

(In Parentheses): A Conversation with Filmmaker Nely Reguera.

*In recent years, Catalanian independent cinema, mostly linked to a professional cohort from the ESCAC film school (Escola Superior de Cinema i Audiovisuals de Catalunya), has bustled with activity. Standing out from this new group of talented filmmakers is Nely Reguera, Best Debut Direction Goya nominee (30th edition, 2016) for *María* (and *Everybody Else*). One of the virtues of this first work resides in the restraint and honesty with which it portrays the frustrations of a whole generation that reflects impotently on the failure of its life's goals. Similar to how Reguera's protagonists fight to find their place in the world, one could say that she is also working towards her own self-realization. Despite this or perhaps precisely for this reason, we think that it is worthwhile discovering her work since, as this interview will show, she is a director with a singular gaze and many more stories to tell. Reguera's work, as another talented director of her generation notes, is a rigorous cinema that comes from the heart and will give us "a lot to talk about" (G. Arribas).¹*

*The following interview, which took place in person and via Skype on September 1, 2017 was edited with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication. We invite Gynocine's readers to participate in this conversation regarding Reguera and her cinema, on the basis of a suggestive motif from the title of *María* (and *Everybody Else*): parentheses. Reguera, and her peers from ESCAC, are opening a parenthesis, so to speak, within the audiovisual industry. Reguera's stories distinguish themselves by delving into the silences, the absences, the hidden, the excluded, etc. It is a cinema that emanates from daily life and lavishes its gaze upon misfits with no other life goal than living.*

Nely Reguera (Barcelona, 1978-)



¹ Translations ours.

Nely Reguera studied at the Escola Superior de Cinema i Audiovisuals de Catalunya (ESCAC), from where she graduated with a specialization in direction. As a final project, she wrote and directed the short Ausencias (2001) and, later, she worked on a number of video clips, shorts, and commercials. Before her first feature length film, Reguera made the documentary Muxía, a ferida (2005), about the consequences of the catastrophic oil spill by the tanker Prestige in 2002, and she worked as first assistant director on the films Three Days with the Family (Mar Coll 2009) and Blog (Elena Trapé 2010). Her short Pablo (2009), which corresponds to this period of her early work, earned Reguera acclaim at the Alcine, Gijón, Huesca, Mecal festivals and the Versión Española-SGAE competition. In late 2016, María (and Everybody Else) was released and then nominated for two Goya awards for Best Actress (Bárbara Lennie) and Best Debut Direction. Additionally, Reguera has combined her work as a filmmaker with teaching. Since 2010, she has taught at the ESCAC and began to participate with A Bao A Qu in the Cine en curso project, a collaboration she enjoys and plans to continue.

Nely (and Her World)



Frida Films (*María (and Everybody Else)*, 2016)

MARÍA GARCÍA PUENTE and ERIN HOGAN: In *María (and Everybody Else)*, the protagonist, María Funes, writes a novel, *Días de invierno*, that, as she explains it, is inspired by her own family. Similarly, the presence of mirrors, an element that connects directly with the theme of identity, caught our attention. Would it be mistaken to assert that your film lends itself to an autobiographical reading? In what sense is *María (and Everybody Else)* the reflection of Nely Reguera and her world?

NELY REGUERA: It wouldn't be mistaken but I would consider the film a self portrait rather than an autobiography. There are hardly autobiographical elements and instead many aspects of the story are fictional and modified. Fortunately, my father has not suffered from cancer, my mother is alive, there is no Cachita (Marina Skell) in my life, and my siblings are good people. Therefore, *María (and Everybody Else)* and I share the emotion and the feelings of a character

that is certainly related to me and my environment. In the film I wanted to talk about the sensation of being out of sync that we feel when the world is moving at a different speed from our own and we're far from reaching our goals, whether they be for professional success, or a relationship, or children, or certain obligations. I really wanted to delve into this topic and, in particular, into the pressure that the protagonist puts on herself, that for me is the worst, the most difficult pressure. There's no doubt that social expectations play an important role, but sometimes it seems like the social pressure weighs more upon oneself than one's desire to meet its demands. I wanted to explore this idea within family relationships, where sometimes the desire to care for someone else takes precedence over self care. We all know people who feel more comfortable taking care of others than of themselves. This aspect of the film also connects to my own reality, not directly with me, but rather with my family.

MGP and EKH: Many times you've said that you see cinema as a powerful tool for expression and self-awareness. Who is the director behind *María (and Everybody Else)* and what has she learned about herself making cinema?

NR: What I mean by this is that when one works on topics that are personal or of interest to oneself, the mere fact of making cinema pushes you to reflect on these topics and you learn in the process. In the case of *María (and Everybody Else)* I realized that we have certain ways of reacting of which we are not always conscious. One aspect of María's (Bárbara Lennie) character that I really like, even though I think it's harmful to her, are her self-destructive actions. Many of the decisions that María makes are inappropriate. For example, despite her insistence, it's painfully clear that her relationship with Dani (Julián Villagrán) does not have a future. Nevertheless, instead of recognizing this, she takes the situation to an extreme. It's as if María needs to crash and burn in order to start over and carry on, and I discovered this about myself as well.

With regards to my filmmaking, I am interested in cinema that has to do with people, with human beings and with our relationships with each other: how we relate to others and to ourselves; definitively, how we relate to life. In my case, I have been lucky to live in a country in which I do not have to face big problems. Therefore, I can dedicate myself to reflecting on this. In my cinema, I aspire to work in the space of daily life, I am very interested in verisimilitude in cinema. I am inspired by films that reflect daily life, but do not fall into the trap of caricature and instead permit us to empathize with the characters and feel like they relate to ourselves and our lives. Therefore, I like to talk about small things: get togethers with friends, family meals, everything that forms a part of our day-to-day and what's not often given a lot of importance and that, nevertheless, has a lot to say about our ways of understanding life and ourselves.

MGP and EKH: Like Mar Coll or Elena Trapé you are part of a new batch of women filmmakers educated at the ESCAC, where you are currently a professor. What role has the ESCAC played in your professional development?

NR: I began at the ESCAC and I consider it my home. For me, the ESCAC has been very important because at this school I've met many people with whom I later have worked either directly or indirectly. To make *María (and Everybody Else)*, which was filmed and produced in Galicia, I surrounded myself with a marvelous group mostly made up of professionals from the ESCAC. Nevertheless, it was always clear to me that the technical crew of the film would be

classmates from the ESCAC like the director of photography (Aitor Echevarría), the editor (Aina Calleja) and one of the screenwriters (Eduard Solà). Moreover, when we finished a first edit of the film, I came to Barcelona and I asked a few friends to give me their opinion; between 70% and 80% of them were from the ESCAC.

I think that it is necessary to point out that the ESCAC produces different styles. It may be true that it began as a school that promoted a certain kind of cinema, like that of J.A. Bayona, but little by little it is proving that it encapsulates a spectrum of styles. Bayona, but also other directors like Mar Coll, Javier Ruiz, Elena Trapé, Marçal Forés, Liliana Torres, or myself have each come from there with their own style and specializations.

The short *Pablo*, to name one example, was possible thanks to the producer of the ESCAC, that would later produce the teaser for *María (and Everybody Else)* and become the producer that made the film possible.² In other words, the ESCAC has played a fundamental role in my career and the career of many classmates because, in addition to being a university, it also finances shorts and feature films by students, and this is precisely the first and most difficult step in one's film career. Fortunately, this model is being replicated by other universities, like the Pompeu Fabra, whose students' final projects are practically feature length films. Initiatives like this one constitute amazing support for those who are beginning in this field or want to get a foot in the door in the audiovisual industry.

Finally, I owe the ESCAC for having given me an opportunity to return to school, 10-12 years after graduating, to teach, which I've enjoyed immensely.

MGP and EKH: What classes do you teach at the ESCAC and what is your teaching philosophy?

NR: My classes are in application. In the second year, I usually supervise the practicum in narrative, for which students film four simple five minute shorts (with only exterior conflicts). I don't think it really shows my teaching philosophy because it is a very specific course whose objective is for the students to learn a series of basic concepts (point of view, characters, etc.). That is, students are not expected to find their own voice but rather to learn that sometimes, depending on the story, an open or a closed shot might be better. Obviously, I always insist with my students that this profession is not like math and that there are many ways to make movies, but it is first necessary that they know what classical narrative is so that they can then define their own gaze. When I teach a course in the fourth year or the master's, nevertheless, my lesson is different; I encourage them to dig deep within themselves and to understand that it is necessary in cinema for them to know their subject well in order to tell stories with honesty.

² **The ESCAC's primary producers were Escándalo Films, until 2012, followed by ESCAC FILM.**

Nely (and Her Cinema)



Frida Films (*María (and Everybody Else)*, 2016)

MGP and EKH: Recently, a lot of notice has been made of the new Catalan independent filmmaking, linked to the ESCAC.³ However, your first feature length film was produced by Frida Films, a Galician producer, and your shorts were filmed in Spanish. Where do you categorize your cinema in the peninsular cinematic landscape?

NR: I have no idea. What's more, I admit that labels bother me. I understand why an experimental, self-produced cinema like the *Novo Cinema Galego* from Galicia would use a label to identify itself. However, not all films corresponding to this framework are experimental. I wouldn't be able to tell you if there is a new independent Catalan cinema either. I think that we are fortunate to be in a moment in which, despite the economic crisis, really interesting works are being made both here and in the rest of Spain. I'll focus on this fact and let everyone else call it what they want.

With regards to where to inscribe my cinema, I honestly don't know. In certain aspects, I see myself in the cinema of Mar Coll, but in others, I see myself in Jonás Trueba's. I prefer to think that there is a kind of cinema, not only a Catalan or Spanish but rather international, from which we all drink and which is interrelated. I filmed *María (and Everybody Else)* in Galicia for emotional reasons. I have family from Galicia and I felt that the story was better told in Galicia. Moreover, I did not want under any circumstances to dub the film. I would never be able to film in Catalonia only in Spanish because it wouldn't make sense. That is not my reality; my reality is bilingual. That is why, if I had made the film in Catalonia, it would have had to have been dubbed for the rest of the country and I can't stand dubbing.

³ For Gregorio Belinchón, the current vibrancy of Catalan independent cinema is attributable to a "new and captivating" wave of women filmmakers, including Mar Coll, Elena Trapé, Neus Ballús, Carla Subirana, Leticia Dolera (and everybody else).

MGP and EKH: Tell us about your leap from the short to the full-length film. What were the challenges and what did you learn?

NR: For me the hardest part was working on the script and the production of the film. Crossing over from a short to a feature length film is truly an odyssey, and even more so in the case of *María (and Everybody Else)* since it doesn't have an external conflict. Screenwriting was a collaborative process in which three of us were involved:⁴ Eduardo Solà, Valentina Viso and myself.⁵ After a lot of searching and discussing a variety of options, the three of us assumed that the story would be constructed on the basis of the protagonist's internal conflict and her many instances of emotional ambivalence. Once we finished the script, the search for financing was very complex and difficult. It's not possible to rush this phase and it was necessary to be patient and to trust that we would eventually get financed. In our case, it was a long process because we had the misfortune of dealing with the economic crisis, which reduced financial support for cinema and fewer films were being made.

Another part of this learning curve, and where I've grown the most, is in production. All of my shorts had been produced by myself and with my friends and, all of a sudden with *María (and Everybody Else)* I had to learn to work with producers. For me, learning to manage this relationship with producers, by knowing how and when to negotiate, in a constructive and positive way was more difficult than directing. I really enjoyed filming, partly because we had worked for so long on the script and I had a clear idea of it. What's more, I felt supported during the whole process since I surrounded myself with an extraordinary team and this is crucial for success.

MGP and EKH: Your first works as a director, the shorts *Ausencias*, *Noises* (2008), and *Pablo*, and your full length film *María (and Everybody Else)* are based on very solid scripts that are plagued, so to speak, with silences. That is, there is a lot that is unexplained or not made explicit in these stories but rather suggested and possible to read between the lines. What attracts you to these silences?

NR: For me, silence says a lot more than words. I think in my films so much is explained through what's not said, not told. Something that I elaborate in *María (and Everybody Else)* and, more tangentially in *Pablo*, is the theme of indirect communication. In María's family, they spend all day talking but they never express their emotions and desires clearly. That is, they do not speak openly and honestly but rather on a diagonal, hoping that their interlocutor interprets what they really want to say. I think this way of interacting is common and it might be motivated by a lack of sincerity or by insecurities and fears that we have. This topic really interests me and that's why I explored it in the film.

⁴ According to Reguera, five screenwriters appear in the film's credits because the writing process was very long and the script ended up taking inspiration from a story she and Roger Sogues had written. That first screenplay was led by another character, Jorge (Pablo Derqui), and focused more on an inheritance conflict.

⁵ In addition to *María (y los demás)*, Valentina Viso has collaborated as a screenwriter on the feature films *Tres días con la familia* and *Todos quieren lo mejor para ella* (2013) by Mar Coll, and *Blog* by Elena Trapé.

On the other hand, I'm not very interested in overly explicit cinema that affirms grand theses about how things are. In the arena of human relationships, nothing is crystal clear nor totally predictable; therefore it's more realistic to work in nuance and suggestion that give the spectator a more active role. I think it's always very important to include the spectator in the film, giving him or her the space to connect with the aspects of the story that relate to him or her.

MGP and EKH: With regards to what you've just said, we think it's really interesting how you explore the theme of human miscommunication in your works. In *Noises*, for example, you give the spectator access to the unintelligible mental world of the protagonist through film sound. How did you devise sound in *Noises*?

NR: The protagonist of *Noises* suffers from schizophrenia.⁶ In our research, we spoke with many people with schizophrenia and asked them to explain the moment in which they start to hear voices. We wanted to portray this sensation in the short and, to this end, we mixed a variety of conversations in the sound track. I wrote a series of texts, sort of strange texts, that shared an obsessive idea and I asked friends to record them. Then, the sound engineer mixed and equalized them so that they would be perceived with that echo effect that we had imagined from our interviewees' descriptions. It really turned out beautifully. I was really interested in transmitting the chaotic sense of torment that people with this mental illness feel when they are constantly receiving inputs they cannot tune out.

MGP and EKH: Your films deal with dysfunctional characters who do not fit in and are incapable of being happy due to a psychological defect or weakness: insanity, anxiety, self-alienation, insecurity, etc. All things considered, your approach to these topics is essentially tragicomic. What do you think dramedy contributes to the treatment of human flaws?

NR: For me, humor is indispensable. *María (and Everybody Else)* is a little different from *Pablo* since, if indeed the protagonist suffers from some insecurities and fears, it is not possible to say that she is mentally ill. Pablo (Pablo Derqui), by contrast, is schizophrenic and therefore his story is more dramatic. It is true that I had the intention of adding humor to the short but the circumstances were quite complex.

In the case of *María (and Everybody Else)*, we laugh at and with María because in the end her life is not as terrible as she thinks it is. In fact, I have the impression that María is her worst enemy in the film. If you stop to think about it, her character has some great things in her life and a big part of her problem resides in her distorted perception of reality. Instead of focusing on what she has and has achieved in her life, María is obsessed with everything she doesn't have. If we had approached the character's internal conflict from a dramatic perspective, the film would have seemed exaggerated because María's situation is not that dramatic (she's not dying, her father isn't paralytic, her mother doesn't have Alzheimer's). Ultimately, we wanted to invite spectators who laugh at her also to laugh at themselves since I consider laughter to be the way to overcome our insecurities, to learn to keep things in perspective, and not to take things so seriously. I am convinced that if María, and by extension, everybody else were to laugh at ourselves a little more often, we would be happier; this is my attitude towards life.

⁶ This character is played by Pablo Derqui, a repeat collaborator of Reguera's from *Pablo and María (y los demás)*.

MGP and EKH: In an article from the Spanish newspaper *ABC* by Laura Ferrero, the author affirms that *María (and Everybody Else)* is the portrait of a lost generation, the Challenger generation, that saw “their dreams go up in flames on live TV”.⁷ Do you agree with this reading of your film?

NR: To say that I am defining the experience of an entire generation in *María (and Everybody Else)* makes me uncomfortable and it even seems a bit hyperbolic to me for the simple reason that I never had it in mind as an objective. Nevertheless, I share this understanding to a certain extent. I belong to a generation, born in a democratic Spain, that grew up with everything. Many of us have lived well, we have been able to study what we wanted and we have taken for granted that we were going to be able to achieve everything we set our minds to. However, these expectations have not been fulfilled and it is at this moment when disappointment sets in. Moreover, we’re living a time when success isn’t only defined by having a job and a romantic relationship but also speaking twenty languages, doing yoga, swing dancing, etc. This is nonsense. By contrast to our parents, who as a generation grew up better able to cope with their frustrations, we are incapable of dealing with these emotions. In this sense, we are much more childlike and immature than they are. We don’t handle frustration well.

MGP and EKH: Exactly, in the film there are many elements that we could interpret as symbols of the protagonist’s frustrated aspirations: the murky pool water she doesn’t clean, the half-dead plant in her garden she doesn’t rehabilitate, etc. In a certain sense, it’s as if the atonality of María’s flute playing were a metaphor for other facets of her life that are out of sync or off key. How do you get your spectators to identify with and recognize themselves in your protagonist and her failures?

NR: One of the virtues of *María (and Everybody Else)* is that its protagonist awakens a tenderness in her spectators, and that was entirely due to Bárbara Lennie’s merit. She is a character who spends over half of the film angry with life, which would make her hard to connect to. For this reason, it was important for the spectator to be able to understand that her behavior was not simply a whimsy but rather motivated by an internal pain; that is, that María was not bitter but rather someone who wanted to be happy. Therefore, I see her daydreaming, the publication of her book or singing in the car convinced that she and Dani are falling in love, as fundamental for the construction of her character. That hopeful woman is also María, she isn’t only the overprotective daughter who disapproves of Cachita. Bárbara Lennie successfully transmits that sweetness and tenderness (it is also easy to fall in love with her).

On the other hand, I think the film appeals to a wide range of spectators because the protagonist is struggling in many areas of her life: in her writing, with her best friends (who are rather insincere), with her lover, with her family, etc. Some spectators identify with María’s family dynamic, while others recognize themselves in María’s unsatisfactory love life or insecurities. I always say that honest storytelling that highlights the, even absurd, defects of characters allows spectators to identify more closely because we all have defects. I wanted to showcase a human being like María with nuances (she is generous and affectionate but also

⁷ Translation ours. According to Ferrero, “Challenger generation” was coined by the writer Llúcia Ramis in her novel *Todo lo que una tarde murió con las bicicletas* (2013).

jealous, frustrated and ill-tempered). Moreover, I was interested in vindicating the imperfection of a female lead. It seems to me that female characters in film are very limited (to so-and-so's girlfriend or mother, etc.). I wanted to detach myself from these stereotypical profiles and to portray this woman in all her complexity.

Nely (and Women)



Frida Films (*María (and Everybody Else)*, 2016)

MGP and EKH: In both *Pablo* and *María (and Everybody Else)*, you explore father-daughter dynamics from the perspective of Marías who function as pillars of their families. Recently, *María (and Everybody Else)* was even included in a film series organized by the SGAE (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores) and dedicated to the pejorative popular representation of the house wife (*maruja*).⁸ Do you think that María is this kind of pejorative incarnation of the Spanish housewife (“Maruja” from “María”)?

NL: I think it all depends on how we understand “maruja.” I had the opportunity of talking about this with the writer who organized the series, Laura Freixas, and she confessed that even though she knew that María did not correspond to the “maruja” prototype (that may actually relate to another generation), she decided to include the film because it was the only contemporary feature length film that she’d found with a housewife in the leading role. Nevertheless, to tell you the truth, I never considered María to be a *maruja*. In fact, I think one could argue that the protagonist resists that categorization. María’s house work is incidental and she does it as part of her daughterly duty. She stays at her father’s house due to her father’s (José Ángel Egido) illness and need. On the other hand, if we stop and think about it, it’s convenient for María to play the

⁸ An eclectic list of titles accompanied Reguera’s film in this series, including: *Margarita y el lobo* (1969) by Cecilia Bartolomé, *¿What Have I Done to Deserve This!* (1984) by Pedro Almodóvar and *La mujer sin piano* (2001) by Javier Rebollo. The full list of films and the series’ introduction can be found on SGAE’s webpage (www.sgae.es).

victim and to assume the role of caretaker because it allows her to avoid facing her life. In this self-imposed duty she finds a perfect excuse to postpone her dream, which is finishing her novel.

The only characteristic that the protagonist shares with the prototype is her controlling quality. María needs to dictate all aspects of her father's life and this control extends to her brothers. All the men in the family are a disaster but this is due, in part, to the fact that she doesn't let them help: she barely allows them in the kitchen!

MGP and EKH: The film indirectly touches upon a dilemma that many women face related to motherhood and creative work. Why did you elaborate on this dilemma in the film and when was it relevant for you to include it?

NR: It was essential for me that María wanted to write because it was the only thing that exclusively had to do with her personal fulfilment. This is her dream and I felt like relating it to creativity. Moreover, it was necessary that the film's resolution had to do with this creative facet of María so that it would be hopeful. It wouldn't have made any sense to include a cookie-cutter happy ending in which everything worked out because it wouldn't have been realistic, but we did want María to realize that in order to improve her life she needed to begin with herself and her goals, but not in a selfish way.

With respect to motherhood, I suppose that given my age and gender, it is on my mind, and therefore it appears, somewhat tangentially, in *María (and Everybody Else)*. It would be strange or even absurd to make a film about thirty somethings without mention of parenthood. In this sense, there is a scene I really like in which María and her friends are at an art gallery and one of her friends announces she is going to be a mother. At this moment neither the protagonist nor Sofía (María Vázquez) are capable of being happy for the expectant mother since one of them is worried about Dani's reaction to a message she's sent and the other is envious. I think this situation is entirely believable because a social and biological pressure exists surrounding this topic that is impossible to avoid. We would also have to add that women today feel pressure on two accounts. More and more women juggle their professional and family lives; they want to do it all: advance in their careers and dedicate themselves entirely to their children. These expectations seem totally impossible and even unfair since this pressure falls much more on women than men. Therefore, even though the film is not primarily about this, I was still interested in including it.

MGP and EKH: The beach sequence really caught our attention since it seems to function as a thesis sequence for the film. We mentioned the symbolism of the stagnant pool water, which María doesn't face. In the beach sequence, however, María is faced with the saltwater of the sea and is obligated to dive in. Would you tell us what the key elements of this scene are for you?

NR: I began writing the script during a summer I spent in Galicia and maybe for this reason it was clear to me it had to be filmed there. I remember I went to the Galicia's Atlantic beaches frequently during those months and in the very first draft of the script, although slightly different, the beach scene appeared.

This scene is very interesting because a lot goes on in it. María is one of those people who doesn't speak when she should, she clams up, but then she finally explodes. During the beach sequence she loses it and finally confronts her brother Jorge (Pablo Derqui), unleashing a

small family crisis. I liked the idea that María would extract herself from this conflict by taking refuge in the sea and that this would be when Cachita would be in danger and María would have a moment of doubt as to how to respond. For an instant, María doesn't know if she should let her father's fiancée drown so that all of her problems would be solved or if she must jump in to rescue her.⁹ Of course, I don't think she would have been capable of letting Cachita drown, but I really liked exploring how during a moment of crisis the craziest ideas can go through our heads. Something I like about this scene is that despite how dire the situation is, it is also very funny, and it functions as a climactic moment of the film in which María and her father finally converse. I think it is really helpful for this character that she have this conversation with her father, in which she denies everything and in which the spectator can see just how afraid she is to start a new life, in this time and place. The fact that we see María so alone on that beach, totally soaked with her teeth chattering, makes her fragility apparent. Moreover, when her father turns and walks away from her, we have the sense that the gap between them is widening.

MGP and EKH: In the case of filmmaker Nely Reguera, tell us about your professional fulfilment as a filmmaker. Do you identify with María? Have you found your place in the film industry? Are you on the right track?

NR: I loved making this movie and I especially enjoyed the shoot and postproduction. Of course, when I re-visit my film, I see some things that I would change. But, for the most part I'm happy with the result. I am especially pleased about the positive reception of *María (and Everybody Else)*. It's been very encouraging to see how people have connected with the story, understood it and empathized with it. It gives me the confidence to work on my next full length film.

As to whether I feel I'm on track, I would say more or less. I have started working on my next project and I have a clear idea of it. I really like films like *María (and Everybody Else)* and my next project will follow in this filmic line. In spite of it all, it's a long road that I want to keep exploring with different things, formats, and methods. For example, I am always rather obsessive about the script and dialogues, and I'd like to try doing the opposite: start with a situation and a few characters and then improvise with the actors. I still have a lot to learn.

MGP and EKH: Would it be possible to say that *María (and Everybody Else)* is a feminist film that dialogues with and deconstructs the narrative conventions of the romantic comedy?

NR: I consider myself a feminist and I would like to think that *María (and Everybody Else)* is a feminist film, even though I've heard a variety of opinions on the subject during post-screening discussions. Some people clearly see the feminist discourse in the film and others don't. At the very least, the film is female-centered since it focuses on a female lead, with her virtues and defects, that comes to terms with herself and is told by a female director.

All in all, I think that the film's dialogue with the genre of the romantic comedy can shed light on this topic. I am increasingly interested in cinema that is hybrid or unclassifiable: comedies that are dramatic or have commonalities with thrillers, for example. *María (and*

⁹ Reguera highlighted during the interview that earlier versions of the script had imagined that María was a good swimmer and shown her swimming in the pool. This idea was finally replaced by her flute playing hobby.

Everybody Else) is a dramatic comedy that clearly dialogues with the clichés of the romantic comedy. There are some scenes in the film, like the one with the wedding dress or the one in which María looks at herself in the mirror dressed in her lover's flannel shirt, that use humor to break up the clichés. In this sense, I do think that *María (and Everybody Else)* is clearly feminist, but not everyone has caught onto that. There has even been a subset of critics that have condemned the scenes in which María daydreams. They didn't understand that the purpose of those scenes was precisely the opposite: to make us laugh at the protagonist's fantasies. The resolution, nevertheless, I think is not open to the anti-feminist debate. The film would have been a disaster as a romantic comedy because the protagonist ends up alone. As much for me as for the rest of the screenwriters, it was very important that María not end up with Dani or any other guy, but rather that she finished her novel, which is her dream.

MGP and EKH: Would you tell us more about the ending? How did you film it? Had you thought of alternative endings?

NR: The resolution was the hardest part of the screenwriting. Conceptually, we know that María was never going to arrive at the wedding and that the film would end with her submitting her novel. Nevertheless, coordinating this transcendental act was really complicated. For the part at the beach, we thought of so many alternatives, each more complicated than the others, until one day, I was walking down the street and the anecdote with the bear occurred to me.

We wanted to include a scene in which María had an emotional breakdown and we knew that it had to be after Cachita's accident and after her final meeting with Dani, but we felt like something was missing. It started to come together when we had the idea of María throwing herself her very own book launch, like Marta Viso's (Alba Loureiro), with the teddy bear intended for Dani's daughters as María's audience. With this idea, everything else fell into place; we had the idea that she would fall asleep and miss the wedding. For me, this monologue in the bookshop is very important because it is the first time in the film that María stops, and as if she were looking in the mirror, she looks at herself. I have the impression that during the whole film she leaps forward without reflecting on the fact that her father has decided to remarry. In reality, I think this is wonderful news but María interprets it as the opposite because this news rocks the foundation of her life. I really like the tragicomic charge of the sequence with the bear and how Bárbara Lennie's marvelous acting makes us laugh and cry with the character. In a certain way, this scene shows how María always uses her imagination to solve problems: she's not writing a novel but imagines she publishes one, her relationship with Dani is going nowhere and she imagines that they are going to marry, etc. Nevertheless, at this moment she realizes that her life has become a farce and that, if she truly wants to be happy, she needs to live in reality.

The last sequence of the film, in which María runs across the town of La Coruña, we come back to the idea of flight I mentioned earlier, but we give it new meaning. We could read her run in different ways. We could think, on the one hand, that María's final run is the result of her elation at having submitted her novel; that she is finally choosing the life she wants to live and she throws herself into it with all her energy. On the other hand, another possible interpretation is that the protagonist is running because she's late to the wedding and feels bad about it. If *María (and Everybody Else)* were a romantic comedy, the resolution would have been predictable: María would have gotten to the wedding, reconciled with Cachita and received a love text from Dani. We always knew that we did not want a formulaic ending that was disconnected from real life. That's why we opted not to show the wedding, because in real life

not all stories end simultaneously. María submits her novel, which is what's most important, and from there she carries on. What happens with everybody else, her father, Cachita? Who knows.

MGP and EKH: In 2016, CIMA (Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales), turned ten years old. Nevertheless, it doesn't seem like there has been significant progress in the presence of women in the Spanish audiovisual industry in recent years. It's often indicated that it is a sector whose networks exclude or prevent the incorporation of women. What is your opinion of this situation? Why does it continue to be dominated by men?

NR: The world of cinema is masculinist (*machista*), not only in Spain, everywhere. Nevertheless, I think that we are changing little by little and that sexism (*machismo*) lessens with each subsequent generation. Evidence of this can be found in the growing presence of women in the technical crews on films led by younger rather than older directors. Even though more women are working in the audiovisual industry now, it is still rather a hostile one to the access of women. The university may be the only exception, where there is a more equitable representation of women and men. I've never felt less than a male peer at the ESCAC and I think that the school has transformed so much in recent years. When I studied there, women made up 20% of the student body (in my case there were only 10 women out of a total of 50 students) and, currently, the proportion of men to women is almost equal. I'm also surprised by their passion and self-confidence, most of all compared to the attitude many of my female classmates and I had a few years ago. We have to celebrate this because, at the end of the day, these women are the future.

There are many reasons why it is so difficult for women to break into the audiovisual industry. Firstly, there are so many clichés about us that we need to demystify. Sometimes I come across male colleagues who, for one task or another, do not trust a female professional. For example, I can't think of any female directors of cinematography that have worked in action films, even though I'm sure that they would be perfectly capable of assuming the responsibility. Another factor is difficulty with financing. On this subject, director-actress Leticia Dolera shared an anecdote in an interview that I found very revealing. She related the great frustration she felt when, having met with a few television heads to pitch her film, she was told that "we're sorry, but this year we already have a women's film (*película de mujeres*)."

One of the problems is precisely considering cinema by women as a genre in and of itself and the press is largely responsible for this. I would like to encourage everyone to reflect on how films by women are presented in the media. Often, it's placed in a bubble; an absurd distinction is established between cinema in general and cinema by women. In my opinion, this pigeonholing is very dangerous: women want to be directors and want to make films for everyone, not just women. It's fine that the increase in women directors is celebrated but we have to speak of them and their cinema in a more inclusive way. To give you an idea, not too long ago a story came out in *País SModa*, a fashion magazine, on Spanish women directors in which they appeared styled (make-up, heels, etc.). But just a couple weeks later a story was published in *País Semanal*, another magazine by the same newspaper, on five male directors who appeared in their typical clothing. This comparison infuriates me not only for the detail of styling but also for the issue in which each group appeared. Male directors appeared in the Culture section of the weekly magazine, women directors appeared in the monthly Fashion magazine. Why are male directors showcased in Culture and women in Fashion? Not only is the medium for each story (fashion vs culture)

outrageous but also the image that it projects of women directors. I share this example in order to highlight the prejudices towards cinema by women that can be found within and beyond the sector.

In regards to what you mentioned about networks, I think us women need to support each other in some way and the fact that there are more and more of us also helps because there will be more support. All things considered, the ideal situation would be for all of us to work together and that it wouldn't be our responsibility to promote equality nor construct a sect for women; that's why universities are so important. I think we should try to reproduce the university's work dynamic, where men and women work together in a natural way, beyond the university. When it comes to equality, we have a long road ahead of us but we are taking the first steps to achieve it.

MGP and EKH: Nevertheless, last June the Cultural office of the Catalanian government (Generalitat) rejected the proposals of CIMA's Catalanian delegation to promote equality in the distribution of public funds for audiovisual productions. What do you think of this? What measures would you implement to promote equality?

NR: I think that particular news item is terrible. The decision was rather frustrating because CIMA had already consolidated support from a number of organizations including the Producers' Association (Asociación de Productores). We really didn't expect for the Catalanian government to respond this way.

For me, the solution can be found in supporting education for a more equal society. It's essential to recognize that despite the progress that's been made, sexism (*machismo*) has not been eradicated from our society. Sexist situations are part of daily life, but they often go unnoticed because they are more subtle now than they used to be. We need to denounce these attitudes and fight for governmental action. In fact, one of CIMA's proposed measures for Catalonia was to incorporate a graduated system of quotas to guarantee equality. However, I am personally not a big fan of this solution because I think it ignores the causes. All in all, the fact that CIMA's proposal for Catalonia was rejected confirms bias in the system.

MGP and EKH: On this subject, how do you contribute to equality as a professor? At the screening of *María (and Everybody Else)* at the American Film Institute in Washington (June 2017), you mentioned that it was important to you that a woman, Aina Calleja, edited the film. What was your motivation for this decision?

NR: I admit this is a recent realization for myself as a professor. A while ago, I was asked in an interview to name five films portraying women that made an impression on me as a director and, subconsciously, all five I mentioned were directed by men. When I took a look at my selection, I was surprised by my list and I revised it to include women. It was easy, since I admire many women directors, but they weren't first to come to mind. Even though I am openly feminist, I belong to a generation whose cultural references were male (singers, writers, directors, etc.), and this leaves its mark. However, I think that my female students have a more diverse references than I did and, therefore, I began to include more films by women directors in my curriculum. Not doing so would be incoherent.

With regards to the second question, the reason we chose Aina Calleja to edit was simply because it seemed to me that a woman would better understand María's character and I felt that Aina would be able to connect to her emotional ambivalence. It's just natural for me to work

with women in my films because many of them are also a part of my circle of friends. Independent of this, for such a woman-centered film like *María (and Everybody Else)* I always wanted to work with female (and male) screenwriters.

Nely (and the Future)



Frida Films (*María (and Everybody Else)*, 2016)

MGP and EKH: Would you tell us about your future projects? Do you plan to keep making films?

NR: Currently, I'm directing a television series. It's a family comedy that is much less dramatic than *María (and Everybody Else)* and I am one of a few directors in the project. I'm really very excited about it. At the same time, I am working with Eduardo Sola and Valentina Viso on the script of my next film, which will also have a female protagonist, although she'll be older. For now, we want to make another dramedy, but with more dark humor. The idea is to shoot it in Catalonia and, if possible, in Spanish and Catalan. But, it will all depend on casting and if we find the right Catalonian actress for the part because the protagonist is a 65-year-old woman and there are not that many actresses in that age range. Like in *María (and Everybody Else)*, Aina Calleja will edit, Maruxa Alvar will be artistic director, and I hope that I'll be able to incorporate more women professionals.

In regards to the second question, the truth is that I never think in the long term. I'm really interested in teaching but I hope to be able to continue making films in the future, at least for a while. At any rate, nothing is certain at this point; making movies is extremely difficult and expensive, and I have not found the formula to facilitate the process. Nevertheless, I can imagine, ten films from now, laughing at my insecurities and pre-shoot neuroses and, most of all, at how much I obsessed over my first feature film.

MGP and EKH: Would you please tell us about *Cine en curso*? Do you plan to continue with this collaboration?

NR: There is no doubt that audiovisual literacy is very important, especially with today's bombardment of images, and it is essential to know how to interpret them critically. The problem is that cinema has always been used as a tool in schools and as an object of study. In *Cine en curso* we analyze cinema, mostly fragments by auteurs like Truffaut, Cassavetes, Kaurismäki, with which students connect. Nevertheless, what I am most interested in is the innovative way in which it incorporates cinema in the classroom.¹⁰

Cine en curso is a part of the *Le cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse* (Cinema, one hundred years young) program from France. A few years ago the French Ministry of Culture asked filmmaker Alain Bergala to think about ways to incorporate cinema in schools. Bergala created the seed project and even wrote a highly recommended book that is an enjoyable read on the subject, *La hipótesis del cine* (2007), where he details the initiative. Basically, the project, in which 5th to 9th grade students participate, consists of organizing workshops where these students use cinema as a tool for creativity and group work. One of the principal objectives that we achieved with this initiative was that the students opened their eyes and stopped to observe and listen to the world through a camera. For this, we asked them to use their own smartphones and basic cameras to observe and record their surroundings. Then, together we use professional equipment (camera, tripod, microphone...) to make a short fiction film or documentary. It's a beautiful process in which we work together at every stage, beginning with the script. Even though final products are often very similar (stories of ill ease at school, immigration, first love, parent-child conflicts, etc.), I love the workshops because they allow the students to open up emotionally. Moreover, this practicum allows students to realize the expressive potential of cinematic language and they discover that their own stories can also be cinematic.

I've been working with *Cine en curso* for seven years and I plan on continuing to do so because I love the project and I really admire the women (Núria Aidelman and Laia Colell) who've brought it to Spain. If I participate in the next edition, it will be a bit scaled back due to my obligations to the television series.

MGP and EKH: What is the question no one has asked you that you would like to answer?

NR: Leading up to the 2017 Goya awards ceremony, I was often asked about my opinion of being the only female nominee for Best Debut Direction. If I could choose, I would like to be asked the opposite in a hypothetical future: what do you think about the fact that there is only one male nominee? Of course, I would respond that I am very happy that there is a greater show of women among the nominees (laughter). I'm joking, although a situation like that would confirm that equality among men and women in the cinema would at last be a reality.

¹⁰ The *Cine en curso* program began in Catalonia in 2005-2006 and expanded to Madrid, Galicia, Argentina (Córdoba), Chile and Germany (Branderburg y Berlin). For more information, check out their webpage (www.cinemaencurs.org).

We wish to express our gratitude to Nely Reguera for her generous collaboration in the publication of this conversation.

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