

Today, Mediático presents [Stefanie Allum](#)'s report of the latest awards ceremony for the Catalan Film Academy—the [Premis Gaudí](#). Allum's report on the Gaudís compares them with the Goyas, the Spanish Film Academy award ceremony. The report is packed full with useful information on the last few years of Catalan and Spanish cinema. Currently a PhD student in the Department of Media and Communication Design at Northumbria University, Newcastle. Allum's PhD research uses Catalan cinema as a case study to further problematize the term 'national cinema' in relation to sub-state national cinemas. She [tweets](#) about Contemporary Catalan Cinema in English, Catalan and Spanish at [@salluminium](#).

On the Seventh 'Premis Gaudí'

[Stefanie Allum](#)



Veteran Catalan Director Ventura Pons, winner of a Premi Gaudí d'Honor

On Sunday 1st February 2015 I attended the [Gaudí awards](#) ceremony for the Catalan Film Academy at Sant Jordi Club, Montjuic, Barcelona, hosted by television personality Àngel Llàcer (pictured above). The 'Premis Gaudí' are the Catalan equivalent of the Goyas, the Spanish film awards made by the 'Academia de las Artes y las ciencias cinematográficas de España'. Gaudís are awarded by the Catalan 'Acadèmia del cinema Català' (ACC). They previously existed as the 'Premis Barcelona', and were awarded by the 'Col·legi de Directors de Cinema de Catalunya' between 2002 and 2008. When the ACC (founded in 2008) assumed responsibility for the awards in 2009, they began to mirror the Academy Awards ceremonies in Spain and elsewhere. Now, like the Spanish Goyas ceremony, which provides a platform for satire about news items beyond the cinema, the Catalan gala has been characterised by political and economic commentary. In what follows, I reflect on the most interesting aspects of this year's ceremony, and what they suggest about contemporary film culture in Catalonia and Spain.[\[i\]](#)

In her speech, Isona Passola i Vidal (president of the ACC) described 2014 as a 'dark period' for the industry, with further cuts in government subsidies affecting funding opportunities for production and the (state-wide) 21 per cent 'IVA cultural' (VAT on cultural products) continuing to have a negative impact on audience figures. However, she highlighted that, despite difficulties, some great films were being made. Six days later at the Goyas, the president of the Spanish Academy, Enrique González Macho, utilised Passola's statement, inverting its negativity, noting that whereas for Catalan cinema 2014 had been 'a difficult year in which some good films were made', for Spanish cinema it had been 'a good year, despite the few problems that still exist'. Indeed, the [Goyas ceremony](#) (on the 8th February) also opened with presenter Dani Rovira reeling off figures about the gross domestic product generated by cinema and how much it had contributed to the treasury, summarising that 2014 was the year that the state stopped helping cinema, and cinema started helping the state.

Even though criticism of the Spanish VAT system, and calls for it to be lowered, were a

common theme at both galas, we may wonder how the same year can be described as 'the best year ever' for Spanish cinema, and a 'dark period' for Catalan cinema, when the two cinemas are so closely linked. As actors Alfonso Sánchez and Alberto López at the Goyas pointed out, before presenting Edmond Roch and Toni Novella (both from Girona) with the Goya for best production design, 'when the Catalans get going, they do whatever they want, and that includes making Spanish cinema!' This difference in perception between the two ceremonies may just seem like a stereotypical example of the gap between the Spanish and Catalan approaches to life, but it is also true that smaller industries such as the Catalan one are much more vulnerable to economic troubles than a larger industry like Spain's.

The different perspectives at the two ceremonies could equally have to do with the effects of the economic crisis: Catalan film production has consequently been reliant on 'co-productions' with Spain. Perhaps it is a reflection of a general fatigue of all things 'Catalan' after almost five years of a sustained effort for independence (from the separatists) and sustained tolerance (from the nonplussed and unionists). 2015 also marks four years since the economic crisis really began to impact on the film industry, and September 2015 will mark three years of battling 'el maldito IVA' (the damn VAT). However, both of these factors equally impact Spanish cinema. Perhaps it is simply disappointment at falling production and audience figures for Catalan film both of which, had been quite consistently on the rise (at least until 2011).

The drop in production figures in Catalan cinema was much in evidence at the gala. Only twenty-seven films populated the twenty-two different categories, and there were only ten films to fill the seventeen categories devoted to feature-length fiction. The animation category had only two nominees, although this was an improvement on last year when the category was altogether empty. Passola harked back to the 'golden age' of 2010 when; *Pa Negre* (Agustí Villaronga 2010) won a number of Goyas including 'Best Film' and became Spain's first Catalan-language entry for 'Best Foreign Film' at the Oscars, domestic audience figures were at their peak of 8.9 per cent and there was an all-time record of 95

exhibited Catalan feature length productions.[ii]



Pa negre (Agustí Villaronga 2010) Spain's first Catalan-language Oscar entry for Best Foreign Film

In terms of exhibition, Passola pointed out that, domestic audiences for Catalan films in 2014 had dropped to 5 per cent, and she compared this to 44 per cent in neighbouring France. Although a stark contrast, Passola is not making a fair comparison: France consistently has the largest domestic audience in Europe, and it also produces a lot more films. It also has legislation to ensure its films reach domestic audiences. Spain is also a large producing country, but its domestic audience is smaller (only 15 per cent in 2011).[iii] The difference between 5 and 15 per cent is much smaller, although it is difficult to measure the actual number of spectators in either market given the high levels of piracy in both Spain and Catalonia. Perhaps it would be fairer to compare Catalan cinema not to France or Spain, but to another small film-producing country such as Belgium, which in 2011 had domestic audience figures of 10 per cent which is much closer to Catalan Cinema's 'golden age'.

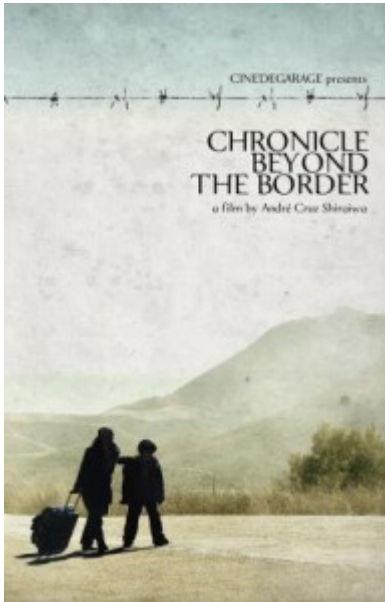
It was also evident at the gala that Catalan cinema's low audience figures influenced the way the awards were staged. Àngel Llàcer's lavish opening [performance](#) was used to introduce films with limited spectators to an audience (at the gala and watching on

television) who had likely not seen them. The performance was also an opportunity for a bit of locally inflected, political humour.



10.000 km (Carlos Marques-Marçet 2014)

For instance, *10.000km* (Carlos Marques-Marçet 2014: eight nominations including 'Non-Catalan Language Film') was described as 'the distance between [Artur Mas](#) (Convergència i Unió / 'Convergence and Union', President of the Generalitat de Catalunya and present at the ceremony) and [Oriol Junqueras](#) (Esquerra Republicana Catalana / 'Catalan Republican Left', leader of the opposition)', who both support independence, but whose political differences are so numerous that it makes it difficult for them to work together on the only thing they have in common; a desire for independence from Spain.



L'altra frontera / 'The other border' (André Cruz Shiraiwa 2014: three nominations including 'Best Film') was described as the border with Andorra that the Pujol family crosses 'to buy their butter', referring to the [corruption case](#) against former Catalan president , Jordi Pujol, and his sons.

Born (Claudio Zulian 2014: three nominations including 'Best Film'), *Rastres de Sàndal* / 'Traces of sandalwood' (Maria Ripoll 2014: eight nominations including 'Best Film') [Editors note: This Mumbai/Barcelona story with its lost sister/Bollywood plot looks awesome] and *Stella Cadente* / 'Falling Star' (Lluís Miñarro 2014: thirteen nominations including 'Best Film'), the other three Catalan nominees, were also included in this musical summary.

Box office hits *El Niño* (Daniel Monzón 2014: thirteen nominations including 'Best Non-Catalan Language Film') and *REC 4 Apocolipsis* (Jaume Balgueró 2014: nine nominations including 'Best Non-Catalan Language Film') logically left out of this performance, are not in the Catalan language. If audience figures for Catalan films are low, audience for Catalan-language films are even lower. Although audiences for both were on the rise throughout the

last decade, they have dropped in the last few years along with a general decline in cinema attendance. So, the effects of the crisis (both directly and secondarily in the form of the rise in VAT) show that Catalan and Catalan-language films prosper in times of high disposable income, but suffer in times of economic hardship. This is by no means an unusual situation in European cinemas, but it has come about just as money and effort invested in the Catalan industry infrastructure throughout the last decade was beginning to make a difference, making the decline that much harder for those in the industry. A smaller film industry like that of Catalonia is much more easily damaged than an industry linked to a nation-state like Spain's.

Despite a number of comments lamenting the stagnation of the industry in the last three or four years, Passola used her speech to look forward to future higher audience and production figures generated by funds raised from the 'tasa de conexión', a 25 cent tax that telephone operators will pay the Generalitat for every ADSL connection in Catalonia from January 2015. She also introduced a new, as yet unnamed measure likely to take the form of a membership scheme guaranteeing discounts and access to special events related to Catalan cinema, which will increase domestic audience numbers by, 'giving spectators the cinema they want'. Given that the most popular films are coproduced with Spain and in the Spanish language, this suggests that the future of Catalan cinema lies in this direction. It also reminds us of actor and member of the Spanish academy José Sacristan's much-applauded speech at the 2014 Gaudís, in which he stressed that Catalan and Spanish cinema must work together to succeed in times of economic difficulty.

Following Passola's speech [Ventura Pons](#), the Catalan auteur, was awarded the Gaudí d'Honor in homage to his career as a director that spans 5 decades and includes 25 feature films. He used his [speech](#), which he gave in verse, to criticise José Ignacio Wert, the Spanish minister for sport, education and culture, and ended by shouting 'visca el cinema català' (long live Catalan cinema), with Passola, to a mixed response from the audience. Actress Carme Sansa's wish to one day present the award for 'Best Film' (which went to *10.000km*)

in a 'free country' got a similarly mixed audience reaction.

Perhaps the Gaudís aren't the place for independent politics; Catalan and Spanish cinemas are so closely tied that individuals often work in both and in order for this to be successful some topics are, unsurprisingly, taboo. Yet at the ceremony itself there was some tension in the air. Those who support the ACC's stance on independence clapped, and those who don't, didn't. I have always liked the openness with which people express political opinion in Spain and Catalonia, and the Gaudís were no exception. Although the ACC may appear to take a pro-independence stance, this does not mean that it wants to cease working with Spain. In an ideal world, independence would actually benefit the two cinemas. The structures and relationships for coproduction are already in place which means the two cinemas could, in theory, benefit hugely from European and Ibero-american coproduction funds.

Presenting the award for Best Lead Actor (which went to David Verdaguer in *10.000km*) actress Belén Fabre took the opportunity to address some internal issues by reminding the audience that the anniversary of '4F' was only three days away. '4F' stands for the 4th of February 2006, when a member of the Guardia Urbana (the municipal police force of Barcelona) received a blow to the head from a plant pot thrown off a balcony during a raid on an occupied building.^[v] The true cause of the policeman's injury remains unknown, four innocent individuals remain in prison and another (Patricia Heras) has committed suicide. Every year, those seeking justice for Heras and the other falsely-imprisoned youths ask for it to be reopened.^[vi] Fabre's follow up statement that 'there are still a lot of unanswered questions that need answering', received a large applause.

Looking towards international politics, Passola informed the audience that a seat had been left empty for Ukrainian director [Oleg Sentsov](#), who is currently imprisoned in Moscow for opposing the annexation of Crimea to Russia, and Passola stated that all European film academies would be doing the same.

As with most academy awards ceremonies, only one category was devoted to documentary film, even though this is one area of filmmaking in Catalonia (Barcelona) that is going from strength to strength. The Premis Gaudí can be forgiven the lack of attention to documentary filmmaking, as they are aimed at strengthening popular cinema. Furthermore, as students of Spanish cinema will know, documentary filmmaking in Barcelona has a long history, and therefore already has an established network of support and reputation for quality. The 'Masters en Creació Documental' at the Universitat Pompeu Fabre gains more and more international attention each year, and International documentary festival, 'DocsBarcelona' is now entering its eighth year. This year films connected to the masters in documentary creation had a special spotlight at the [International Film Festival Rotterdam](#), and the director and many of the production team on *10.000km* (winner of best non-catalan language film at the Gaudís) are among the alumni. In fact, documentary production in Catalonia doubled between 2007 and 2013, meaning that in 2013 it made up 41% of all production.^[vii]

This year's nominations for 'best documentary' have already won a number of international awards. *Bugarach* (Ventura Durall, Sergi Cameron and Salvador Sunyer 2014) is in the official selection at eleven different festivals as well as winning the FIPRESCI Prize at St Petersburg. *Els anys salvatges* / 'The Wild Years' (Ventura Durall 2014) is in three official selections, *Gabor* (Sebastián Alfie 2014: winner) in the official selection of seventeen different film festivals, and *I will be murdered* / 'Demà moriré' (Justin Webster 2014) won 'Best Documentary' at The International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, 'Best Director' at the Cartagena Film Festival, and an 'Honourable Mention' at DocsBarcelona.

Given the increasing success of Catalan documentary, auteur and alternative cinema in festivals and awards around the world, perhaps it is worth drawing a distinction between industry and culture within Catalan cinema and summarise that although it may have been a difficult year for the industry, independent productions have fared better. Not only are

independent films usually cheaper to make, but they also better suited to deal more with the current climate of social anxieties. That said, both independent and industrial Catalan productions did well at the Goyas with Marques-Marcet winning 'best new director' for *10.000km*, and *El Niño* winning best soundtrack, special effects, title track, and production design.

Isabel Coixet was not present at either ceremony because she was opening the [Berlinale](#) with *Nobody Wants the Night*, the first Spanish (Catalan) filmmaker to do so. That the Catalan ceremony highlighted Coixet's absence (whilst the Goyas celebrated her success) is symptomatic of the Gaudís' overall critical approach to the last year in Catalan cinema but also understandable, given the recent dip in production and audience figures. Politically, and even though the issue of independence is usually kept out of cinema, frustration with the latter is also responsible for affecting the general mood of a previously confident Catalan cinema.

Tellingly, at the Goyas, Catalan cinema was celebrated in a much more positive fashion. The point was made that in many cases, Spanish cinema *is* Catalan cinema. Furthermore, whereas the Spanish government is reluctant to recognise the plethora of regional and linguistic identities that contribute to the Spanish identity, González Macho and the Spanish Academy celebrated 'nuestro cine, plural', and Spanish cinema was described as a place for the reconciliation of identities and autonomies; Basque, Galician and Andalusian cinema all had their moment during the ceremony. Perhaps cineastes do know best when it comes to politics.

Just like the Goyas, the Gaudís are an interesting watch for reasons other than the prize giving. They follow in the tradition of using the gala as a platform for the expression of political viewpoints, whether in criticism of funding cuts in central and local government, internal issues such as 4F, international issues such as Oleg Sentsov, and also as a platform to express viewpoints on larger issues such as Catalan independence. Furthermore, the

Gaudís can offer insight into what is holding the industry together. That so many acceptance speeches involved thanks to television companies highlights the fact that, as in other small European countries, cinema relies on television for survival once public funding disappears. The team of *Rastres de Sàndal* which won for 'Best Film' at the Gaudís spoke in detail of the support that they received from Televisió de Catalunya, Televisión Española, and Canal+ right from the beginning, and highlighted how it had been imperative for the success of a film that received no public funding. Special thanks to television were also much in evidence at the Goyas, and rightly so. Since 2010, all television companies that broadcast contemporary feature length films (less than seven years old), must invest 5 per cent of returns into cinematographic production. So, lack of public funding is to a certain extent rebalanced through investment from television.^[viii]

The Catalan film industry has come such a long way over the last fifteen years and it would be a shame for the 'dark period' of 2014 to overshadow the cultural successes elsewhere in film culture. Although it has been a difficult year, and numbers are down, there is light at the end of the tunnel for the industry in the form of the connection tax and members club. One of Passola's closing comments that 'a country without culture does not exist', sounds almost like a warning. But Catalan culture, and more specifically film culture, does not appear to be in danger. The industry is currently having some difficulties, but to consider 2014 a 'dark period' is to take a short view (and ignore the last ten to fifteen years of growth). The long view suggests that Catalan culture, and cinema, have seen much darker periods.

Given that both the Goyas and the Gaudís are closely tied to internal politics, it is no wonder that perceptions and moods varied between ceremonies. In some ways Catalan and Spanish cinema are best understood as parts of the same whole, but in many other ways they are better understood as separate entities. This year, as attempts to negotiate with Spain on independence drag on and are repeatedly frustrated, the general atmosphere of the Gaudís was low and somewhat self-critical. At the Goyas however, signs of long-awaited economic

growth in the sector were, understandably, celebrated. This economic growth is state wide and therefore includes Catalan cinema, but it seems that this year, Gaudí and Goya were looking in different directions.

NOTES

[i] For more detailed information on the nominees and winner, refer to the following pages: Catalan Film Academy (In English, Catalan, Spanish and French):

<http://www.academiadelcinema.cat/en/>

[ii] José i Solsona, Carlos (2013) *Una dècada de producció cinematogràfica a Catalunya (2002-2011)*, Barcelona: UNICA.

[iii] *Observatori Europeu de l'Audiovisual 2012*, except for data for Catalan film: *Estadístiques Cultural de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura (Generalitat)*. Cited in: Generalitat (2012) *Pla estratègic 2021: Cultura (cinema)*, Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.

[iv] Ibid.

[v] The injury put him into a vegetative state and four individuals, who according to forensics could not have committed the crime because they were at street level, were arrested, severely beaten, and imprisoned. A fifth, Patricia Heras, was arrested in the waiting room of the hospital where the other suspects had been taken for the treatment of injuries sustained during the beatings. Her hairstyle and clothing lead the police to believe that she was involved and so they searched her phone. Misunderstanding a text message, they arrested her and she was imprisoned, even though she was in hospital because of an unrelated cycling accident. She committed suicide whilst on parole in 2011, and although the case is closed the true cause of the policeman's injury remains unknown, so every year,

those seeking justice for Patricia and the other falsely-imprisoned youths ask for it to be reopened.

[vi] Two weeks previous to the Gala, the feature documentary that many thought would bring the reopening of the case, *Ciutat Morta* (Xapo Ortega and Xavier Artigas, 2013), was screened on the Catalan public television channel, TV3. The film explores the consequences of the incident through interviews with friends of Patricia, the other prisoners, Amnesty International, and the forensic scientist who stated that it was impossible for those accused to have committed the crime. Members of the Guardia Urbana and Barcelona City council declined to be interviewed and the film condemns their actions, relating them to wider issues of institutionalised racism, prejudice and violence, as well as the gentrification of various neighbourhoods in Barcelona. Furthermore, prior to its emission, TV3 received a court order dictating that [they must cut the scene which makes reference to the ex-chief information officer of the Guardia Urbana](#), an act which could even serve to confirm the importance of this film in the eyes of its supporters. This film has the unusually high user-rating of 9.1 on [filmin.es](#), suggesting that it strikes a nerve with many.

[vii] José i Solsona, Carlos (2013) *Una década de producción cinematográfica a Catalunya (2002-2011)*, Barcelona: UNICA.

[viii] <http://www.minetur.gob.es/telecomunicaciones/mediosaudiovisuales/contenidos/PromocionProduccion/1.Informes/Paginas/financiacion.aspx>

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