

Opening the Door to Marina Seresesky's Cinema: A Conversation with the Filmmaker

*Thanks to the irruption of the internet and the globalization of economic currents and information, the world is just a click away and we are more interconnected everyday, but not necessarily more united. Behind this facade of global openness, current social politics reveal another reality: one of border control, discrimination of the immigrant Other and the difficulties of integration. Paradoxically, we have never lived in such a small and immense world at once. How can we overcome the barriers that separate us physically and the internal walls that isolate us from others and ourselves? These are precisely the concerns that motivate the filmmaker of Argentine origin, Marina Seresesky, whose gaze is one of the most stimulating and engaged of today's film landscape in Spain. Seresesky's characters teach strategies that we can use to better understand others, to maintain our ties and to nourish our roots. In fact, her first feature length film, *The Open Door* (2016), is an excellent example of how her cinema explores human relationships and affects, through the metaphor to which we allude in the title, in order to open a door to solidarity.*

The following conversation took place in person and via Skype on July 18, 2018 and was edited with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication. In this interview, we put into practice the Sereseskian metaphor of the open door and we invite Gynocine's readers to cross its threshold to discover the creative world of the director. The image of the telephone booth as a meeting place and a place for dialogue is another common motif in Seresesky's cinema. For this interview, we have been fortunate to "enter" with her into this space of conversation in order to consider central themes in her filmography: uprooting, maternity, reconstituted families...Seresesky's work, feminine and feminist, could also be considered urgent because it requires that we deal with reality straight on and open ourselves to Others and to empathize with them.

Marina Seresesky (Buenos Aires, 1969-)

*Of Argentine origin and Spanish residence for a number of decades, Marina Seresesky boasts an extensive career in the performing arts and the audiovisual industry. She began as an actress. She performed in the Teatro Meridional theatrical group and participated in a variety of productions directed by Gerardo Vera (Agosto) and Omar Grasso (*La tempestad* and *El misántropo*). In addition to her work in theater, she played the lead in the film *Entre Abril y Julio* (2002) by Aitor Gaizka and has appeared in a number of television series (*No sé quien eres* and *MIR*). Her debut in film direction took place in 2010 with the documentary *Madres 0,15 el minuto*, which won the Biznaga de Plata at the XIV Malaga Film Festival, and a fiction short, *El cortejo*. Her short *La boda* (2012), earned awards in national and international film festivals and a Goya nomination (2013) for Best Fiction Short. The culmination of her directorial and screen writing work came four years later with her first feature-length film, *The Open Door*, starring Carmen Machi, Terele Pávez, and Asier Etxeandía*



and produced by Meridional Producciones. *The Open Door* was released in Spain on September 2, 2016 and received two Goya (2017) nominations: Best Actress in a Leading Role and Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Since then, Seresesky has made a couple of publicity shorts: *La nueva vida* (2017) for Nespresso and *Padre* (2018) for TEKA. She is currently in post-production for her second full-length film, the comedy *Lo nunca visto*, which is expected to arrive in theaters in early 2019.

The Revolving Door



Meridional Producciones (Making of *The Open Door*, 2016)

MARIA GARCIA PUENTE and ERIN K. HOGAN: One could say that you are a multi-faceted professional in the audiovisual industry since you have worked as an actress, screenwriter, and producer. Would you tell us about your transition from in front of the camera to behind it and the challenges you faced in this process?

MARINA SERESESKY: It was a very natural transition and one practically out of necessity. It was just that my acting, which I still enjoy and find interesting, wasn't enough. I needed to express myself creatively with more tools. So, I began to write, something that I had never done before but that allowed me to discover other worlds, and to open the door to directing. Since taking this step, it is almost impossible for me to return to acting because directing encompasses its own rich and complete world. In this professional capacity I can develop what interests me over many creative areas: from the visual to the written, from wardrobe to set design, from details to performances, etc. With respect to all of this, I would say that the transition has been natural and that the challenges have grown in accordance with my movement towards directing. Frankly, I don't know if I'll ever act again or not; what I can tell you is that directing is just so fulfilling and I don't know if I'll ever feel the need to act again.

MGP and EKH: Who are your cinematic role models? Which women filmmakers do you admire?

MS: I really like film in general and I watch all kinds of movies, my references are varied and eclectic. As is natural, being from Argentina, my work has obvious influence from Argentine cinema, but also from other national cinemas like Italian, which I've always loved, and, of course, Spanish cinema. With respect to directing actors, I think that my cinema is closest to Argentine film, which is closely linked to the emotions of the characters and performance. Nevertheless, I must confess that Italian film is probably my favorite. I love Neorealism. I grew up with the cinema of Fellini and Visconti and I constantly return to their films in my work. Of course, while making films in Spain it is almost impossible not to be influenced by Spanish greats like Almodóvar and Berlanga. With Berlanga, specifically, I am fascinated by his cinema's way of combining comedy and drama; it's a very complex focus that he masterfully executes and it really attracts me to his films as a spectator.

With respect to women filmmakers, I really admire work by veteran directors like Susanne Bier, Isabel Coixet, Iciar Bollina, and Gracia Querejeta. Coixet's freedom to experiment (in drama, comedy, horror, etc.) is incredible. On the other hand with Bollaín, I feel like I share a way of seeing life. In recent years a number of younger generations of women filmmakers have come up (Arantxa Echevarría and Manuela Moreno, to mention a couple) and are producing stimulating projects that I think contribute a very important perspective from the feminine side.

MGP and EKH: Your filmography has received a warm welcome for the most part from spectators and critics. Nevertheless, like any other cultural product, it has not entirely escaped criticism. In *Cine para leer*, for instance, José Luis Martínez Montalbán discounts, in our view erroneously, your cinema as impersonal, saying that *The Open Door* is characterized by its lack of definition. In your opinion, what defines your cinema?

MS: I wouldn't know how to define my cinema because I don't have an extensive filmography yet. Nevertheless, I would say that what most interests me and what I work on is combining drama and comedy and this preference might explain why one might consider that my films lack definition. Creatively traversing such an ambiguous space is very complicated because it requires very versatile actors who can perform a wide spectrum of nuance. I have had the good fortune of surrounding myself with professionals who can move easily between comedy and drama. Like I said earlier, my cinema has a strong foundation in performance: digging into the emotions of the characters, into their gazes, their thoughts, etc. Finally, another aspect that I think distinguishes my filmography is that I like to center our attention (and the frame) on the person who listens rather than the one who speaks. This doesn't mean necessarily that I won't change in the future. It's common that male directors have the opportunity to explore many genres (comedy, drama, horror, etc.), but women directors are typecast in social cinema. I'm not against this genre, I love to make social cinema, but I also want to try out different things, and if I'm disregarded as impersonal for this, so be it. My goal as a director is to experiment, to search, and to have the opportunity to make the films I want to make.

MGP and EKH: This conversation is for the *Gynocine* project. From our point of view, your cinema can be considered gynocinema in so far as it can be interpreted with a feminist lens. Do you consider yourself a feminist director? Why?

MS: I consider myself feminist, period. I fight for gender equality; without a doubt there is a long road ahead of us and it is necessary for us to keep fighting in that direction. It's inevitable

that my feminist point of view informs my cinema. In the first place, my cinema emerges from a woman's gaze (because I am a woman). To this, we'd have to add the fact that most of my main characters are women to whom I like to give the volume and nuance they often lack elsewhere in cinema. They tend to be more simple. I'm interested in the complexity of women and, especially, in working with older actresses, actresses above 50. This is an almost invisible age in film, it's as if women of this age do not exist. My vindication of the mature woman in film derives to a great extent from my feminist perspective. This collective exists and, moreover, I think they have so much to tell us; women over 50 are indispensable for the continuity of society.

MGP and EKH: In your first feature film, *The Open Door*, the apartment's front door is the root of a conflict between your main characters: Antonia/María Luján (Terele Pávez), who always leaves it open, and her daughter Rosa (Carmen Machi). Our conversation revolves around this metaphor. On a symbolic level, what does the open door evoke for you?

MS: An open door for me means that one allows the Other in: to open one's heart and mind, which is something that Rosa resists with all her might. When you open the door, you let everything in, the good and the bad; in other words, you become vulnerable to the emotions of others. We have to be vulnerable to the Other. It's essential for living and moving forward: getting to know our neighbors, going out, talking, being with people, etc. The open door is a metaphor for life. Even though the film can be painful at times, because the characters do suffer, I have tried to convey the message that opening doors, just how much depends on each one of us, is about moving forward to a brighter place, otherwise we remain stuck. This is what happens to Rosa: all of a sudden, she opens the door and a girl (Lucía Balas) comes in, changing Rosa's life entirely and illuminating her life. The film moves little by little from darkness to light. Through this girl, Rosa realizes that there are other ways of interacting with others and that feeling isn't always bad. That's why I think that, especially with current politics, it is so important to open the door to the Other: because this transforms you.

The Door to the Auditorium



Meridional Producciones (*The Open Door*, 2016)

MGP and EKH: One of your first films was the documentary, *Madres 0.15 el minuto*. What was your experience with this project? Did it serve as research for *La boda*?

MS: Filming this documentary was one of the most beautiful experiences I've had. The project emerged from my observation of a drama that occurs in many cities, in this case Madrid, where many of our children are cared for by women from other countries who have had no other choice than to raise their own children from afar. It surprised me that so little had been said about the reality of these women, that, nevertheless, is present everywhere. In my documentary, I wanted to give them the attention they deserve and to reflect how they care for their children's education by phone and what they suffer due to the separation. The project put me in contact with many of these women, primarily the six protagonists of the documentary, from whom I've learned so much and with whom I continue to be in touch. For me, these women are true heroines. Their situation is not easy: they live alone, far from their support systems, and they survive as best they can. Being far away from their families is no doubt a very difficult experience and they endeavor to preserve at all cost their relationship with their children. In fact, it was a story of one of these women that became the basis for the short *La boda*. I spoke a lot with them and I listened to endless stories. *La boda* came directly from there, from a story of a quiceañera, that I later modified in screenwriting. It's funny but, in a certain sense, the short *La boda* is like the child of *Madres 0.15 el minuto*, and I feel like it was certainly a fantastic closing to my exploration of the topic of long distance motherhood.

MGP and EKH: In fiction, what genres do you work with? With regards to this, we noticed that there is little consensus on the genre of *The Open Door*. On the one hand, some critics categorize the film in between comedy and drama but, on the other hand, platforms like Filmin classify it as a social comedy. *The Hollywood Reporter*, to the contrary, calls it a drama¹. Could this lack of consensus be due to the cultural specificity of humor? With which classification are you most in agreement (comedy, drama, both)?

MS: I have had the good fortune to view the film with very different audiences in many places: Transylvania, Mexico, Bulgaria, USA, etc., and surprisingly, I can assure you that spectators laugh at the same parts. For instances, one of the sequences that gets the most applause is when Rosa throws her mother's ashes over the courtyard [*corrala*]. It is a very cathartic moment that at first I never thought would be so funny. The scene of the family Christmas celebration also comic.

What I've realized is that the reception of the film depends on how every individual is feeling at that moment. Some people have told me that they find the film more dramatic or comic or vice versa. Even for myself, depending on the audience with whom I view the film, I perceive it differently. Motherhood is such a powerful topic, that everyone lives in a personal way, especially such a complicated motherhood like that we see in *The Open Door*. For those who can identify with this kind of motherhood or who have lived it themselves, the film is very painful. Others will pay more attention to other aspects of the story. The film is a kaleidoscope of

¹ Filmin presents *The Open Door* as “An exciting and fun social comedy for a wide audience that is critical and reflective of our society and ourselves” (translation ours). The complete introduction can be found on their website (www.filmin.es).

characters that appeal in different ways to spectators: the girl, Rosa, Lupita (Asier Etxeandía), etc.

In my case, since my mother is far away, I wrote the first draft of the script with a more dramatic tone. However, with time I understood that the story of Rosa and her mother is also a marvelous comedy to explore because their relationship has both sides. It's understanding, then, that the film has won prizes as a comedy and as a drama. Lots of people tell me that when they watch *The Open Door* they don't know whether to laugh or cry and I love that. It doesn't matter to me the emotions that my film evokes, as long as it evokes them. What's important is that the spectator experiences what's on screen because, actually, cinema is about just that: making spectators feel.

MGP and EKH: In Marina Seresky's cinematic world, women are central. Why do you surround yourself with such gynocentric casts?

MS: Honestly, I do not make films for women but rather for everyone. However, I'm concerned with, I like, and I feel comfortable working with women. As a director and screenwriter, it's not difficult for me to tell stories about women; I feel a natural affinity for this kind of film. What's more, I think that it makes sense since I am a woman and I understand on an instinctual level how we work and we feel (I have it in my DNA). The problem is that women's cinema is not the norm anywhere. Unfortunately, despite the fact that women are more than half the population, the majority of films are led by male characters. This is total nonsense, especially if we take into account the fact that women go to the movies more often than men. If the situation were more equal, that is, if there were as many women screenwriters as men, it wouldn't be strange to see films about women, as is my case. I don't understand why I have to justify why I write about women while no one would ask a male director to explain why he has a male lead. And why do they repeatedly ask us how we juggle our careers and our personal lives but not ask men the same question?

MGP and EKH: Earlier you commented that you are very interested in working with older women. In your opinion, what do these characters bring to your cinema?

MS: The women I'm interested in, between forty and sixty, have a much richer life experience that allows me to tell many stories and to express myself directly, without masks. These women have been around and have been able to unmask themselves. They tell things like they are and they are no longer obsessed with finding romantic love. A thirty-year-old woman is looking for love but has different priorities when she's older. My cinema is not usually about romantic love; even *El cortejo*, which could be considered a love story, is more about second chances. I think this time in a woman's life, maturity, is more interesting and it's when falling in love or romance are no longer the center of everything. Narratively speaking, second chances or overcoming failure are more stimulating than the search for love. I find these topics very attractive. In addition, I am also older now and I write, naturally, from this reality.

MGP and EKH: On the flip side, we find that your male characters, with the exception of the undertaker (Mariano Llorente) in *El cortejo*, are less developed or, as is the case in *The Beginning* (2016), they fall along the lines of stock characters: the hero vs. the villain. Do you agree with this assessment?

MS: I've been told this many times before and I'm not so sure it's the case. For starters, *The Beginning* is a collaboration and does not represent only my work². I have more ownership of my own work. In *La boda*, for example, there are no male characters; it's entirely a story about women and *The Open Door* is similar. In the film there is only one male character, Paco (Paco Tous), who actually makes decisions since the other, Lyuba's brother (Emilio Palacios), is still a teenager who lacks the power to change his situation. If it's true that Paco does not exhibit many positive qualities, neither do the female characters. In *The Open Door* there are women with malicious attitudes that can be very unpleasant for spectators, as is the case with Juana (Sonia Almarcha). I don't think we can really say the the women in the film are totally good or bad; they are complex, nuanced characters. On the other hand, in the context of the story, Paco is just a normal guy who has had a hard life and, like everyone in this building, does what he can to get by. In fact, I chose Paco Tous for the role because he is an actor with an average, common look; he looks like he could be our neighbor and not like the abuser we often see on screen, and this was very important for me.

MGP and EKH: You are recognized as an excellent director of actresses, for which your actors have received many awards. How do you cast your films? What has led you to work with actresses, like Carmen Machi, on multiple occasions?

MS: More than skill as a director, I think that I choose really well, and this ensures much of the project. It's true that it's necessary to collaborate, rehearse, and guide, but if you begin with solid casting, you've already done 80% of the work. Depending on actors who you know are capable and really understand the role is fundamental. This is why I'm so concerned with selecting the actors who will surround me well and this often takes longer than rehearsing. Moreover, I often have particular actors in mind when I'm writing a script. Later, I might end up casting other actors than those I had in mind in the script but it's always clear what kind of energy I need from the actors for my characters.

Carmen Machi is a spectacular actress capable of performing in any genre: drama, comedy, anything you ask her. What's more, we happen to get along really well; she understands right away the tone I want for her character and the subtleties of the script. As a matter of fact, I just finished shooting with her another film, a project with a very different tone from *The Open Door* since it is a very fun comedy in which Carmen again plays the protagonist. Whenever I embark on a new work, I try to foster a relationship of trust and companionship with the actors because this facilitates filming. I think that I have a good sense of humor and I'm patient and the actors appreciate this. Maybe this is why they say I am a good director, I don't know.

² The short *The Beginning* was co-written with Benito Zambrano, who also directed it.

MGP and EKH: Motherhood and adoption are recurring themes in your work. On these subjects, the scholar Jo Evans observes a big discrepancy between how Spanish women filmmakers portray them (Isabel Coixet and Icíar Bollaín, to be precise), and how male directors like Pedro Almodóvar represent them³. What is your conception of motherhood in your films?

MS: Motherhood is such an important subject for me. In fact, almost all of my films deal with this subject in one way or another. I think that the bond between mother and child is the basis of so many things and that it gives way to many potential conflicts that are great to explore in fiction. Even though we are not all parents, we have all had a mother, and this relationship can be so powerful and impact us so much. I'm most interested in conveying the message that there is not one formula for the perfect mother but rather it's specific to each mother and child. I think that my interest in this topic was born from the documenary *Madres 0.15 el minuto*. Its protagonists, as I've said, were long distance mothers who, despite not being able to raise their children under the conditions they would have liked (being by their side), they do a marvelous job, as good or even better than mothers who are in constant contact with their children and who supervise their every move. In the short for Nespresso, *Una nueva vida*, I delve into this topic again, but from a very different perspective, from adoption. And, of course, in *The Open Door*, the conflict between Rosa and her mother is the dramatic drive of the story. Throughout the film, their relationship is very difficult, plagued by fights and reproaches. Nevertheless, and despite all of this pain, when Antonia dies she leaves her daughter a very important legacy, something much more valuable than the treasure of gold wedding bands that she accumulated over the years: a kind of love that liberated Rosa from her emotional blockage.

In the case of Almodóvar, I think that he is a director who's shown surprising sensibility and depth in his exploration of motherhood. At least, that's how I see it. All things considered, I think that women directors, whether we are mothers or not, can speak of this topic with a different perspective and position and, in addition, a lot of authority. I think it's crucial that we express our representations of motherhood and I hope that more films by women directors will explore this topic in the future.

MGP and EKH: We find your exploration of death very interesting. In films like *El cortejo* or *The Open Door* you present a very unique perspective on death as the root or catalyst of love. Tell us about your vision and where it comes from.

MS: I've been told many times that I treat death like a Mexican. For me, just like motherhood, death is a very rich topic that is also at the center of many of our experiences and emotions as humans. Nevertheless, I don't think that these experiences have to be negative. An example of this is my short *El cortejo*, in which I tell an atypical love story that takes place at a cemetery.

³ Evans begins her study commenting on the lack of visibility of women filmmakers in Spanish cinema and continues by analyzing the figure of the *mater dolorosa* or self-sacrificing mother and the castrating mother. For the author, Almodóvar combines these two archetypes in the melodrama of Gloria, protagonist of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?!*, while the mothers of Isabel Coixet (*My Life Without Me*) and Icíar Bollaín (*Take My Eyes and Flowers from Another World*) are in her opinion multifaceted women whose motherhood represents only one facet of their existence (337-38).

Death is part of a process that I find very interesting and that awakens many personal feelings that transcend the natural pain that we experience when a loved one passes. I like it when people approach death in a less dramatic way. In *The Open Door* I returned to this hopeful, if you will, perspective of death. For example, one of my favorite sequences from the film is the one that takes place at the funeral parlour during which Carmen Machi's and Asier Etxeandía's characters converse beside Antonia's casket. This is a very intense but restrained scene in which comedy and drama mix in equal parts.

I recall that filming this scene was so difficult for us because that very same day we lost a person very dear to us: Amparo Varó. Amparo was a very close friend of Carmen Machi's, Asier Etxeandía's, and mine. In fact, she was the actress that I first had in mind for Antonia⁴. I had given Carmen and Asier the precise instruction not to cry in this scene and, just ten minutes before saying "Action!", we learned of Amparo's death. It was surreal. None of us could believe that it was happening right at that moment. What's more, we were in such a state of shock that the three of us busted up laughing as if in a sort of collective catharsis. And this is life: something good can come from the worst tragedy and the most intense pain can give rise to a smile. Maybe it's a matter of survival: we all have an inner drive that pushes us to work through pain and difficulty to continue living. I'm really interested in exploring these experiences and seeing them reflected on screen.

MGP and EKH: We are also really interested in the concept of family that we see in your cinema. In your films like *The Open Door* or *Una nueva vida* you deconstruct the model of the traditional family and you propose alternatives. Could you tell us more about this?

MS: It's just a question of looking around. Today, there are still plenty of traditional families (father, mother, children), of course, but there are many other combinations that are equally valid and that we should recognize. I am in favor of each individual adopting the family model that s/he prefers and that allows him/her to live a happy life. One's family should be chosen and this viewpoint, in which I firmly believe, translates to my films. In *La boda*, to give one example, the protagonist and her friends form a family, in my understanding, even though they do not share blood, they love each other and care for each other in this way. The short *Una nueva vida* departs from the same idea. All in all, *The Open Door* is probably where this perspective on family is most apparent. It is the story of a family made up of a transwoman (Lupita), a woman in her 80s (Antonia), an eight-year-old girl and a prostitute (Rosa). This family composition might be unusual but it works. Who's to say how a family must be or how we must be happy? In *The Open Door* the girl and the transwoman are probably the most maternal characters of the story, without a doubt, more so than Antonia or Rosa. My objective in this film was to show spectators that individuals like Lupita can be just as maternal as any woman and that we should all be free to form our families as we wish.

⁴ Marina Seresesky, Carmen Machi and Amparo Varó worked together 2011 in the comedy *Agosto (Condado de Osage)*, directed by Gerardo Vera for the Centro Dramático Nacional. Seresesky got the idea for *The Open Door* during this collaboration, writing Rosa and Antonia with Machi and Varó in mind.

MGP and EKH: Your work revisits, with a twist, common themes in Almodóvar’s cinema and in popular cinema. In fact, in *Nuevo en Bilbao*, *The Open Door* is referred to as “the film Almodóvar would like to make today” (translation ours from *Pressbook* 10). What do you think of this influence and how does your film differ from Almodóvar’s?

MS: It’s hard for me to believe that *The Open Door* would be the film that Almodóvar would like to make. Frankly, it is not the first time I’ve been compared to Almodóvar but I am flattered by the comparison. I recognize the possibility of his influence on me but I’m not really aware of it. Perhaps our similarity is due to the fact that he is one of the few filmmakers who cultivates women’s stories and who offers improbable combinations of characters. *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* is a good example of this: in the film we see a very heterogeneous group of women, with very different personalities, who band together for a purpose. To this we would have to add Almodóvar’s fascination with transvestites and that we share a similar sense of humor. Despite all of this, I think that Almodóvar’s cinema is much more luminous than mine. This, in my opinion, is the fundamental difference between us.

MGP and EKH: Spanish popular comedy has always revealed deeply entrenched machismo⁵. Nevertheless, Marina Seresesky’s comedy distances itself from sexist stereotypes. In your opinion, what is the key to making a comedy without machista registers?

MS: Spanish comedies are no more sexist than Spanish dramas, Spanish horror, etc. National cinema in general reproduces a very narrow view of reality which is masculine. Perhaps we notice sexism more in a comedy because sexist humor still functions, but it really affects all genres; the masculine point of view is always privileged.

In my case, I am a feminist person and my cinema is feminine and feminist because it is intrinsic to me, it is how I perceive reality. One of the keys to making a non-sexist comedy is to rely on gynocentric casts. When women pronounce comedy it is logical that we are repositioned as spectators. In my most recent project, *Lo nunca visto*, which is a very fun comedy, I have often asked myself whether I am subconsciously reproducing sexist stereotypes. Nevertheless, I think that it is possible, and to a certain extent necessary, to engage with these stereotypes in order to deconstruct them. To give you an idea, some time ago I read that in 90% of world cinema a woman turns to a man at least once to ask “and what do we do now?”. So, in the feature I just finished filming, I’ve changed this around. In *Lo nunca visto* women and men switch roles: she takes the initiative and he asks her what they should do. These are small winks that should hardly be noticeable but I think they are key since they indicate that we are watching another kind of comedy.

⁵ According to Barbara Zecchi, gynocinematic comedy “reconquers” humor (the capacity to laugh and produce hilarious situations) from patriarchy which has historically excluded women from it (167-68). Zecchi enumerates five approximations to laughter in the gynocinematic comedy: “deconstruction of the traditional family”, “recover of the mature woman”, “mockery of machismo”, “role reversal” and “alternatives in a magical world” (168-184, translation ours). Seresesky’s comedy in *The Open Door* ascribes to the first two typologies.

MGP and EKH: Another intertext present in your cinema is that of fairy tales. The short *The Beginning* presents itself as a modern anti-fairy tale, which is an influence apparent in *The Open Door*⁶. What role do fairy tales play in your films?

MS: This is a really interesting reading of the film. Although, I confess that I really hadn't thought much about it besides in the ending of the film. Although some spectators have expressed their dissatisfaction with the film's denouement, considering it too idyllic for such a dark story (all of a sudden there's light and the characters live happily ever after). I respect this interpretation but I do not share it. For me, this happy fairy tale ending is not a reality as much as a hope. The key can be found in Sara Montiel's song that dominates the soundtrack of the ending, "Fantasy", that also denotes the circularity of the narrative since the song opens and closes the film⁷. With this ending I want to open the door to hope, express a wish: a wish that Rosa and Lyuba can escape together and be happy because in reality it would be very unlikely that this would happen.

I'm interested in the emancipating and hopeful potential of fairy tales but I also think that they can be very dangerous and can influence us in negative ways depending on how they are used. Fairy tales have traditionally been used to indoctrinate women into conforming with certain gender expectations and to make them believe the Prince Charming exists. For me, it is fundamental that *The Open Door* is not one of those stories about solitary women or about a second chance in which a man suddenly appears to save the heroine and show her the meaning of life. In Rosa's case, it's not romantic love, and certainly not a gallant man, that saves her but rather a return to innocence that allows her to be vulnerable. Therefore, I really like your reading of *The Open Door* as an anti-fairy tale because I think that the best way to tell a fairytale is precisely from the opposite perspective: from reality not fantasy⁸. The happy fairy tale ending could also be a wish, an open door to hope but one still grounded in reality.

⁶ The comparison between *The Open Door* and *Snow White* is particularly noticeable. Like the evil stepmother of the tale, Antonia is an older woman who is often portrayed as someone longing for her former beauty in front of a mirror and who has a difficult relationship with her daughter. Similarly, the arrival of Lyuba to the protagonists' house and the domestic work she performs is reminiscent of the heroine of *Snow White* at the home of the seven dwarves. In fact, in an interesting metanarrative wink, Rosa herself alludes to this similarity at the moment when she is interrogated regarding the whereabouts of the girl and responds: "I've got her here, like Snow White and the seven dwarves, you've got to be kidding me!" (translation ours).

⁷ "Fantasía", composed by Gregorio García, is one of the principal songs on the soundtrack of *Samba* (1954), a musical drama by Rafael Gil starring Sara Montiel.

⁸ According to the seminal study by Catriona McAra and Calvin Melvin, the antagonism of the anti-fairy tale arises from its potential for deconstruction and it functions on the basis of a complex relationship of complementarity with respect to patterns and characteristics of the classic fairy tale: optimism/ pesimism, fantasy/ reality, didactic/ uninstrutive, patriarchal/ feminist, Manichaeon morality/ ambiguity, etc. (McAra and Calvin 3).

The Door of the Phone Booth



Meridional Producciones (*La boda*, 2012)

MGP and EKH: You also explore the recurring theme of uprooting (familiar, cultural, geographic), a universal feeling that cleverly portrayed in *La boda* through the space of the phone booth. What are the implications for you of this uprooting and why are you so interested in it?

MS: Motherhood and uprooting are probably the two topics that most obsess me. Obviously, uprooting interests me because I have experienced it myself, even though mine cannot be compared with the suffering of others, like the six protagonists of *La boda*. Uprooting is hard to calibrate. Do we measure it in distance or time away? It depends on how you experience it and what you need. Mine is a daily choice but it's still an uprooting. I live far from my extended family, my childhood friends, my parents and siblings, and I take this wherever I go. These circumstances have made me reflect quite a bit, they've made me cry, laugh, etc; you could say that they are entirely integrated into my life. Moreover, I come from a very multicultural family: my grandmother was Turkish, my grandfather Polish and both emigrated to Argentina. Even recently I've discovered things I didn't know about my distant relatives (great and great great grandparents), stories of travel, transfers and moves. I always have in mind these experiences and cultural mixes that make me who I am.

Migration has existed since the beginning of time and it has always been painful for those who leave and for those who stay. Nevertheless, in current politics it is a very urgent issue to resolve. I am concerned personally and as a citizen by the situation that many immigrants are living today and I firmly believe that we can't just watch it and do nothing. We have to do something about this and that's why I write about it. The comedy I've just filmed is another exploration of the topic of migration and how we treat newcomers to our communities. Certainly, the topic of the integration of different cultures really interests me.

It seems strange to me that this experience, instead of encouraging people to connect with others, has the opposite effect: it makes them withdraw or makes them try to hold on to what they left behind. This is similar to what happens to the protagonist of *The Open Door*, who can also be considered to a certain extent as uprooted due to the emotional abandonment she suffered since she was a child. Rosa has imposed a number of barriers upon herself that isolate her and have created an armor she wears that does not allow her to connect emotionally with anyone.

Part of her problem is that, instead of dealing with her situation, she blames everything that happens to her on her mother. Due to this, she is incapable of coming out of the closet of loneliness and silence in which she is stuck to such an extent that someone from the outside has to come in in order to take her out. In a sense, Rosa is like so many people today who blame others (their families, the government, institutions) on their own unhappiness instead of trying to take responsibility for their own actions.

MGP and EKH: You are, in fact, from Argentina and it's possible to see in your interest in displaying the lives of Latin American women in Spain your strong affinity with these communities. What is your view on the situation of Latin American women in Spain, whose stories you highlight for example in *Madres 0.15 al minuto*?

MS: Within the Latin American community there is so much diversity but, in general, Latin American women are very open and interactive. Even though, it's understandable, being far from one's family and environment is difficult and they establish support systems in order to get by. It's a survival strategy that we clearly see in *La boda*.

I relate to women from many different countries in part because we share certain cultural idiosyncrasies and we also share our uprootedness. In my films I like to portray the experiences of Latin American women in Spain because theirs is a reality that occurs in many cities, primarily in Madrid. It would seem very strange not to see the coexistence of women from Spain, Latin America, Russia, or any other country in a courtyard [*corrala*] like the one that appears in *The Open Door*. Our cities are increasingly more diverse and that reality should be displayed as should in film.

MGP and EKH: With that in mind, do you consider yourself a director of Spanish, Hispanic, global, or intercultural cinema? Or, adapting the central question of *Madres 0.15 el minuto*, are you a "long distance" Argentine director?

MS: Honestly, I don't know, I have no idea where I'm from anymore and I think it doesn't really matter to me. I think it's fun that sometimes the press refers to me as an Argentine director and others as a Spanish director. It's very likely that I'll make my next film in Argentina where I'll surely be considered a Spanish director who's come to make an international co-production. It happens to me often: in Argentina I'm taken for Spanish and here I still have an Argentine accent. I'm really indifferent to this. Professionally, it shouldn't matter where I'm from and, personally, I'm not even really sure where I'm from. In fact, I think it was Joan Manuel Serrat who said something with which I couldn't agree more: "I'm from where my children eat." In my case, I am from the place where I can make a living, eat, and be happy.

Doors to Open



Meridional Producciones (*La puerta abierta*, 2016)

MGP and EKH: You've just finished filming your second feature film, *Lo nunca visto*, that, as you've mentioned, is a comedy. Could you tell us more about this project? How did it start?

MS: *Lo nunca visto* is about a very small, isolated, disappearing Spanish town that, all of a sudden and to its residents' surprise, receives newcomers from Africa dressed in their traditional garb. In theory, it would be great for all concerned that these foreigners stay to live in the town: the Africans, who have fled from their home countries, would have found a new home and the town's inhabitants would receive relief from depopulation. Nevertheless, this option turns out to be almost impossible because both parties create obstacles to integration. The film is about this navigation between incompatibility and integration; all of this as a comedy, that I think is the appropriate tone for exploring this subject.

The origin of the story was a study, if I'm not mistaken, Amnesty International published a while ago about the solving rural Spain's depopulation with foreign refugees. The study dismissed this as a solution since neither the locals nor the newcomers viewed it as desirable. I thought this was incredible. How is it possible that we can't arrive at an agreement in the face of such necessity? It's necessary for both parties to work to meet halfway. This is the point of departure for the film.

The feature is very choral and has a great cast with Carmen Machi, Pepón Nieto, Paco Tous, Kiti Mánver, John Cortajarena, and four marvelous African actors. The title, *Lo nunca visto*, alludes to the four Africans that arrive to town. They are spectacular dancers who are a sight unseen for locals. Definitely, the story is about discrimination, racism from both sides and the prejudices that prevent us from opening up to others.

MGP and EKH: What other creative work do you plan for the near future?

MS: My next project will be a thriller and then I would like to make a period horror film. I love to explore and really I love genre film. We are planning to film the thriller at the end of next year. It will be a suspense film with supernatural elements relating to the subject of motherhood. The story will take place in Mexico and it will be led by a woman whose child has disappeared

and dares to embark upon an extraordinary journey to find answers. I hope that it keeps moving forward because I'm really excited to make it.

MGP and EKH: In addition to this thriller, what other doors would you like to open?

MS: The first door I'd like to open is one that allows me to work without censorship or self-censorship. This is very important to me. I would like someday soon to be free to make a thriller or a horror film without anyone raising an eyebrow. It's happened to me that at meetings about the horror film I'm asked: "But who wrote this? Just you?".

Of course, I have many other stories stored in the desk drawer and, most of all, a lot of enthusiasm for working on new things: direct a coproduction, make a film in English, travel, etc. I am open to everything. The only thing that I really want is to be able to keep making films, and this isn't limited to feature films. For sure, this isn't the best time for filmmaking, and Spain isn't the best country for this, but I'm willing to fight for each project. It would be great to be able to tell you in a year from now that I'm working on two or three new projects. That would be ideal.

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

MS: I wouldn't be able to say what this question would be but I am certain what I do *not* want to be asked again. I don't want to hear any more comments suggesting that directing is a hobby rather than a profession for women or that undervalue our work behind the camera. In addition, I would like enough time to pass so that we don't have to talk about equality or justify why we make a film about women. I would like premieres of these films to simply be about the projects without having to allude to gender. As I mentioned earlier, we still have so much ground to cover in order to be able to achieve this goal but I'll willing to continue to talk about this subject as much as is necessary to achieve the goal. Talking about it is the only way to give it visibility.

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