only three years after Franco's death) Spain had a parliamentary democracy which restructured the nation into seventeen Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas*). This dramatic decentralization was more effectively refigured on television than in cinema, partly because of the immediacy and dailiness of the broadcast medium and partly because of changing economic con-

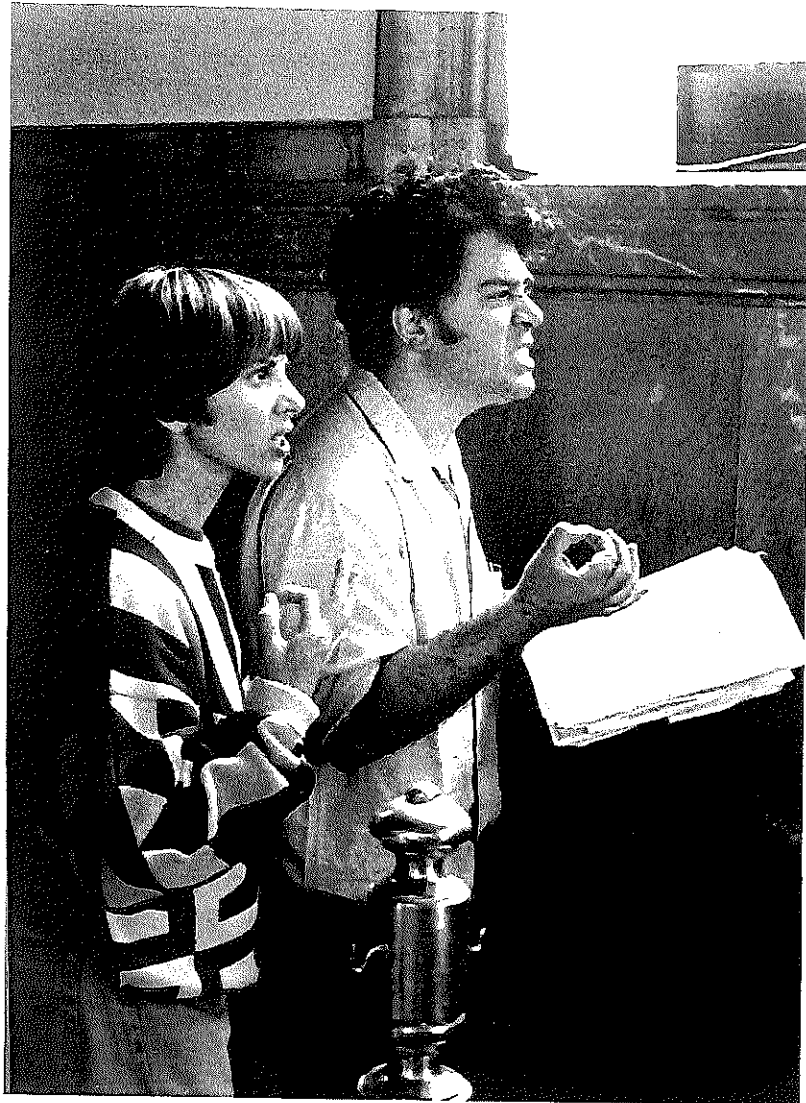
Pedro Almodóvar directs Victoria Abril in *High Heels* (*Tacones lejanos*, 1991), one of his parodic melodramas that helped make her an international star

ditions. At the same time that Spanish film production was sharply declining, there was an equally dramatic growth in Spanish television which occurred both at the microregional level (with seven new regional networks broadcasting in regional languages and being run by provincial governments) and at the macroregional level (with three new private networks at least partially controlled and financed by outside European interests). As multinational corporations strove to enter this market, advertising sales for Spanish television during the 1980s increased sevenfold, a faster rate of growth than for any other nation during that period. This increase contributed to a sharp decline in cinema-going (from 331 million spectators in 1970 to 101 million in 1985) as well as to an alarming decrease in the number of cinemas. To make matters worse, foreign films were gaining a greater share of the shrinking market. By 1985 Spanish films held only 17.5 per cent of the home market as opposed to 30 per cent in 1970, and by the end of the decade that figure was down to 10 per cent. Film-makers from all regions in Spain had to cope with this dire financial crisis, which now seemed more threatening to Catalan and Basque directors than Castilian domination, especially since expression of their regional language and culture was no longer legally banned. As Berlanga observed in 1983, 'Instead of the political and ideological censorship that we used to have we are now feeling the effects of what one might call economic censorship.'

In 1982 the incoming Socialist government under Felipe González appointed film-maker Pilar Miró general director of cinema, as if to signal the beginning of a new socialist era of total artistic freedom, and she immediately set out to solve the crisis. Despite the 1977 law ending censorship, in 1980 her controversial film *El crimen de Cuenca* had been confiscated by the police because of its negative depiction of the Guardia Civil. When the film was finally released in 1981, like *Furtivos* it broke Spanish box-office records. By 1983 she realized that few Spanish films could expect to survive in the home market, so she introduced a new law that protected Spanish films against foreign imports and substantially increased government subsidy. Yet Spanish film production continued to plummet (reaching a new all-time low of forty-seven films in 1989); the only increases were in production costs and government expenditures. Miró's critics attacked her for encouraging 'self-indulgent' artists to ignore the realities of the market-place and the changing tastes of Spanish audiences.

It was time for a change, and this was provided by Pedro Almodóvar, who claimed:

My films represent ... the new mentality that appears in Spain after Franco dies—especially after 1977. ... Everybody has heard that now everything is different in Spain ... but it is not so easy



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to find this change in the Spanish cinema. . . . In my films they see how Spain has changed . . . because now it is possible to do . . . a film like *Law of Desire*.

When *Law of Desire* (*La ley del deseo*, 1986) received critical raves at the 1987 Berlin festival and did well commercially in foreign markets, the Socialist government used it to promote Spain's culture industry—a strategy that was similar to Franco's earlier use of oppositional figures like Saura and Querejeta. Despite the film's homo-erotic sex scenes and its backstory of homosexual incest, *Fotogramas y video* (Spain's oldest and largest circulation film journal) heralded it as a model for Spain's cinema of the future, one that could arouse interest abroad 'not only at the level of . . . cultural curiosity but as an exportable and commercially valid product'. Yet Almodóvar's success was based on risk-taking. By watching his erotic cinematic hybrids, spectators risk having their own future refigured and their sexuality destabilized and reinscribed, which is precisely what happens to the Antonio Banderas character after watching the inset homo-erotic porn at the opening of *Law of Desire*. Almodóvar soon succeeded in establishing an outrageous protean sexuality (in place of the *pañolada*) as the new cultural stereotype for a super-liberated post-Franco Spain. Thus he subverted the centre by redefining it as the marginal, and ironically this inversion helped to demarginalize Spanish cinema in the world market. In fact, in 1991 *Variety* reported that six of Spain's all-time top thirteen exports to the USA were directed by Almodóvar.

This global success was to become even more crucial in the 1990s as Spain moved toward convergence with other members of the European Community. In contrast to 1983, when González was eager to demonstrate Spain's ideological transformation and therefore supported the Miró decree, in 1992 he was more interested in demonstrating fiscal responsibility to his European peers so that Spain could meet the economic criteria established at Maastricht in December 1991. Given the increasing pressure to stop subsidizing industries that were losing money, the crucial question was whether the film and television industries should be exempt since they manufacture unique cultural products that construct images of national identity for world consumption.

In June 1992 Spanish film-makers held a three-day conference in Madrid called Audiovisual Español 93. Participants urged the government to pass a new law to protect Spanish cinema from Hollywood domination and from the 'Euro-pudding' co-productions of the EC that threatened to erase the cultural specificity of Spain and its autonomous regions. Like the Salamanca congress, it ended with a dire pronouncement, this time by conference president Román Gubern, who warned that, without government protection, 'in 1995, instead of celebrating the centennial of Spanish cinema, we will cel-

brate its funeral'. The exclusion of film and television from the 1993 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) made such protection possible by acknowledging the unique status of these industries.

Despite Gubern's dire prophecy, in the early 1990s Spain has already had three major triumphs in the North American market that were not directed by Almodóvar, even though he helped pave the way for their success: Vicente Aranda's *Amantes* ('Lovers', 1990), Bigas Luna's *Jamón Jamón* ('Ham, ham', 1991), and Fernando Trueba's *Belle Époque* (1992). All three were directed by film-makers who are highly regarded in Spain but hardly known abroad. All three attempt to associate the post-Franco stereotype of a super-liberated Spain with the oppositional culture of an earlier era. All three mine the subversive potential of melodramatic excess, a tradition that can be traced back to Buñuel's surrealist classic *Un chien andalou* in the 1920s and was mainstreamed by Almodóvar in the 1980s. While remaining within a predominantly heterosexual discourse, all three are driven by female desire.

Amantes exposes the subversive power of female sexuality that lies at the core of film noir, a post-Second World War genre with a strong international heritage. Based on an actual murder which took place in Spain during the repressive 1950s, *Amantes* demonstrates that *cine negro español* can make an important contribution to the genre. As played by Victoria Abril (who, despite her long collaboration with Aranda, first became an international star in Almodóvar's *Tie Me up! Tie Me down!* (*Átame!*, 1989)), Luisa is a *femme fatale* who not only seduces the young hero and actively pursues her own desire but who also controls every aspect of their love-making. The extraordinary explicitness of the sex scenes helps reveal why the fear of female sexuality is the structuring absence of the genre.

Jamón Jamón seems to question whether the effects of Spain's historic shift to democracy and post-modern consumerism is really as liberating as advertised. The substitution of erotic images for the Andalusian stereotype is overseen by a businessman played by Juan Diego, the actor who first represented Franco on screen in a fictional film (Jaime Camino's *Dragón Rapido*, 1986). In the opening shot we see a desolate Spanish plain through the silhouette of one of those gigantic black bulls advertising Osborn brandy, a composition dominated by the beast's huge testicles which are cracked and creaking. This traditional sign of Spanish machismo is later rivalled by an equally giant post-Franco billboard with a crotch shot of Samson-brand briefs, which Manuel's family firm has manufactured for three generations. Yet this parodic fast-paced melodrama and its hyperplotted narrative are driven by female desire, a gender reversal that is introduced in the comical scene where Manuel's wife literally selects the *cojones* for the jockey-shorts billboard from a line-up of desirable young studs. In a culturally over-determined

Manoel de Oliveira

(1908-)

Manoel Candido Pinto de Oliveira was born in Oporto, the second city in Portugal, to a well-off bourgeois family. The eldest son, he was educated by the Jesuits who, chased from Portugal by the republican, anti-clerical revolution, had opened a school at La Guardia across the border in Spain.

As a youth Oliveira excelled at sports, was a fanatic for 'flying machines', and was a motor racing champion in Portugal and abroad. The cinema fascinated him as a sign of a new age; André Deed, the Italian divas, Max Linder, American serials, and Chaplin all captivated him. He was inspired to make films himself after seeing Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927). He took drama lessons from the Italian Rino Lupo, acted in one of his films, *Fatima Miraculosa* (1927), and posed, back naked, for cinema magazines. His career thus developed along a very different path from the other Portuguese film-makers of his generation who caused the first 'revolution' in Portuguese cinema (in the late 1920s and early 1930s), and who came from theatre and journalism.

Despite this erratic start, Oliveira stunned European critics in 1931 with his first film, the city symphony *Douro, faina fluvial* ('Douro, work on the river'), a remarkable exercise in montage, similar to avant-garde works of the period of which he was unaware. He acted in *A canção de Lisboa* ('Lisbon song', Cottinelli Telmo, 1933), the first sound film completely shot in Portugal, and during the 1930s he continued to write scripts, but without backing only made commissioned works (now all lost). Mean-

while Oliveira developed links with Portuguese intellectuals who had liked *Douro*, and when he finally came to make his first full-length film, *Aniki Bóbo* (1942), it expressed a metaphysical and aesthetic concern strikingly different from the populist and conventional Portuguese cinema of the time. After the war, *Aniki Bóbo* was shown in Europe and critics were surprised by its similarities to Italian neo-realism (particularly in its use of natural settings and untrained child actors).

Oliveira's ambitions seemed to end there, and he considered abandoning the cinema for good to take over his father's textile factories. But artistic worries gnawed at him constantly and he returned to the cinema in 1956 with the short film *O pintor e a cidade* ('The painter and the city'). By now, however, it was no longer editing that interested Oliveira but the links between cinema and theatre, and the ability of film to present 'all of the real'. He started to use long takes, and give careful attention to theatrical texts and actors' words. *Acto da primavera* ('Act of spring', 1960) and *A Caça* ('The hunt'), released in 1958, anticipate what Pasolini later defined as 'cinema-poetry'. If his documentaries of the late 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s were fictions, they were fictions which became documentaries.

However, it was only when Oliveira was in his sixties that he began an unbroken film career, with his 'trilogy of unrequited love' between 1971 and 1981. 'The cinema,' he claimed, 'does not exist. Theatre exists. Cinema is a way of capturing it.' He adapted Claudel's *Le Soulier de satin* in a seven-hour film that won the Golden Lion at the Venice film Festival in 1985. He questioned the role of the creative artist and of cinema in *Mon Cas* (1986). In *A divina comédia* ('The Divine Comedy', 1991) he attacked the cen-



nal mysteries of the human condition. In *Não, ou a vã glória de mandar* ('No, or the commander's vainglory', 1990) he gave his own view of the history of Portugal. He reinterpreted bovaryism in *Val Abraham* (1992), and he analysed human microcosms in *A caixa* ('The box', 1994).

Oliveira has become the public image of Portuguese cinema, showered with honours in Europe, Japan, and America. But in Portugal he is a lonely figure, spurned by a public which finds his films too difficult. Indifferent to popular acclaim, he defends the aristocracy of the art of cinema in the age of the 'audio-visual'.

The amazing paradox of his career, which started with silent films and culminated after his eightieth birthday, comes from the way he re-thought cinema. He has never strayed from the experimental side which was already obvious in *Douro*, but his pursuits have outstripped formal research, to become questions about the very nature of cinematic art or about art itself. Sometimes he makes films with ten-minute takes (*Le Soulier de satin*) and sometimes he cuts by the millimetre (*The Divine Comedy*). There are sweeping shots such as only appear in the classics (the opening of *Não*, the end of *Val Abraham*), then he inserts the most minimal, the most stripped of experiences (*Um dia de desespero* ('Day of despair', 1992), *A caixa*). Some works echo great themes (History, Love, Death), in others the scenario is reduced to a few essential lines. Sometimes he appears a profound metaphysician, at others he appears to mock totalizing visions.

A film-maker of profound intellect, he is both the last of the great early film-makers (he can be compared to Dreyer and Ford) and one of the paradigmatic representatives of modern cinema. For him, the world which represents itself is the world which presents itself, a world haunted by the dream of an initial and ultimate unity. And, if he has built an unmistakable style (an Oliveira film is recognizable in every shot), he has not become fixed in one theory or theme. Each film seems to question everything we thought we knew about him.

JOÃO BÉNARD DA COSTA

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Opposite: A scene from Oliveira's first feature, the internationally acclaimed *Aniki Bóbo* (1942), shot in the ruins of Oporto.

choice, she picks those that belong to a young would-be bullfighter named González who delivers salamis for the Hernán Cortés 'Los Conquistadores' meat company. Like the billboards, this film's sexy images are clearly addressed to the erotic tastes of both genders. Bigas Luna's films are as excessive as Almodóvar's, yet they are usually populated not by emancipated lovers but (as in Saura's *Peppermint frappé*) by emotionally stunted characters whose sexuality turns pathological in a consumerist context. His films suggest that the post-Franco images of a super-liberated Spain may be as bogus as the Francoist *españoladas*.

In contrast, Fernando Trueba's *Belle Époque* shows that this so-called 'new liberated mentality' has historic roots in Spain's pre-Civil War era, a period he recovers as a utopian fantasy for the same global audience that made Almodóvar a star. The film is bracketed by two suicides that are committed by figures whose culturally specific meanings will probably be understood only by Spanish spectators (a Guardia Civil with anarchistic tendencies and a Catholic priest devoted to the philosophy of Unamuno), yet the transgressive comedy at its centre helped it beat China's *Farewell my Concubine* for best foreign film at the 1994 Academy Awards. However, the film is not so transgressive as it appears, for in its most carnivalesque scene (where the beautiful lesbian sister in military drag seduces the hero who is convincingly dressed as a maid), cross-dressing is repositioned within heterosexual bounds. When Trueba accepted his Oscar, his humorous speech reaffirmed this radical posture. After apologizing for being an atheist who was incapable of thanking God, he thanked Billy Wilder instead, the very film-maker whom Almodóvar always acknowledges as his most important influence. Like Almodóvar, Wilder is another European who made good in Hollywood both in gender-bending comedies like *Some Like It Hot* and in classic reflexive noirs like *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard*. This is precisely the terrain now being explored by a super-liberated Spanish cinema which is ardently pursuing that obscure object of global desire.

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