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Framing the socially invisible: a transdisciplinary gender analysis of two documentary films on jazz

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Rubrica: [Reti creative](#)

Parole chiave: [audiovisual methods](#), [gender discrimination within jazz worlds](#), [gender equality in music education and professionalization](#), [jazz in documentary films](#)

Abstract

The article focusses on the analysis of two documentary films by Ramon Tort: *A film about kids and music. Sant Andreu Jazz Band* (2012) and *Andrea Motis. The silent trumpet. A story about the success of simplicity* (2018). The first film allows for an analysis of the Catalan jazz band as an agency of degendered socialization, teaching school-age boys and girls how to play jazz while being part of a group and building the self-confidence also allowing them to envisage a career as professional musicians; the second film, on the

launching of the international career of one of the previous ‘kids of the band’, shows the relation between socialization within the band and the successful breaking of the invisible barriers hampering women’s access and career-making within occupational fields still conceived as a male dominion – as in the case of jazz. The integration of standard tools of social research with an audiovisual methodology allows to identify the logic and dynamics of the cultural work framing a creative space, grounding both the educational and occupational experiences considered and their documentation, where the relation between jazz and gender is articulated following egalitarian principles.

1. Introduction [1]. The invisibility of women’s discrimination within jazz worlds

Despite a past and present offering copious examples of jazz female players and bands [2], non-singer jazzwomen have been largely neglected by orthodox musicology and music industry, which continues to present them as perpetual phenomena phenomenon [3], exceptions to the rule only temporarily transgressing the long-established patriarchal order. In investigating the reasons explaining the persistence of gender discrimination in democratic societies – formally recognising the right to equal treatment of women and men – social research has focussed on normalised practices invisibly reproducing stereotypes and biases. Several studies have unveiled the existence of ‘hidden curricula’ incorporating within educational structures stereotyped gender models – more or less consciously reinforced by the expectations of teachers, peers and parents – deviating girls’ educational paths from domains non compatible with conventional roles of women in society [4]. In the case of jazz, the first invisible hurdle is posed by the persistent influence of the traditional sex typing of musical instruments, discouraging girls from learning to play most instruments linked to jazz, such as horns, double bass or percussions [5]. Once girls nonetheless gain access to jazz education, other subtle mechanisms work to dissuade them from pursuing a career in the field. Female jazz students are often advised by teachers to divert their specialization to areas deemed more appropriate for their training, such as classical music classes [6]. Their male colleagues, on the contrary, are supported by greater expectations on their abilities and suitability for a career as jazzmen and tend to dominate social interactions in jazz classes or festivals, leaving girls on the side-lines [7]. These mechanisms foster feelings of insecurity and anxiety among female musicians, creating a ‘confidence gap’ resulting in self-restraining and self-excluding behaviours negatively affecting their career chances [8] and indirectly confirming those common-sense explanations of women’s marginality within jazz worlds as caused by their inborn incomprehension, incompatibility or even aversion for the *genre* [9].

In the following paragraphs we shall analyse a case study of educational and occupational experiences triggering the application of egalitarian principles to jazz worlds, as documented by two films realised by the director Ramon Tort. The article is structured as follows: first, we set into context and explain the rationale behind the choice of the case study and the adopted methods, matching authors’ disciplinary approaches – sociology and musicology and film studies – in a shared understanding of gender as a cultural construction, negotiated through social interaction and representations of audiovisual communication. Following this approach, each of the two films is analysed in detail in its double ability to offer alternative and more egalitarian and inclusive audiovisual narratives of jazz and, at the same time, to question how audiovisual media frame and represent processes of social construction of gender through musical practices. Conclusions point to the contribution of film documentaries both as a useful source for multidisciplinary analysis and as a medium conveying not only information but also the audiovisual representations of experiences legitimising the concrete possibility of alternative, more egalitarian and inclusive narratives of jazz and social life in general.

2. Methods

As a case study of educational and occupational experiences enhancing the application of egalitarian principles within jazz worlds, we consider two recent documentary films realised by the film director Ramon Tort: *A film about kids and music. Sant Andreu Jazz Band* (2012) and Andrea Motis. *The silent trumpet. A*

story about the success of simplicity (2018). The first documentary is about the Sant Andreu Jazz Band (SAJB), created in 2006 by the jazzman Joan Chamorro within the municipal school of music of Barcelona, to teach kids of different ages and sex how to play jazz while being part of a group. The second documentary reconstructs the transition of one of the most talented and enigmatic of those kids – the trumpet player, singer and composer Andrea Motis (Barcelona, 1995) -from brilliant pupil to international jazz musician.

Extensively praised as a best practice in the field of music and jazz education [10], the SAJB is here analysed as an agency of socialization activating mechanisms enhancing girls' legitimated access and full participation to jazz learning, laying the personal and musical groundwork allowing them to envisage, and possibly realise, a career as professional jazz musicians. This type of experience, while undoubtedly positive for all kids in the band, becomes particularly precious for young girls, more exposed to experience in their socialization the social dynamics creating a gender confidence gap representing one of the main obstacles to their entrance and career making within sectors traditionally conceived as a male dominion.

Both films were realised by the director, screenwriter, and producer Ramon Tort (L'Arboç, Spain, 1975). Specialised in the filming of creative processes, Tort filmed a video of the SAJB live concert at the Palau de la Música Catalana in 2009 and, overwhelmed by the intensity and strength of its educational project, decided to realise a documentary film on the band. The making of the first film, started in 2010 with a limited budget, took 18 months: released in 2012, it entered the circuit of commercial film distribution in Spain and received several awards at international film festivals. In this process Tort became acquainted with the band's director, Chamorro, and with the band's kids. Also the second documentary, released in 2018 after four years of filming and a crowdfunding campaign, obtained several awards in international festivals [11].

Besides discussing a significant experience of the international jazz scene from a gender perspective, our contribution aims to enriching a more traditional methodology, based on documental analysis, interviews and conversations with the musicians and other informed actors [12], with audiovisual methodologies. As discussed within film studies, a documentary film is never a neutral representation of the observed world but offers an audiovisual re-writing, a fiction (un)like any other [13]. Within jazz studies, for a long time focused mainly on sound recordings or representations of jazz in literature, fiction film, and art [14], this double value of documentary audiovisual sources was recently acknowledged as offering noteworthy evidence to analysis [15]. On the one hand, documentary audiovisual sources can offer contextual information on the creative process; on the other hand, they increasingly raise questions of how a jazz performance is presented to audiences, both in terms of the visual and the listening gaze [16].

Against the backdrop of performance theory, recent studies have discussed how the framing of the camera can focus the audience attention on particular instruments and musicians, shorten the distance to the stage through highly studied shots, as well as rehabilitate a relationship with the public, for instance including it in the shooting [17]. From this perspective, the transdisciplinary analysis of documentary films offers the possibility to scrutinize in depth multiple dimensions of actors' interaction escaping to verbal communication analysis [18], as framed within creative spaces where the relation between jazz and gender is defined according to egalitarian principles, both at the educational and occupational level. Moreover, in so doing, it bridges a gap with studies on the performances of jazz women in film and television devoted to case studies from the first half of the 20th century [19].

3. Case study 1: *A film about kids and music. Sant Andreu Jazz Band (2012)*

The SAJB was created in 2006 by the jazzman Joan Chamorro within the municipal school of music of Barcelona as a combo class for kids ranging from 6 to 18 years. The project rapidly reached important achievements and grew in popularity, also through the concerts performed throughout Spain and abroad, rapidly diffused worldwide through the use of social networks [20]. However, the main focus of the film is not jazz: «the main theme is education: the importance of education as an instrument to model people» [21]. Participation in the SAJB, in fact, seems to influence the behaviour, beliefs and values of the kids, besides their music learning, in a particularly delicate phase of the shaping of their inner self. Tort openly states his argument in the end titles, once having brought evidence of the experience to the audience: «When they

leave the project to make way for younger children some continue as musicians and other don't, but they all have learned to share and, above all, to believe in themselves» [min. 00:01:33]. This process, undoubtedly positive for all kids, becomes particularly precious for young girls, more exposed to experience in their music training the dynamics creating the confidence gap representing one of the main obstacles to their entrance and career making within jazz worlds. In the following analysis those elements will be considered distinguishing on two aspects: the mechanisms through which Chamorro's project allows to degender musical practices in jazz education and the audiovisual strategies adopted by Tort to convey to the audiences the project's strengths.

3.1. Degendering jazz education: kids' socialization within the SAJB

No child prodigies: building personal resources within a musical ensemble

Part of the force of the documentary relies on offering the audience audiovisual evidence of the proficiency, passion, understanding with which the SAJB kids play jazz music – usually associated with adulthood. In spite of this, the 'child prodigy' or exceptional natural talent rhetoric is carefully escaped. As well explained by the band leader, Joan Chamorro, each of the kids is presented as having a potential to be released through tailor made educational paths, sustained by appropriate incentives and rewards for his/her work.

Joan Chamorro [min. 00:32:00]: Talking to people, they tell you «How lucky you are to have 40 talents!» (...) And I say: «No, no I don't have the talents» (...) I think all the kids are potentially, or most of them with few exceptions – because they have some problems, because they haven't heard music at home, or never danced... because they have never experienced music as an attractive thing, they haven't had the chance – but most of the kids have the potential. They are kids that, when properly encouraged, they could be in the SAJB without being especially talented. Kids have lots of capabilities: than one of them has something special (...) so maybe there's someone talented but, in general, the group is formed by normal kids who have been encouraged in at way.

The SAJB project proves that, with the right encouragement and upbringings, kids learn to believe in themselves, in the possibility that they can learn to play jazz and to play it well. The fact the everyone is potentially good and, that – through perseverance and determination – can make it, gives faith to the kids in themselves, but also makes them responsible for their own achievements or inaccuracies. The film shows Chamorro in several occasions switching between a playful and familiar approach, to a more disciplined and professional one: when preparing kids for a concert rehearsals he recommends them to be punctual and serious: «I mean serious as an attitude, not as being serious!» [min. 00:27:59]. Both individually or collectively, kids are reminded that, as band members, they are expected to exercise and get ready for the concerts as a matter of respect – for the other members, for the director, for the side players, for the audience. Those rules empower kids, feeling their contribution to be important to the band as a whole, and helps them to build their self-esteem. The tangible results achieved by the band, boosted through the public concerts, offer them an optimistic view on the goals they may achieve in life. In this way the kids build a set of personal resources, that – as we shall see – represents a precious means to mediate as adult their relation between work requirements and personal well-being[22].

Breaking the sex typing of jazz instruments

From the point of view of gender analysis, the first element to catch the eye of the viewer is the lack of sex typing of instruments within the SAJB, where we see girls flanking boys in playing all jazz instruments, typically associated to masculinity: trumpet, trombone, saxophone, double bass, guitar. Socialization within an organizational context avoiding sex-typed associations with musical instruments normalises girls' access to all music training and career paths, where they can feel included as legitimate members, rather than as exceptions to the rule. Several of the young girls seen in the film are today building a sound career within jazz[23]. As confirmed by Andrea Motis in our interview, the experience within the SAJB allows 'not to feel strange' as female jazz musicians:

Andrea Motis: Yes, [I was in the SAJB] from 11 to 21. And there we were more girls [than boys], a lot of girls... I think that this is one of the reasons why I don't feel strange [as a woman] for playing jazz. Because I was grown up and learning with a band where there were a lot of girls in it. Only in my own quintet I'm [now] the only woman, but not in the band where I used to be.

The documentary, following the SAJB in its various moments (study, rehearsals, concert, leisure time), inserts within a choral representation of the band more intimate and in-depth portraits of some of its members, mainly those with a soloist role within the ensemble, mostly girls[24]. Among them, the Armengou sisters (6 and 9 years old), both playing the trumpet within the band, where – as it happens in numerous families – the elder one takes care of the youngest. The two sisters are also viewed during their leisure time, as in a drawing course, or at home: a special look is offered to the youngest one, surprising for the proficiency and responsibility shown in the handling, the manipulation and the taking care of her trumpet and for the professional spontaneity when flanking with her solos famous jazzmen in front of wide audiences [see [sequences n. 1](#) and [n. 2](#)].

Modelling towards equal, diverse and inclusive social interaction

The charisma of the band director is certainly at the centre of the SAJB, to the extent that commentators have identified the only weak point of the project in its difficult sustainability for future generations[25]. Chamorro's method starts with the idea of the naturalness of music learning through listening and imitation, gradually supported by notions of harmony and more structured technical exercises as the kids grow. The asymmetry of power inbred in the educational relation is reframed in a modelling strategy, typical of apprentice education, inserted within a directive-interactive architecture[26], making room for flexible interaction between teacher and pupils, but leaving clear the distinction of roles. This is visually perceived in the film also in situations external to the music school context, as when the kids have fun in a swimming pool, while Chamorro keeps an eye on them from a distance [min. 00:47:03].

Although not explicitly acknowledged in the project or in the film, one of the most challenging aspects of the SAJB is its overcoming of gender stereotypes in education. In the film we do not see Chamorro or the other teachers as having different expectations from boys and girls: all kids are constantly encouraged to improve, challenged to raise the bar of their engagement and gratified for their achievements, through their involvement in the concerts or recreational activities. This process, however, is differently handled by Chamorro carefully balancing dosage and modes of playful attention and professional discipline according to age and personality of each member (cuddling the youngest, encouraging the shy one, scolding out the lazybones).

Joan Chamorro [min. 00:52:00]: I work knowing that every student is different. Not all plants bloom in the same period, nor in the same days and with the same intensity and they don't need the same care. It's the

same with the pupils.

Gender balance is seen at work also in peer group interaction: we see boys and girls of the band in great harmony and confidence when playing music, but also when sharing their time together. During concerts, all kids wear the same gender-neutral outfit (a black t-shirt with the band logo and jeans), avoiding the sexualisation of their bodies. This holds true even when girls are exposed to audiences in their more stereotypical role of jazz singers[27], that never adopts the flirty alluring moves demanded from the ‘canaries’[28]. Similarly, the film director’s regard, although driven by an aesthetical search celebrating the beauty of youth, music, nature, and life, does not adopt an exploitative ‘male gaze’[29] when portraying the adolescent girls of the band, while he contributes to reassessing female agency through the images and sounds of their performance as instrumentalists[30].

3.2. Framing gender and jazz in mediatized performance

Body and sound: gender and music generation

According to Chion (2009), audiovisual recordings of musical performances present a particularly complex nature in the case of instrumental performances where – differently from singing performances – there are greater difficulties in portraying the emission source of the sound, also in relation to the musician’s body, often leading to a very fragmented style in filming[31]. Chion’s observations fit rather well in the case of performances with instruments of the classical *virtuoso* tradition, such as the piano or the violin, but seem to be less valid for wind instruments, sharing common features with vocal performance. In both the latter cases, in fact, the sound-generating principle resides in the column of air finding an exit in the mouth of the singer or in the instrument’s mouthpiece. Therefore, both singing and playing a wind instrument are united by a crucial feature defining the process of performance mediatization: the musician’s figure offers, through the same shot, the image of the bodily source of a given musical sound, of the physical labour needed to emit it and of the expression associated to the interpretation of its meaning. The distance of this image from the stereotyped view of femininity – not contemplating technical proficiency, stamina, freedom in interpretation, alteration of grace and composure – was among the reasons historically preventing women from playing wind instruments.

The vocal-instrumental commonalities are fundamental to our perspective, given that Tort filmed a big band consisting only of wind instruments, except for the rhythm section, associated indiscriminately between males and females. This fact not only involves a similar strategy in approaching the performers through the camera and representing their music-making, but also brings about an interconnection between the domains of singing and instrumental playing, two universes that in jazz are often kept in distinct gendered areas. Although voices in the SAJB, as already noted, are almost exclusively associated with the female gender, Tort seems to rehabilitate the space for an equal comparison between different types of musicians. This process occurs on two levels: firstly, the director establishes a common audiovisual strategy of filming performers among all the students of the SAJB, whether instrumentalists or singers; secondly, he adopts an insistent use of American shots and close-ups for both young musicians and professionals involved in the concert, suggesting cross-cutting relationships in the evaluation of the performance. Reasoning about the choice of shots means questioning the stylistic-formal traits through which an audiovisual text constructs meaning and transmits it to the viewer, in a continuous negotiation between performers, mediatization of their actions and the viewer’s responses.

These audiovisual commonalities show the crucial role of singers and instrumentalists’ face and their mouth to reveal how sound, whether vocal or instrumental, is produced. From a gender perspective, this is not a secondary issue. Historically, in cinema and visual culture, brass mouthpieces in feminine lips constituted a

taboo to be resolved through the composition of images responding to available stereotypes on femininity: an angelic distance, an alluring pose, or a flaunted virility [32]. On the contrary, *A film about kids and music. Sant Andreu Jazz Band* rehabilitates a practical look on mouthpieces, stressing their technical and mechanical role. The camera's proximity reveals the young students' efforts, the care in putting together different parts of their instrument, the materiality of the performance process (see, for instance, the young saxophone player in [sequence n. 3](#)). In so doing, the film avoids the gendered look typical of the past, and it shows the physicality of playing, stressing the connection between breath, instrument, and sound production. In line with Chamorro's educational approach, moreover, during rehearsals, Tort also captures the more relaxed aspects related to instrumental playing as smiles surfacing behind the instrument, or how, among younger students, the mouthpieces become a sort of toy to play with. Nevertheless, desexualised images convey a direct link between instrumental devices and technical proficiency.

Fading the director: the camera's focus on kids and music

As stated from the documentary's title, Tort intended to realise a film on kids and music. In order to do so, however, he needed to resize the role of the SAJB's charismatic director, from leading to supporting actor. This is realised by the film director through a series of framing choices gradual diminishing of Chamorro's presence in the transition from learning and rehearsals to the final concert performance. During the rehearsals, the camera insists on his figure, through close-ups isolating his face but also, paradoxically, emphasizing his leading role also in his visual absence but vocal presence in the voice off, as adopting his view when guiding the kids in their study and preparatory stages of the concert. During the concert performance, conversely, Chamorro's figure is reabsorbed within the band in a role functional to the performers, while the kids (and their music) become the real focal point of Tort's camera. This aspect is made possible first and foremost in the stage space's proxemic organization during the concert, encouraging interaction between students and professional jazzmen in their positioning on stage.

Tort's 'cultural work' has a central weight in putting the musicians' relationships at the centre of the audiovisual representation. It is no coincidence that the camera insists on frontal shots, full-length or half-length, enclosing within the same frame the professional jazzmen and the kids, placing everyone on the same level and defining musical performance as a cooperative endeavour. This relationship is particularly evident during the performance of *Undecided*, which involves during the solos of the 6-year-old girl at the trumpet (Elsa Armengou) and the two jazzmen at the sax and trombone (respectively Jesse Davies and Wycliffe Gordon). In the narrative logic of the documentary this performance follows the above-mentioned sequence picturing the girl while rehearsing and taking care of the instrument, establishing a clear link between engagement in studying (following Chamorro's guidance and encouragement) and the achievements reached at the concert. The camera amplifies not only the gender but also the generational gap between the musicians, made manifest also by the enormous vertical imbalance in height and size; however, when the camera incorporates the three performers in a single shot, the spectator is invited to grasp the two-sidedness of the relationship, also emerging through gestures of reciprocal recognition and appreciation, mixed with the amazed glances addressed by the adult and big jazzmen to their young and small female colleague [see [sequence n. 2](#)].

0:00 / 0:54



0:00 / 1:17



Legitimizing a local jazz band within the jazz world

Another field where audiovisual strategies prove to be of crucial importance in the cultural work of framing and constructing discourses on music education and work is the process of legitimation of a combo class of a municipal music school in Southern-Europe within the international art world of jazz [33]. This process is realised within Chamorro's project through the flanking of the SAJB not only with well-known musicians of the Catalan jazz scene, but also with international guest stars, primarily black American musicians [34], symbolically representing the authentic jazz tradition. In Tort's documentary the process of authentication is principally enacted in two ways: musically, through to the gestures and glances of approval directed by the jazzmen to the kids during concert performance, as captured by the camera; verbally and non-verbally, through the words of praise for the project taken from the interviews realised with the American jazzmen and from their informal dialogues with Chamorro, as filmed by Tort. Chamorro's manifest emotion following Gordon's words of appreciation highlights – even in the artificiality of mediatization, disclosed by his furtive glance into the camera – the relevance of the judgments of authoritative figures in specific art worlds in evaluating compliance to the standards and values required for legitimate access and permanence within it [35] and the contribution of audiovisual media in consensus building, a mechanism also used in the film cherishing Andrea Motis as international jazzwoman.

4. Case study 2: *Andrea Motis. The silent trumpet. A story about the success of simplicity* (2018)

When working at his documentary on the SAJB Tort became acquainted with Andrea Motis, one of the most brilliant kids of the band, since then pursued by the music industry, but only gradually and guardedly embarking on the path towards musical professionalism. For several years Tort follows with his camera Motis's footsteps, witnessing her access to the network of international jazz musicians. The sobriety, reflectivity and balance shown by Motis in managing her career through a constant dialogue with her entourage (from Chamorro to her father, from teachers and colleagues to students), deconstructs the stereotypical image of the jazz star as an adult heterosexual male, solitary genius, leading an exceptional life of dissipation and excesses. The following analysis identifies the main mechanisms at work in Motis' path towards a degendered professionalisation in jazz and the audiovisual strategies adopted by Tort to convey to the audiences how this contributes to break the 'brass ceiling' [36] with reserved simplicity.

4.1. Degendering professionalisation paths in jazz

Managing the private and the public self within music industry

The film on the launching of the Andrea Motis' international career offers a portrait of the young jazz musician breaking the barriers distinguishing onstage and backstage, professional, and personal life. We see Motis travelling, dressing up for concerts, doing interviews, rehearsing, chatting with colleagues and friends, listening to music, recording, studying and teaching, reading messages and writing letters, knitting and dancing, all activities contributing to present the musician's life in its simple 'ordinariness' [37], rather than in its exceptional glamour. The balance found by the young musician in preserving her inner self (seen as reflective, concentrated, and reserved) while managing her professional self (demanding her exposure to the public's gaze and to the stress, anxiety and fatigue linked to stage performance) is the result of a gradual and strenuous learning process, involving doubts on her willingness to be involved within a music industry pressing artists to compete in a race with increasingly higher demands.

Andrea Motis [min. 00:42:00]: We believe the farther you go, the better. How many people [musicians] ended committing suicide or overdosing? Because they need external substances to put up with the concerts or to get drunk to avoid anxiety. I've had many doubts on whether I really wanted to expose myself – be a public person, do concerts and so on (...) This has created me problems that I have overcome, little by little, listening to myself.

The personal resources to react to those pressures, such as self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem, and optimism, adapting to job demands while preserving control over her own physical and emotional well-being, are related in the film to Motis' socialization within the SAJB, as well as in her own family environment. As example of the solidity of the educational model to which Motis was socialized, Tort reconstructs a significant episode of her career. Recurring to some material recorded for the SAJB film, he shows us a teenage Andrea referring, halfway between flattered and puzzled, about the offers she just received both from popular competitions (as the Eurovision contest) and well-known jazz labels (as the Blue Note), still weighted by Chamorro and her parents. Seven years later, when Tort follows Motis in the process of recording of her album for the jazz label Impulse!, Chamorro recalls how the tough choice to refuse early tempting offers was guided by the concern of not exposing to the pressures of the market industry the young Andrea, not yet fully equipped with the personal resources to effectively manage the pressures and strains deriving from the music industry.

Joan Chamorro [min. 00:15:00]: When you are 13, 14, 15 years old you are still looking for who you really are. We [her parents and I] decided that if she ever was meant to reach something it should be when she would have matured quite a bit more, both in the artistic and personal level.

Besides Chamorro, as generous and wise mentor, another non-stereotypical man shelters Andrea as she launches her international career, namely her father and manager: throughout the film we see Ramon Motis as a silent presence taking care of all non-musical aspects of her work (answering her emails, sewing her dress, ironing her clothes for the concert) [see [sequence n. 4](#)].

0:00 / 0:26



Escaping the gift logic: building a musical career through study and research

Another step in the path towards professionalisation as jazz musician for Motis is to come to terms with a definition of talent as an innate, natural, special gift. This definition, rooted within the romantic concept of the creative genius[38], is displaced by Motis with an idea of professionalism in music grounded on the educational model offered within the SAJB, built through continuous and passionate engagement in work (through study and research) to improve expertise and offer audiences, as a cultural mediator, jazz music at its best.

Andrea Motis [min. 00:33:00]: Once people started to take notice of me I thought: «I would never pay to see myself playing!». I don't know if I am gifted. I try to play and recreate this beautiful genre that is jazz in the most humble and simple way. Then people discover new things through me. This is lovely. Maybe someday I'll have something special, but I still don't know what it is.

The focus on her professional competence, rather than on natural gifts, also leads Motis to avoid the music industry mechanisms leading female artists to the sexual self-objectification of their image, in order to reach larger audiences. Motis never adopts sexually alluring clothes or poses in her records' covers or during performances, without hiding her beauty, adapted to the dress code of the venue (from casual to more formal), or her passion for activities traditionally associated to femininity (from ballet dancing to knitting).

Taking the lead: the silent breaking of the brass ceiling

The transition of Motis from talented pupil of the SAJB to international jazz musician is displayed in the film through her growing agency in the shift towards roles associated with the new phases of her professional and life course. In the last part of the film, she shares with a correspondent a reflection on travelling while on tour, that she metaphorically extends to relations.

Andrea Motis [min. 00:01:11]: It's interesting to think that as you move away from some places you get close to others. The same thing applies to people. This feeling of leaving things behind...

As travelling implies to leave behind one place to get close to another one, life leads us to detach ourselves from some people, to reach other ones, reframing our role within relationships and organizations. We thus see Andrea becoming the leader of the quintet originally led by Chamorro, but also teaching, playing and travelling all around the world with new colleagues and ensembles, including her partner, guiding with her the musical procession of the South American youth orchestra in the sequence closing the film [39] [see [sequence n. 5](#)].

0:00 / 0:45



4.2. Building musical agency through audiovisual strategies

Differentiating audiovisual strategies

The two documentary films here analysed undoubtedly share similarities, linked to the group of individuals filmed, the field of jazz music and the stylistic features of the director. However, they are clearly distinguished by strategies responding to different aims: *The silent trumpet* offers a composite and still open portrait of Motis, through the multiplicity of her interests, work commitments and everyday experiences. Although Tort favours also in this film very close-up shots during musical performances – showing us the face of Motis and her musical partners – musical filming is only a small part of the story of the multifaceted character of the young musician, emerging from the process of emancipation from her mentor. The film follows a trajectory beginning with the fundamental experience within the SAJB of Motis and ends with her presentation as a teacher herself, in a long processional sequence in the woods at the head of another kids' orchestra guided with her partner in an itinerant musical performance of a piece composed by herself (*Save the Orangutan*) [see [sequence n. 5](#)].

A substantial difference between the documentaries lies in the balances between sound and image: *A film about kids and music* presents relatively linear relationships, using almost exclusively diegetic sounds, whether voices, noises or music; *The silent trumpet*, on the contrary, adopts a more elaborate sound editing opening up the nondiegetic domain, without, however, ever resorting to an original music score or to pre-existing music. Indeed, Tort exploits the songs interpreted by Motis, mostly from live performances inserted

during the documentary, as narrative devices to move between diegetic levels. Thus, he gives Motis' trumpet and singing voice an audiovisual autonomy beyond the materiality of the mediatized performance, setting alternatives paths of signification that relocate her voice within cinematic discourse. The construction of the performer's agency is carried out on several levels, two of which are characterized by a strong metalinguistic mark. The most evident one is the use of footage, shot directly by Motis herself through a dirty and retro visual grain typical of Super 8, who presents us her point of view during work trips. This audiovisual material not only represents a series of subjective shots, but it offers us an alternative view that rehabilitates the operative and narrative capacity of Motis herself, the object and subject of the cinematic representation.

Gaining musical agency through feminine voice-over

Another strategy of a metalinguistic matrix to assert Motis' agency is the employment of her songs as an ambiguous device between nondiegetic and voice-over functions. Voice-over has always constituted a vast cinematic issue, especially in the documentary field[40]. Most of the critiques on its often didactic and conventional use can be brought back to Bill Nichols' definition of the 'expository mode' «as didactic, the oldest and most primitive form of nonfiction film»[41]. It is no coincidence that traditional framing of voice-over as a sort of 'voice of God' has been closely associated to the patriarchal and masculine order underlying its use. Tort's documentary clearly avoids this normative model in its choice to adopt as voice-over fragments from Motis' diaries read by herself; however, he ends up entrusting with voice-over also Motis' singing with the task of commenting images, thus using a hybrid expressive channel, halfway between the verbal and instrumental domains.

This modality is particularly evident in the track introducing the documentary during the opening credits. The process of approaching the leading character takes place through a series of blurry, almost indecipherable shots of Motis as she knits and through her voice intoning *Nearness of you*. This nondiegetic use, which expresses through lyrics and Motis' performance a sense of intimacy, proleptically problematizes the role of her singing voice-over and its relationship to the images with which it is associated. The use of the singing voice-over in the film can be seen on one side as reproducing a descriptive modality typical of the conventional use of the divine voice-over (as, for example, when we hear her singing *Ain't No Sunshine* as she walks the streets of a sunny New York, or *Summertime* when enjoying the contemplative quiet before the sea). On the other hand, the use of her voice modulated as a singing medium has a function of self-empowerment for Motis herself, as a female performer offering her particular point of view on the world through her music.

Conversely, considering the shifting balances between singing and instrumental playing, the blurring between nondiegetic and voice-over domains also invests in these standards' instrumental sections. Motis' trumpet is also employed beyond diegetic concert venues shooting, intervening as an alternative (instrumental) voice upon images. In so doing, these audiovisual strategies contribute to defining Motis' musical identity as a hybrid performer and challenge how her 'voices' can inform and transform non-musical venues.

Portraying the artist's freedom in gender and music performativity

The relativization of the voice-over status realized by Tort reaches its peak in the last piece played in the film: *My favourite things*, the famous song from the musical *The sound of music* (1959), and performed as a standard throughout jazz history, especially after the interpretation by John Coltrane[42]. Motis' rendition is functional to mark three different audiovisual materials mixed up together in parallel editing: a live performance together with Chamorro, at the baritone sax, and the Simfonica Del Valles Orchestra, conducted by Rubén Gimeno; footage from a studio recording session of the song with Motis at the microphone and Chamorro and others behind the mixing console; and a Motis' ballet lesson, where joy is transparently expressed by her face [see [sequence n. 6](#)]. In the first two cases, the piece intervenes in a diegetic key,

without defining with certainty which is the actual performance (are we listening to the studio version or the live one?). The impossibility of clearly distinguishing the actual place of emission of the piece is also functional to what seems to be the proper accompanying function of the piece. Ballet dance's musical scoring shows how, through a singing voice-over, Motis can express her performative ability – in the Austinian sense of the term – to embody her way, as a singer, as a trumpeter, as a performer, to feel and live jazz music. Motis' list of *favourite things* intervenes as a sound curtain to her last words: «It's clear to me that I play music because I enjoy it a lot, not because I seek fame. I don't think about what may come. I'd like to think I'll still be free to choose» [min. 1:16:20].

0:00 / 1:43



5. Conclusions

In artistic worlds, more than in other fields, educational and occupational choices are often seen as following the presence of exceptional individual talent, conceived as a natural gift. This notion tends to cover the structural nature of gender inequalities in music and to present women's marginalization within jazz worlds as a personal matter related to sexual differences, rather than a social issue to be redressed. The documentary films here analysed, however, offer evidence of the fact that, when socialised to degendered and inclusive musical practices – avoiding the sex typing of instruments, while working on the development of personal and organizational-based self-confidence – girls may build a professional career in jazz also as proficient instrumentalist and not only as singers. The same resources appear to be crucial in allowing the breaking of the invisible barriers still hampering women's career-making within jazz, as in other fields structurally arranged according to a patriarchal order.

The integration of different disciplinary approaches in our analysis of the audiovisual material has allowed to identify the logic and dynamics of the cultural work contributing to frame and convey creative spaces, where the relation between jazz and gender is defined according to egalitarian principles, both at the educational and occupational level. From this point of view, film documentaries may represent a precious source offering both scholars and larger audiences not only information on best practices, but also audiovisual representations of valuable and intense experiences, legitimising, through mediatization, the concrete possibility of alternative, more egalitarian and inclusive narratives of jazz, and social life in general.

Footnotes

[1] The authors would like to thank Alfonso Casalini, Pauline Cornic and the anonymous referees for their precious feedback on a previous version of the article. Although the article is the result of shared reflections among the authors, the original writing of the paragraphs can be attributed in the following way: C. Casula (§1, §3 introduction, §3.1, §4.1, §5), M. Cosci (§2, §3.2, §4 introduction, §4.2).

[2] Dahl, 1984; Hindle Hazen & Hazen, 1987; McGee, 1994; Tucker, 2009. See also the *Internet Bandsman's Everything Within* website (<http://www.ibew.co.uk>, last visit 06/03/22), where Gavin Holman has

documented hundreds of female artists active during late 19th and early 20th century as instrumental soloists, or members of family groups, amateur or professional bands and orchestras, focussing in particular on female brass artists in Germany, the US and the UK.

[3] Tucker, 2000, p. 330.

[4] Kelly, 1982; Wajcman, 1991; Acker, 1994; Skelton, 2002.

[5] Steblin 1995; Alexander, 2011; Casula, 2021 and *forthcoming*.

[6] McKeage, 2004, 2014; Wehr, 2015.

[7] Steinberg, 2001. A similar ‘hidden curriculum’ pattern was identified as grounding the persistent exclusion of women from the STEM area (Warrington & Younger, 2000).

[8] Wehr-Flowers, 2006; Björck and Bergman, 2018; Buscatto, 2021.

[9] An example of this trope is given by a verse of Paolo Conte’s song *Sotto le stelle del jazz* (*Under the jazz stars*), where he sings: «Le donne odiavano il jazz, non si capisce il motivo» (*Women hated jazz, we don’t understand the motive*). The relation is expressed in opposite terms («*Jazz hates women*») by the jazz pianist Rita Marcotulli, voicing the difficult integration of female musicians within the jazz world, particularly in Italy (Pedrinelli, 2011).

[10] The SAJB and its director have received several prizes in international competitions: a well-documented focus on the educational model in the blog of the Swedish expert in educational issues Bengt-Ove Boström (<http://musik.pm/> last visit: 06/03/2022).

[11] Cosci, 2021.

[12] An interview with Andrea Motis and conversations with Joan Chamorro and Ramon Motis were realised during the Nora Jazz Festival (Pula, 1-13 August 2018); email correspondence with the director Ramon Tort (who has authorised the use of the sequences for this article) occurred between 2019 and 2020. We wish to thank them all for their kind participation to the research.

[13] «Documentaries are fictions with plots, characters, situations, and events like any other. They offer introductory lacks, challenges, or dilemmas; they build heightened tensions and dramatically rising conflicts, and they terminate with resolution and closure. They do all this with reference to a “reality” that is a construct, the product of signifying systems, like the documentary film itself. Like the constructed realities of fiction, this reality, too, must be scrutinized and debated as part of the domain of signification and ideology»; Nichols, 1991, p. 107.

[14] For example, see Gabbard, 1995; 1996.

[15] Heile, Elsdon & Doctor, 2016.

[16] Kramer, 2002, pp. 68-99; Cohen, 2012.

[17] Kershaw, 2002 [1992]; Cook, 2014; Elsdon, 2016.

[18] Clark & Morriss, 2017. Although the authors share the comprehension of the original dialogues in Catalan, the quotes reported in the text are from the English subtitles.

[19] Tucker, 2000; 2009; McGee, 2009.

[20] Most of the news and videos can be retrieved through Facebook in the official profile of the Sant Andreu Jazz Band, the personal profile of its director Joan Chamorro, and in the profile of the international network Friends of Sant Andreu Jazz Band.

[21] Email conversation of the authors with Ramon Tort.

[22] Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007.

[23] To name a few of them: Alba Armengou, Elia Bastida, Joana Casanova, Magali Datzira, Alba Estaban, Eva Fernandez, Carla Motis, Rita Payes, Abril Sauri (Berman, 2020).

[24] Tort gave a camera to Chamorro and several kids of the band, in order to allow them to film what they were doing in their daily life in a more direct way, without the direct control of the director's eye, as in a sort of audiovisual diary.

[25] See Boström's articles at <http://musik.pm/> (last visit: 06/03/2022).

[26] Bonaiuti, 2018, p. 46.

[27] Singing is the only case of gender unbalance seen in the film on the SAJB, where performing singers are all girls. However, this seems to be more related to Chamorro's preference for the 'classical jazz' repertoire, including 'jazz ladies' songs (Billie Holliday, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald) than to gender biases (in fact the male voice accompanying the girls is that of the trumpet player Ricard Gili, imitating Louis Armstrong's style).

[28] Tucker, 2009.

[29] Mulvey, 1973.

[30] As confirmed by Chamorro in a conversation with one of the authors (CC), the voice is seen as another instrument to be played by band members, whose approach to polistrumentality is encouraged.

[31] Chion, 2009, pp. 413-414.

[32] Tucker, 2000; 2009, pp. 17-21.

[33] Lopes, 2002.

[34] The guest stars include jazzmen from the USA (Jasse David, Willife Gordon, Terrel Stafford) and from Catalogna (besides Chamorro, Ricard Gili, Esteve Pi, Ignasi Terraza, Josep Traver). On vitality of the Catalan jazz scene see also Casals, 2020.

[35] Becker, 1984; Moore, 2012; Wagner, 2015.

[36] The expression (Tucker, 2009) adapts to the jazz context the 'glass ceiling' image, referring to the informal, invisible barriers concretely hampering the advancement in a profession of women or other marginalised social groups, thus creating vertical segregation in the labour market.

[37] Perrenoud & Bois, 2017.

[38] For an overview on the genesis of this concept and its institutional legitimisation, see, among others, Bataille, Bertolini, Casula & Perrenoud 2020.

[39] The scene is taken from a summer camp in Chile, where Motis taught for the school of music Papageno (<https://www.papageno.cl/>), together with her partner, the violinist Christoph Mallinger, with whom she had a baby in autumn 2020.

[40] Chion, 1999; Bruzzi, 2006 [2002]; Rogers, 2014; Pramaggiore & Honess Roe 2018.

[41] Bruzzi, 2006 [2002], p. 48.

[42] Morlon, 1999, pp. 106-121; Zenni, 2007, p. 278.

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