

# The voice in Carolina Astudillo's essay films. Analysis of the works *El Gran vuelo* (2014) and *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018) according to Julia Kristeva's communicative scheme<sup>1</sup>

## *La voz en los ensayos audiovisuales de Carolina Astudillo. Análisis de El Gran Vuelo (2014) y Ainhoa, yo no soy esa (2018) a partir del esquema comunicativo de Julia Kristeva*



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### **Abstract:**

This article studies the voice in Carolina Astudillo's cinema by analysing her two feature films *El gran vuelo* (2014) and *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018). Her works contain characteristics of an essay film, such as using different techniques and materials, an asystematic discourse, and self-reflective speech. This form of filmmaking is particularly suitable for exploring themes that concern the author. We will apply the communicative scheme developed by Julia Kristeva in *Semiotics* (1969) to identify the different voices in these two films. Thus, we will demonstrate how the director's voice is filtered through her characters, establishing a dialogue with them while at the same time turning it into a mirror-like technique for self-exploration.

### **Keywords:**

Essay film; voice; Julia Kristeva; Carolina Astudillo; self-reflectivity.

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### **Resumen:**

*Este artículo estudia la voz en el cine de Carolina Astudillo a través del análisis de sus dos largometrajes El gran vuelo (2014) y Ainhoa, yo no soy esa (2018). Sus trabajos contienen características atribuidas al ensayo audiovisual, como es el uso de técnicas y materiales diversos, el desarrollo de un discurso asistemático y la autorreflexividad. Esta forma de hacer cine resulta especialmente adecuada para la exploración de temáticas que preocupan a la autora. Aplicaremos el esquema comunicativo desarrollado por Julia Kristeva en su Semiótica (1969) para identificar las diferentes voces en estas dos películas. Con esto probaremos que la voz de la directora se filtra a través de las de sus personajes, estableciendo un diálogo con ellos y al mismo tiempo convirtiéndolo en una técnica de exploración de sí misma a modo de espejo.*

### **Palabras clave:**

*Ensayo cinematográfico; voz; Julia Kristeva; Carolina Astudillo; autorreflexividad*

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## 1. Purpose statement

This study is part of the research project: “*El Ensayo en el Audiovisual Español Contemporáneo*” (Ref. CSO2015-66749-P). One of the project's main goals is to contribute to the definition of the essay film. We explored the definition by analysing a sample of 200 titles classified as non-fiction films ranging from documentaries to experimental works. A series of characteristics rather than a closed definition was found. The complete study is gathered in the article *El ensayo en los medios audiovisuales españoles contemporáneos: definición, producción y tendencias* (*Communication and Society*, 2020), written by the Project Director Norberto Mínguez Arranz and Professor Cristina Manzano Espinosa.

Our objective is to study the voice in Carolina Astudillo's work. She is a Chilean filmmaker who moved to Barcelona to finish her studies, where she is now a teacher and a documentary filmmaker. Her films have focused on recovering women's historical memory in the Spanish civil war and the so-called transition period. Carolina has directed seven short films: *De Monstruos y faldas* (2008), *Lo Indecible* (2012), *Maleza* (2015), *El deseo de la civilización: Notas para El gran vuelo* (2014), *Naturaleza muerta* (2019), *Un paseo por New York Harbor* (2019) and *Herencia* (2020). She is also the director of *El descaro* and the feature film *Canción de Una dama en la Sombra* (2021), both of which are in postproduction, and her two feature-length films, *El gran vuelo* (2014) and *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018). Our analysis focuses on these last two films because they have been the most awarded in festivals and most widely referred to by the media. We consider that *El gran vuelo* and *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* incorporate the themes that have concerned the director; while at the same time, they are examples with the most characteristic formal features of her films, such as the use of archival material as well as found footage and the systematic use of the voice, her own or someone else's, as a testament to the truth that activates identification mechanisms. Carolina's films show an interest in language and the voice as a tool for interweaving personal memory with historical memory. This working methodology as a director, who relates oral and written texts, is related to the concept of ideologeme. The term was defined by J. Kristeva as “that intertextual function which can be read ‘materialised’ at different levels of the structure of each text, and extends throughout it, giving it historical and social coordinates” (*Semiótica I*, 1981, p. 148).

The French Hispanist Edmond Cros updated the concept of ideologeme in the 1990s, referring to the cultural subject as the one who produces and interprets texts within culture, according to a past and historical horizon (2005, p. 41). Later, in *La sociofónica*, Cros defines ideologeme as:

A semiotic-ideological microsystem underlying a functional and meaningful unit of discourse. At a given moment, the latter imposes itself on social discourse, where it presents a recurrence superior to that of other signs. Thus, the microsystem is organised around semantic dominants and a set of values that fluctuate according to historical circumstances (Cros, 2009, p. 215).

Carolina Astudillo's films are examples of a generation of female directors, who in the last two decades, have explored aspects common to women's history, vindicating sensibilities and concerns that are usually on the margins of official historical narratives. Among these directors we highlight Virginia García del Pino, Nuria Ibáñez, Esther Pérez Nieto, Mercedes Moncada, Tatiana Huevo, Lucía Gajá, Lupe Pérez García, María Ruido, Xiana do Teixeiro, Diana Toucedo and

Marcela Zamora. They have given these female storytellers a voice through their films, placing the heritage of a living oral culture and an ethics of care at the centre of their films. Their works focus on Latin America and Spain and mainly follow documentary filmmaking's narrative codes. However, the constant hybridisation of techniques and different materials makes them similar to an essay film. They demonstrate a form of filmmaking focused on the exploration process itself – rehearsing. It is suitable for approaching their concerns from the point of view of art, thanks to its characteristic asystematicity and a self-reflective component.

This analysis is centred on the importance of the voice, both the author-narrator's voice and her characters', whereby we find the word in an anaphoric relationship with reality, which as Julia Kristeva explained in *Semiótica I*, "take their significance only as connectors with this text outside the text-present [...]. Through the anaphora, the variable brings out the absent texts in the written text (politics, economics, myths)" (1981, p.106). Carolina Astudillo's voice is always present, either explicitly or mediated through her characters. In her films, day-to-day life, feelings, and the women protagonists' intimate experiences act as "connectors" to the historical events. The wide use of quotes from letters, diaries, and conversations serves as a tribute to them. At the same time, they act as a call for identification, "That's why I wanted to include my experience in this film since reading other women's experiences can encourage us to take control of our lives" (*Ainhoa, yo no soy esa*, 01:04:45). In Carolina Astudillo's films, polyphony, which Julia Kristeva mentions when referring to the dialogic texts, is an exploration technique in itself through others' testimonies.

## 2. Theoretical framework

One of Julia Kristeva's first academic works was an extensive review of the Russian Mikail Bakhtin's theories in her article *Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman* published in the journal *Critique* in 1967. Thanks to this text, together with other publications by Tzvetan Todorov, Bakhtin's terminology became known in the French intellectual milieu in the 1960s. In her article, J Kristeva combines Bakhtin's notions of literary dialogism with Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic structuralist concepts. She defines intertextuality in the article as: "Every text which is constructed as a mosaic of quotes, every text is absorption and transformation of another text. Instead of the notion of intersubjectivity, that of intertextuality is established, and the poetic language is read, at least as a double" (1981, p.190). Fifteen years later, Gérard Genette developed the concept of intertextuality in his famous book *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (1982). According to Kristeva, literature can be a historical and social field of study, which is impossible to categorise in a closed system of signs –structuralism–. Therefore, she soon became known in the so-called poststructuralist current. Her first works respond to a period of epistemological concern since they raise methodological problems regarding semiotics as a critical science (Bohórquez, 1997). In 1969 she published *Sèmiótikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969) (*Semiótica I and II*, 1981).

In *Semiótica*, Kristeva explains that information in a text is transferred from the writer to the reader through a series of codes that include other texts. Therefore, she establishes "the need to introduce mathematics into semiotics, to find a system of acronyms –= of numbers– whose articulation would describe the working of semiotic practices and construct the language of a general semiotics" (1981, p. 72). This approach, using linguistics and mathematical language as a

system, has been controversial. The physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont criticised the approach in their book *Impostures intellectuelles* (1990), where they denounced technical mathematical and physics terms in Kristeva's works, together with the group of psychoanalysts and philosophers, who comprised the group of French Theory in The United States at the end of the 20th century: Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida, Paul Virilio and Félix Guattari, among others. Sokal and Bricmont's book highlights the problem of cognitive realism in their works, together with a pretentious and inadequate use of scientific terms, which are intended to impress the unspecialised reader in mathematical sciences and have the intention to "*surpasser Lacan pour ce qui est de la superficialité de l'erudition*" (1999, p. 87). In turn, Sokal and Bricmont were attacked in several articles published in the media, in *Le Monde* or *Libération*. Kristeva herself responded with an article in *Nouvel Observateur*, *Une désinformation* (1997, p. 122), in which she denounced both authors' Francophobia. In this article, Kristeva praised the several critical studies and interpretations of her works by colleagues worldwide and cited the then-recent study by Hélène Volat, referring to 660 investigations based on her work and publications between 1970 and 1994 (published by Des Lettres Modernes, *Les carnets bibliographiques* in 1996).

Sociocritical studies gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s in France due to an intellectual conjuncture that led to protests in May 1968. Claude Duchet and Edmond Cros (Chicharro, 2007, p. 715) stood out in Paris and Montpellier. In this context, they began to add aspects from sociology to the study of literary works by analysing the historical and cultural implications beyond the text. This was when the term ideologeme appeared, which was developed by Kristeva and later by Edmond Cros. According to Carmen Ávila and Francisco Linares, although both Cros and Kristeva start from the Bakhtin conception of ideologeme –dialogical texts– and structural semantics, with the beginning of sign developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, they differ in the range of action of this ideologeme. Cros centres its application on the ideological working of the social discourse (2010, p. 108) as Ávila and Linares stated: "It [the connotational social dimension] escapes the concerns of lexicology and lexicography in use, as a matter of a particular interpretation of the texts. It has to do with the semiotisation of the ideology or, in other words, with the cultural production of the ideological, social signs" (2010, p. 109). Cros's notion of ideologeme is related to his theories on the cultural text and cultural subject, but we take his philological education into account. However, we consider that J. Kristeva also highlights the inseparable relationships of meaning between any textual analysis and the social structure in which these discourses are produced. For Kristeva, "[t]he acceptance of a text as an ideologeme determines the very activity of a semiotics which, by studying the text as an intertextuality thus thinks of it in (the text of) society and history" (1981, p. 148). Julia Kristeva defines the text as "a translinguistic instrument that redistributes the order of the language, putting a communicative speech aimed at direct information in relation with different types of previous or synchronic utterances" (1981, p. 147). She goes on to refer to the text as productivity, which is explained for two reasons:

1. Because its relationship with the language in which it is inserted is redistributive- destructive –constructive– it is more appropriate to approach its analysis by applying logical categories rather than linguistic categories. This reiterates Kristeva's consistent criticism of structural linguistics –poststructuralism.

2. Because it is intertextuality, i.e., a permutation of texts where the statements taken from other texts cross, mix and neutralize each other.

Suppose we apply the critical thinking of the poststructural theories to the cinematographic text. In that case, we find multiple possibilities of analysis because of the rupture in categories posed by the essay film. The line that separates fiction from non-fiction has always been challenging to determine. It has often been designed to grab the audience's attention, and it is constantly being redefined (Mínguez, 2014). Other studies on cinema also analyse the hybridisations between fiction and non-fiction (Carrera and Talens, 2018; Cerdán and Torreiro, 2007; Ward, 2005). Josep María Català, in *Estética del ensayo. La forma Ensayo, de Montaigne a Godard* (2014), highlights that this way of filmmaking makes fragmentation problematic and that it is a phenomenon of contemporary audiovisual products (2014, p. 278). He affirms that "The essay film does not mix reality and fiction as a stylistic or expressive recourse, rather it is installed in it by its own configuration" (2014, p. 279). Català uses *Fake* (1973) as an example, directed by and starring Orson Welles, which has almost always been catalogued as a documentary or docudrama, to refer to the uncertainty that the film exerts on the spectator. This is debated by the viewer "as an emotional factor", as they do not know what is real and not. Thus, "[i]t is possible that the spectator finally does not reach a definitive conclusion about the issue raised, but what he/she cannot ignore is that the film has offered a reflection on it, as ambiguous as it may be" (2014, p. 279). According to the analysis carried out by the researchers from the ENAVEC Project, we can highlight seven characteristics of the essay film (Mínguez and Manzano, 2020, p. 23):

1. Construction of a line of thought that is expressed through form. This highlights the importance of each author's particular form of expression, thus revealing a style.
2. Self-reflectivity: cinema as a tool for self-awareness.
3. Asystematic, non-scientific, not closed discourse: "the essay would translate in the sense that the reflections on the filmic theories define the modern paradigm (Pasolini and Rohmer, 1971; Bordwell, 1996), as opposed to the classic narrative paradigm, and it would take on an incomplete or tentative treatment of a theme".
4. Subjective focus, authorial point of view: "we consider the choices of narrative perspective based on the classification proposed by A. Gaudreault and F. Jost (1995), adapted to the particularities of a cinematographic discourse, as opposed to other classifications based on literary discourse, such as Todorov's (1966) or Genette's (1970)".
5. Critical discourse as a tool for aesthetic, social, or even political intervention: the essay can be used in a certain way as a manifesto since it transcends self-referentiality.
6. Essayistic pact: the film establishes a dialogue between the author and the public. It needs the spectator's active participation. To fulfill this purpose, it uses various tools, among which the written word and the voice-over are intertwined.

7. It breaks away from the most conventional audiovisual forms. That is why this type of film escapes closed classifications. "The degree of experimentality serves as an indicator of the essay's capacity to renew audiovisual language, as well as to assess its nature as an audiovisual product intended for a specialised public."

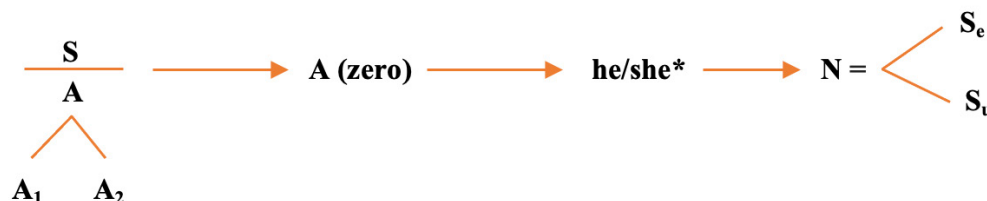
Laura Rascaroli starts her book *How the Essay Film Thinks* (2017) by explaining that some of the features that are attributed to an essay film had already been identified in 1940 by Hans Richter in his article *Der Filmessay, eine neue form des Dokumentarfilm*, such as transgressions and crossing the borders, an escape from conventions, creative freedom, and freedom of expression, complexity, and reflectivity (2017, pp. 2-3). In turn, Nora Alter affirms that one of the essay's principal characteristics is its struggle to free itself from all restrictions, whether formal, conceptual, or social (1996, p. 171). According to Josep María Català, "The essay film is a cinema of thought, i.e., it is not only cinema that thinks but also cinema through which one thinks" (2019, p. 17). Rascaroli develops what she calls "the method of between," a term inspired by Gilles Deleuze's studies about the signifying interstitial power to generate a new filmic thought (Deleuze, 1986). It is the place where the essay is located as a loophole that cannot be understood. Deleuze locates the interstice in a position of discomfort, from which to provoke a genuinely new thought – "Cinema as image of thought" (Rascaroli, 2017, p. 9). Before the publication of *How The Essay Film Thinks*, Raymond Bellour (2012) uses a very similar concept to Laura Rascaroli's in-between to refer to an artist located between visual art and writing, acting as the bearer of cultural memory.

### 3. Methodology

Kristeva establishes a double typology of the discourses (1981, p.206) based on M. Bahktin's (1978) dynamic analysis of texts on literary dialogism. On the one hand, the monological discourse comprises: a) the representational form of the description and the epic narrative, b) the historical discourse, and c) the scientific discourse. In all three, the subject takes on the role of a superior being, a God, "the discourse refuses to turn in on itself –to 'dialogue' ". On the other hand, dialogic discourse comprises three categories: a) the carnival, b) Menippean Satire and c) the Polyphonic Novel. Here the carnival is compared to Nietzschean Dionysianism; it develops in a cynical scenario where its dialogic laws are imposed over the voice of a God: "in the carnival, the subject is annihilated: in it, the structure of the author is fulfilled as an anonymity that creates and is seen to create, as self and as other, as man and as a mask" (1981, p. 209).

However, despite placing the historic discourse within the monological categories, she seems to leave a loophole for dialogue. "All narration, including that of history and science, contains that dialogical dyad that the narrator forms with the other" (1981, p.205). Thus, in the section The immanent dialogism of the denotative or historical word, in the seventh chapter of *Semiótica I*, she states that before a psychoanalytical and semantic analysis of language, "dialogism is coextensive with profound structures of discourse" (1981, p. 202) and that the author leaves in writing a trace of dialogue with themselves (with the other-self), thus splitting into the subject of the enunciation/subject of the utterance. Starting from the basis of this analysis of every communicative process as a dialogue between a subject (S) and an addressee (A), Julia Kristeva draws this scheme:

Figure 1. Julia Kristeva's communicative scheme



Source: *Semiótica I* (1981, p. 204) \*We have added the pronoun she

The subject of the narration [S] in narrating is directed towards an addressee [A]. This, in turn, becomes the subject of the reading of this text-narrative and represents an “entity with a double orientation: signifier in its relation to the text and signified in the relation of the subject of the narrative to it” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 203). This dyad [A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>] constitutes a system of mathematic-like codes. The subject of the narration [Author] in this system disappears, becomes anonymous [A zero], and is mediated through a character [he/she\*] who will become a proper name [N: e.g., Medea]. The character, in turn, will become the subject of the enunciation [S<sub>e</sub>] and the subject of the utterance [S<sub>u</sub>].

The divergence between the what –story– and the how, i.e., the act of narrating, the enunciation –discourse– has been dealt with by many narratologists during the twentieth century. Tzvetan Todorov distinguished between story and tale (1966), Roland Barthes defined a more complex triad: level of functions, level of actions, and level of narration (1966), Gérard Genette distinguished between story, tale, and narration (1989 and 1983), Seymour Chatman used the categories of story and discourse (1978) and Mieke Bal of fable, story, and text (1985). Julia Kristeva was familiar with these terminological debates. Émile Benveniste developed a theory of language between 1960 and 1970 as a criticism of the limitations of F. de Saussure’s linguistics, which analysed language and speech separately. Benveniste formulates a theory of language that was mainly concerned with the relationship of the subject to speech, with the act of enunciation understood as language put into action by “an individual act of use” (2004, p.83). Thus, he establishes that the subject is constituted thanks to the other; for an I to exist, the existence of a you to whom it is addressed is always presupposed (2004, p.181).

Among the characteristics of the essay film mentioned above, we take those of essayistic pact [6] and self-reflectivity [2] to apply them to the analysis of the voice in the two feature films by Carolina Astudillo: *El gran vuelo* (2014) and *Aínoa, yo no soy esa* (2018). This voice is understood as the author’s double dialogic discourse: with the spectator/with herself-her characters –subject of the enunciation– subject of the utterance. As J.Kristeva states: “Dialogism locates the philosophical problems in language, and more specifically in the language as a correlation of the texts, as a writing-reading that goes hand in hand with a non-Aristotelian, syntagmatic, correlational, carnivalesque logic” (1981, p. 224). On the other hand, we also take the characteristic of an asystematic discourse, not closed [3] because in it we can inscribe what J Kristeva calls ambivalence, also taking this term from Bahktin, where they coexist “at the same time

'double of the lived' (realism, epic) and 'lived' itself (exploration, linguistics, menipea)" (1981, p.224). We consider that this coexistence between historical discourse and fictional discourse (Menipea, Polyphonic Novel) can be transferred from the field of literature, where it was stated, to the analysis of essay film, which takes its name and characteristics from the literary essay as a form of writing begun by Michel de Montaigne in the 16th century. In his *Essais*, Montaigne attempts to investigate himself philosophically in a mirror-like way. This analysis reveals the complex relationship between word and image, which José Luis Sánchez Noriega deals with in his seminal text *De la Literatura al cine. Teoría y análisis de la adaptación* (2000). Noriega highlights that cinema employs three registers: visual, sound, and writing. Not only do we allude to the textual using words –silent film in its origins– on the screen, but rather that "the filmic text is *also* constructed with the verbal register" (2000, p. 39, [original emphasis]). The author emphasises the non-univocal character of the image, i.e., that despite the generalised assumption that the word is located at the level of abstraction and that the image refers directly to a referent, the truth is that the image "is susceptible to ambiguity the moment when the soundtrack that accompanies it provides it with very different meanings" (2000, p. 39).

#### 4. Analysis

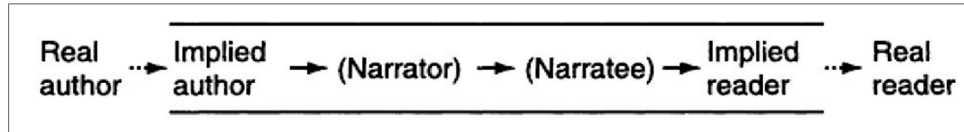
Carolina is a journalist and director; she graduated in Film Studies from the Catholic University of Chile and completed a Master in Creative Documentary from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), where she made her first short film, *De monstruos y faldas* (2008), coproduced by the UAB and Localia Televisión. She then discovered the Les Corts Prison story, a place where many women were imprisoned for political reasons after the Spanish Civil War. Through these films, she wove her filmmaking's common thread, which was linked to research on women's history and memory. Later in 2014, her first feature-length film *El Gran Vuelo* premiered, which was also connected to Les Corts, the prison from which the protagonist Clara Pueyo Jornet escaped. She was a young Republican and member of the committee of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia and secretary of *Socorro Rojo Internacional*. She was arrested during Franco's dictatorship, and her escape was known as *El Gran Vuelo*. Nothing has been heard from her ever since. The film begins with an announcer's voice who states: "We cannot hear the voice of our dead, only in memories, dreams or in an image" (min. 01:09). This phrase acts as a declaration of intentions: through images from family and institutional archives from Franco's Spain, together with the few preserved photographs of Clara Pueyo and her siblings, the director draws us into the events that surrounded the protagonist's life until her disappearance, as well as her intimate universe, her concerns and fears, the trauma of the war and her motivations for living a life dedicated to militancy.

In *El Gran Vuelo*, there are two voices: Sergi Dies' in Spanish, as an omniscient narrator in classic documentary style, and María Cazes', who plays Clara Pueyo and gives us an insight into her most intimate reflections, in Spanish and Catalan. Next, we explain why these two voices represent the director's two points of view, as she dialogues with the spectator through them. Based on Seymour Chatman's (1990) theories on narrative structure, for Justo Villafañe and Norberto Mínguez (2009, p. 195), the implied author in literature materialises through an agent who shows or tells the story. Rimmon-Kenan (2005) reproduces the scheme that Chatman created for his *Story and Discourse* (1978), in which



the author and the reader of the text are left out of the narrative act –“the narrative transaction” (2005, p. 89). Thus they must act in the text through the implied author-narrator and implied reader-narratee.

Figure 2. Seymour Chatman's narratological scheme



Source: *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978, p. 151) Reproduced by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2005, p. 89)

The figure of the narrator who transmits the story does not experience it, i.e., his/her performance belongs to the story's discourse, not to the story. This would be the case of Sergi Dies' voice in *El Gran Vuelo*. On the other hand, Villafañe and Mínguez affirm that “[O]n occasion the narrator and the character coincide, in which case it is difficult to separate the universe from the discourse of the story because the story seems to be narrated and experienced by two superimposed figures, who occupy a different time and space” (2009, p. 195). According to G. Genette's terminology, this figure is a homodiegetic narrator because he/she tells the story as a participant of the diegesis, in the first person, instead of a heterodiegetic narrator who is not part of the story they are telling. If this character is also the protagonist of the story, he/she is called autodiegetic (1989, pp. 298-300). As Genette highlights, the relationship between the heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrator is necessarily linked to narrative levels: extradiegetic, a first-degree narrator who is not a character, and intradiegetic when he/she is a character, and the addressee is no longer a narratee or a reader, but another character in the first story (1989, pp. 284-285 and 302-303).

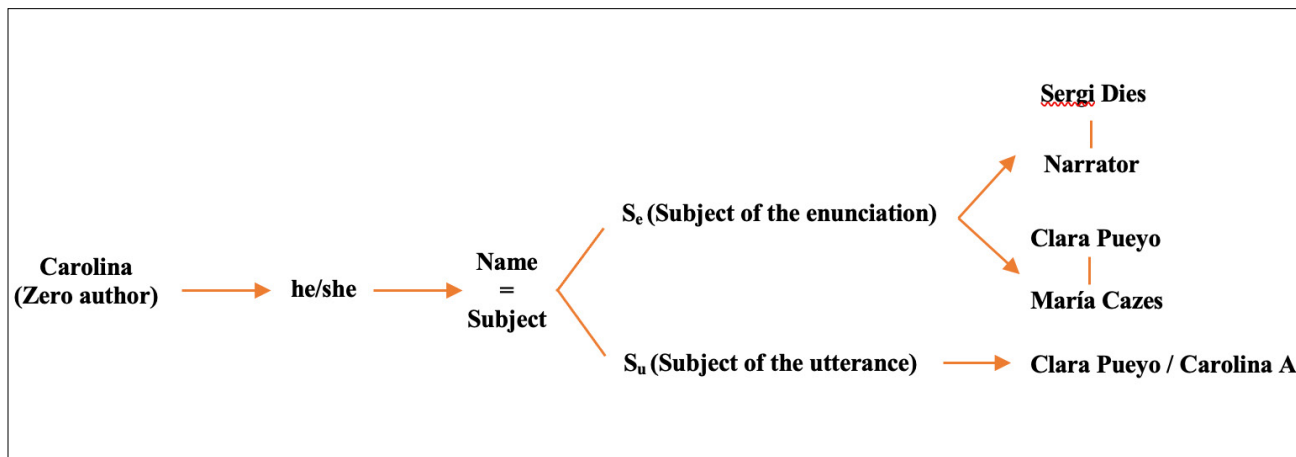
María Cazes' voice represents Clara Pueyo, who in turn is the narrator of her own story through her letters. Here we must not confuse the cinematographic narrator with the voice-over since it is a mechanism through which the narrator manifests himself/herself (Villafañe and Mínguez, 2009, p. 196). Still, it is not necessarily the only one. Visual elements such as photographs and home movies are a frequently used technique in documentaries, which are fundamental in *El Gran Vuelo* and in all of Carolina Astudillo's films. We cannot hear the voice of our dead. Still, the director makes use of memory by giving a voice to Clara's letters, which she never sent: “My stomach has been stronger than my heart, and my mouth must go to other springs to look for the sustenance it needs. I leave the Oasis next week” (min. 44:50). We can interpret two realms of her life through the two voices: on the one hand, the public sphere, composed of historical facts, aspects of the postwar period, the protagonist and her family's life events, which are told through the narrator's male voice. On the other hand, Clara's feelings, the most private parts of her life, such as her motivations to distance herself from her clandestine inmates in the Oasis, falling in love, and the dramatic death of her baby are told in a female voice. A double dialogic discourse is thus established between history and Clara Pueyo's story.

We take the mathematical code system designed by Julia Kristeva to identify how the subject of the narration [Author: Carolina Astudillo] disappears and becomes anonymous [A Zero] and is mediated through her characters [he: male narrator/she: Clara Pueyo]. We affirm that the director dialogues with the other-self as a mirror = with herself through

two confronted discourses: the public and private. Here we recognize one of the essay film's main characteristics: self-reflectivity [2] as a self-awareness tool. This dichotomy –public-history/private-stories– embodies that ambivalence Julia Kristeva mentions in which “at once ‘double of the lived’ (realism, epic) and ‘lived’ itself (exploration, linguistics, menipea) coexist” (1981, p.224). As aforementioned, Kristeva emphasises immanent dialogism in historical discourse. We consider that the male narrative voice in *El Gran Vuelo* does not take on an authoritative role of a superior being –God– typical of monological texts, but instead tries to disguise this ambivalence since we glimpse the director speaking through him: “The revolutionary mystique sacralises values considered to be male: courage, strength, toughness, and heroism. Doubt is a sign of weakness, devotion, sacrifice, and dedication to the cause are demanded” (min. 34:57).

Another case occurs at the beginning of the film when Dies introduces us to Clara's first photographs in a professional tone: “At that time it would have seemed unsolemn for her to smile in a photographer's studio. In those days, women didn't usually do that” (min. 02:47) and a few minutes later, the author merges into the subject of enunciation, making the narrator more recognisable: “Here, the disturbing thing is the other inmates' smiles. In the official photos, are they forced to smile? Or have they simply been taught since childhood to observe themselves when they're being observed” (min. 03:23). As Sánchez Noriega states, we can affirm that in *El Gran Vuelo*, “Cinema seems like a mythical space capable of identifications and projections of the subject” (2000, p.35). In this reflection about how women are conscious of being the object of observation from a young age; Carolina refers to one of the first foundational texts of feminist film theory, the widely known Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, an article written by Laura Mulvey and published by the magazine *Screen* in 1975. Through the use of these two voices, Carolina Astudillo becomes the subject of the enunciation in the male narrator –omniscient– and, on the other hand, a female character representing Clara Pueyo –first-person testimonies– and reveals herself as the subject of the utterance –self-reflectivity–.

Figure 3. Dialogic Scheme of *El Gran Vuelo* (2014) according to Julia Kristeva's communicative model in *Semiótica I*



Source: created by the author

*El Gran Vuelo* has a circular structure; it starts and ends with the only images that Clara Pueyo has conserved as a vindication of her existence, although we cannot hear her voice. Also, eleven different women's voices read the names of the prisoners who were shot in the Camp de la Bota between 1939 and 1940 as a tribute to them, some of which are Clara Pueyo's companions, the exact day of their death and age is also read. The youngest of them was 20 years old and the oldest 60: Carme, Eugenia, Cristina, Ramona, Neus, Dolors, Magdalena, Virginia, Eleonor, Assumpció, and Inés.

Figure 4: Three photographs of Clara Pueyo Jornet



Source: *El Gran Vuelo* (Carolina Astudillo, 2014)

In her next feature-length film, *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018), Carolina Astudillo transports us to sometime later, after Francisco Franco's death. She chooses to tell us about a historical period through the life of a woman whom she also never met and who, like Clara Pueyo, captured her concerns and feelings in writings. In this film, the director explores the years of the so-called transition in Spain, during which Ainhoa grew up, and compares them to the years of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile, where she lived:

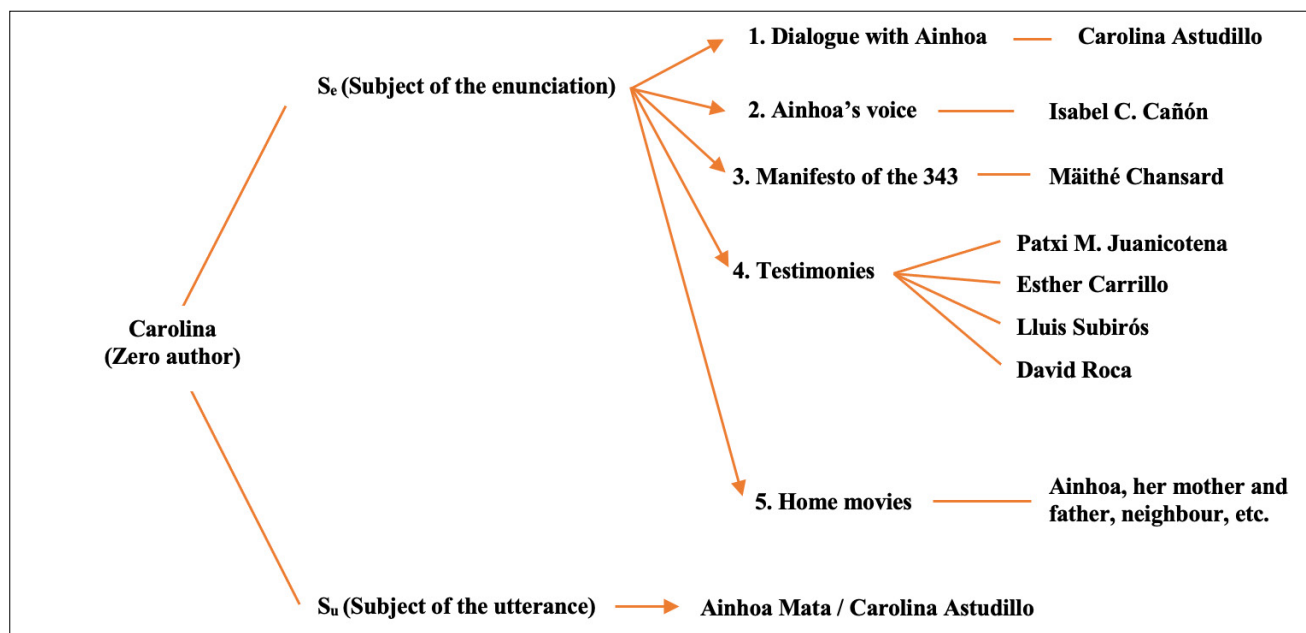
Dear Ainhoa, I have decided to write to you even though I know you will never read this letter. We never met, but we could have coincided. We belong to the same generation, similar and different at the same time. Both of us were born in the seventies, in countries separated by the immensity of an ocean, who lived under dictatorship (min. 01:52)

The early years of Ainhoa Mata Juanicotena's life were portrayed by her father, who was obsessed with recording everything with his small Super 8 camera: birthdays, vacations in Bera de Bidasoa, but above all, the beach: "What is it about summer that leaves a memory that does not fade over the years? Home movies filmed in the summer months abound [...] as if the most beautiful memories were condensed into one season, even love?" (01:35:00). Later on, the photographs and videos with friends will show us Ainhoa as rebellious. She has a punk look that is so characteristic of the crazy eighties. However, she would reveal her sensitive nature, depressive episodes, and feeling trapped through her diaries. Many young people from her generation also suffered this disillusionment of reaching adulthood after an adolescence closely linked to drugs, parties, and the hope for a bright future that would never come.

We hear Carolina's voice as the narrator in this film. The director questions the protagonist, invents a dialogue between the two and identifies deeply with her experiences to the point of confessing that she too decided to have an abortion, just as Ainhoa had done twice: "When I started to write the script for this film I got pregnant. I would never have imagined it [...] Two pink lines; it was as if I were in front of an abyss that seduced and terrified me. I imagine that you went through the same thing" (01:01:45). Here the narrator uses the first person to form part of the story that she is telling; she becomes a homodiegetic narrator identifying with the protagonist to the highest degree: I am like you.

Similarly, when she reads the names of the inmates who were shot in *El Gran Vuelo*, in this second feature-length film, Carolina Astudillo pays tribute to another group of women, comprising Simone de Beauvoir, Delphine Seyrig, Marguerite Duras, and Agnès Varda. The director asked Mäithé Chansard to read an excerpt from the *Manifesto of the 343* for her film, published on April 5, 1971, in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which contained a list with 343 French women's signatures, some of whom were well known, who had had an abortion when it was still illegal in their country. They wanted to vindicate the right to free abortion by exposing this before the courts.

Figure 5. Dialogic Scheme of *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018) according to Julia Kristeva's communicative model in *Semiótica I*



Source: created by the author

Just as Carolina dialogues with Ainhoa, she also does so with the people that knew her and whose testimonies appear in the film, including the voices of her brother Patxi, her friends Esther and Lluís, and David, a former partner. Two

interlocutor's voices were needed: adult Ainhoa's voice is interpreted by writer Isabel Cárdenas Cañón, author of *También eso era el Verano* (2014), a book that Carolina confesses greatly influenced her creative processes for the film. Isabel reads Ainhoa's diaries in her sweet voice. Alongside these are images shot by Carolina in Super 8 of the diaries of Sylvia Plath, Alejandra Pizarnik, Frida Kahlo, Anne Sexton, and Susan Sontag. Sánchez Noriega states that every character usually becomes his/her delegate in the text because an author constructs them. He also points out that "the existence of characters with common features is frequent in auteur cinema" (2000, p. 129). Although Noriega's alludes to recurring characters in some authors' cinema, whereby he focuses on giving examples in fiction films, we consider that this is also a tendency in documentary cinema and essay films, which often have a strong authorial presence. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in the chapter referring to narrative levels and voices in *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics* (2005) develops many of the concepts dealt with by Wayne C. Booth (1961, p. 67), such as an anthropomorphic entity of the author implied in the text, i.e., an alter ego. As Rimmon-Kenan states, this figure is the person from whom all narrative forms emanate from the text as a whole; she uses the term "governing consciousness" (2005, p. 89). She then refers again to Seymour Chatman's studies (1978, pp. 148-150) to clarify that this implied author is not the narrator's voice. The implied author has no voice, has no way of communicating verbally except through a narrator (2005, p. 90), and acts as a whole. He or she leaves his or her mark explicitly; however, it is always inevitably intentional. It will ultimately be the reader who has the responsibility to find and decode the implicit author's features to reach an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the text. According to Chatman (1978, p. 150), it should also be noted that the narrator and narratee are not figures that are always in each text, hence in the diagram reproduced above, they are in parentheses [Figure 2]. On the other hand, in the filmic text, the implied author, although voiceless, has a wide variety of resources that take shape in the mise-en-scene, understood as the act of "developing each element linked to its visual disembodiment" (Tranche, 2015, p. 50). Carolina Astudillo combines visual and auditory elements through the multiple voices in the film, emphasising that she is camouflaging her point of view in other characters-narrators.

## 5. Conclusions

Since her first short film, *De Monstruos y faldas* (2008), Carolina has become interested in constructing a film manifest or film recovery, which uses artistic construction to form women's genealogy. Even though two of her films centre on the prison in Les Corts and allude to Clara Pueyo Jornet<sup>2</sup> –*De Monstruos y faldas* and *El Gran Vuelo* (2014)–, all her works feature female characters with meaningful roles. In her last feature-length film, this identification with the story of an unknown character such as Ainhoa Mata Juanicotenca is made universal. It allows the following idea to be updated:

The idea of making this interweaving, this spider web between women's texts with women's experiences that are always present in diaries, in anonymous people's diaries as well as in well-known women writers' diaries, to relate it to Ainhoa's diary, made it almost political (C. Astudillo. Personal communication, interview January 13, 2021).

2 *Canción a una dama en la sombra* (2021) is currently in postproduction. It is her third feature-length film. The film revolves around the death of one of Clara Pueyo's brothers in Mauthausen. It focuses on the letters that he sent to his wife and the role of the women who waited like in the myth of Penelope.

The constant mix of testimonies and images in different formats show us Ainhoa's life in snippets. Several narrative lines are cut and reemerge, and contain reflections that do not seek a conclusion, just as it is impossible to know the actual reasons why the protagonist took her life. Thus, Carolina constructs an asystematic discourse [3] that is inherent in an essay film, which as Antonio Weinrichter states, "does not set out conclusions but rather provides reflections" (2007, p. 13).

As mentioned in the study's theoretical framework, several authors have reflected on the blurred boundaries between fiction and documentary, or more broadly, non-fiction (Carrera and Talens, 2018; Cerdán and Torreiro, 2007; Ward, 2005). Suzanne Keen refers to the paratextual indicator, taking Gerard Genette's term (1997), which qualifies a book before reading it, as a non-fiction narrative (2015, p. 126). Every paratext announces the author's intentions, whether from the production company and its strategy and from the text itself, generating expectations in the reader. Therefore, often the difference between fiction and non-fiction is purely pragmatic: "labelling and categorising performed by others shape most readers' certainties about the nonfiction they read (2015, p. 126).

If we apply this terminological dilemma to cinema; Mínguez provides three reasons why this categorisation can be problematic: because these concepts are transferred from the literary field; because of a desire or need to group diverse works, which is not appropriate in scientific study, and finally, because they are no longer applicable in the context of new technologies. Therefore their use should be reformulated (2014, p. 127, cited in Pérez Nieto, 2020, p. 728). Keen finds specific fiction traits in literary works that present a factual narrative, i.e., referred to the real world (p. 128). In their book *El Relato*, Pilar Carrera and Jenaro Talens warn that what is essential in classifying a film within non-fiction is not what it refers to, since a canonical Hollywood fiction production can deal with the same subject but how the story has been constructed to produce what they call "a referential effect" (2018, p. 50). They propose this term as an analytical tool, thus opening the way to future documentary film studies. However, they keep in mind the latitudes it is being carried out in: "And this has to do with the institutionalisation of modes of reception for different narrative typologies that make up what we can call the West of meaning" (2018, p. 50). We must refer to the arborescent system of Western thought developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Rizoma*, the need for three-root categorisation against the infinite relations of a rhizoma-channel form of thought: "Problem of writing: inaccurate expressions are always needed to designate something exactly [...]. If we resort to a dualism of models, it is to arrive at a process that would recuse any model" (1977, p. 47). At the heart of these classification dilemmas, we can find the essay film, which presents a hybridisation of formal and narrative characteristics. Therefore, it is not easy to reach a closed definition of what we have considered a form of filmmaking instead of a genre. David Bordwell highlighted the need to apply categories in 1989 –framing (p.146)– to film for its study; most of them are associated with the idea of genre. However, for Bordwell, film theory had not reached an agreement about the definition of such genres: "Indeed, all the results so far indicate that no such conditions can be found. Theorists have been unsuccessful in producing a coherent map of the system of genres" (1989, p. 149).

We currently consider that this is still in place. The application of strict categorisations to a sample of films impoverishes the analysis, eliminating certain peripheral aspects in each of them. The essay film comes about after posing a series

of questions from an author and prioritising the process of creation by questioning narrative and formal structures (Pérez Nieto, 2020, p. 729). Its formal freedom distances it from the fulfillment of a referential “effect of meaning”, as explained by Carrera and Talens (2018, p. 8-9), so it presents features of fiction. The referential level effects will depend on how the discourse has been organised: “What produces the belief isn’t the vision, nor what makes one see are the beliefs. Image and belief are only reached through a rhetorical act” (2018, p. 10).

In Carolina Astudillo’s cinema, we can add the characteristic of self-reflectivity [2] to an asystematic discourse studied concerning the essay film. In her films, priority is given to the film narrative’s construction process as a self-awareness tool, in an exercise of historical memory and family memory. Thus, the pooling of private materials such as home movies and photographs, both her own and others, builds a social portrait while revealing the author’s intimate environment. As Efrén Cuevas states (2010):

[T]he recycling of domestic footage can provide, usually from an autobiographical standpoint, illuminating insights into the human condition, clues for the reconstruction of personal identity, needed for that return to origins –to family roots– as a framework for the understanding of identity issues, even more, when those roots arise from ethnic, religious and national crossings (p. 26).

Finally, we want to highlight the characteristic of the essayistic pact [6] present in *El Gran Vuelo* (2014) and *Ainhoa, yo no soy esa* (2018). Like the rest of Carolina’s works, both titles appeal to the spectator with the systematic use of voice. As we have just referred to, the author gives away part of her intimate life, like her decision to have an abortion. She is generous and asks for the public’s active participation, thus establishing what we have called an essayistic pact. We can relate this communicative phenomenon with the theory of narrative empathy that Suzanne Keen developed in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007). Relating to the characters is based on a certain degree of empathy with the text’s situations. However, the characters are very different from the spectator. The reader’s or public’s empathy has its counterpart, as Keen establishes, in the author’s empathy (2007, p. 124-125).

Although Keen focuses her analysis of empathic relationships on fictional literature, we consider that a writer or creator develops a capacity for understanding in real life. This is because the creation of characters is also applicable to cinematographic works such as Carolina Astudillo’s films. The director sees and feels through research on real-life characters; she tries to understand them and dialogues with them in this process. It is through voice and images that the author brings us closer to past lives. Her empathy with these people is combined with our empathy for her, creating a communicative flow back and forth of identifications and reflections about the past in order to have a better understanding of the present.

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