

Gijón 2006

Walking The Straight Line By Diego Brodersen

It might appear that nothing much happens in *The Straight Line* (*La línea recta*)... but there's a lot going on underneath its surface.

One could say the same of quite a few contemporary films, but it comes as a major surprise in the context of Spanish cinema, which is largely split between academic, psychologically-oriented dramaturgy and formulaic, TV-influenced blockbusters.

So, what's new about *The Straight Line* ? What's so interesting in the simple story of a young girl who doesn't seem to have any interest in communicating with the world, let alone with the people around her?

Noelia (first-timer Aina Calpe) has two jobs: She works at a gas station by night, and spends her days delivering commercial fliers to apartment buildings. A load that seems to weigh too much, she walks the streets with a huge bag full of information no one seems to have interest in. (Rejection is the typical response.) And her reluctance to speak to other people unless strictly necessary seems to surround her within a self-constructed wall of autism - a straight line with no curves, detours or turns in sight. Not even the overtures from a co-worker can alter the monotony; only the pains of an occasional hangover remind us that her character is, indeed, a biological entity.

A film that demands to be completed by the audience rather than constructing a fully fledged dramatic world, *The Straight Line* - the directorial debut of José María de Orbe, the producer of Jaime Rosales' remarkable 2003 feature *The Hours of the Day* (*Las horas del día*) - is indebted to ideas and stylistic approaches from Tsai Ming-liang's melancholic stories of love amidst the remains of society to the sadly humorous characters of Argentina's Martín Rejtman. *The Straight Line* is not so much a symbolic film about the difficulties of today's youngsters in finding a way through life, but rather a character study that defies dramatic conventions and prefers to draw its contours with single traces, perhaps in an attempt to try and understand alienation and everyday malaise in big cities today.

Noelia is an enigmatic character, certainly, and we don't get to know much more about her in the end, but amongst her sad looks and stupefied reactions there seems to live a small spark of rebellion against herself, against her isolation and solitude, a possible (if highly uncertain) chance of breaking away from her sterile path. If the world is her enemy, then Noelia must be a heroine, and so *The Straight Line* can be seen as the story of her first attempts at trying to be her own person.

Will she succeed? Or will she remain trapped within the straight line of the title? Just as with the fate of Spanish cinema, which this daring and courageous film attempts to subvert with its general ethics and aesthetic conventions, it's a question that can only be answered with time.

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