



A Class with Joaquim Jordà

Nuria Cancela, Associate Professor, ESCAC (The Film and Audiovisual School of Catalonia), ESCAC (Escola Superior de Cinema i Audiovisuals de Catalunya) (Nov 2024–), nuriicancela@gmail.com

Samantha da Silva Diefenthaler, Profesor, Professor of Communication Methodologies, specializing in Image Theories, in the Master's Degree in Film Studies and Visual Cultures., ESCAC (Oct 2025–), [santhadief@gmail.com](mailto:samanthadief@gmail.com)

"A Class with Joaquim Jordà" approaches the teaching facet of Catalan documentary filmmaker Joaquim Jordà. The video essay is structured around Jordà's voice-over, drawn from different documentaries and lecture series, through which he offers reflections on key themes in both his creative work and his teaching practice.





Creators' Statement

A “Class with Joaquim Jordà” is a video essay that invites us to imagine the Catalan independent filmmaker (1935–2006) as a university professor—his motivations, his way of seeing and of teaching. “What would it be like to be in a class with Jordà as a professor?” Between the real and the imaginary, a critical and speculative video essay is constructed, one that interrogates images in order to build a narrative. Throughout the piece, his voice guides us in a construction that moves between fiction and reality—a game of imagination about his presence. Following Jordà’s path, the images establish unexpected connections, and cinema is understood as a crossroads that never leads in just one direction. A journey of memory reminds us that “it is necessary to oppose with sharpness those forms of knowledge that have explained the world, in order to once again ask: ‘what is of value?’ or ‘valuable for what?’ and ‘for whom?’” (Calderón 2023: 18).

This video essay draws from diverse materials: Jordà’s own films, images he used in his classes, his personal archive—preserved by Numax: Centre d’Estudis Joaquim Jordà—, his statements in lecture series and documentaries, and the oral and personal memory of his former students at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF). With the filmmaker’s voice-over as its backbone, this project uses images to articulate ideas, just as Jordà himself did throughout his career as teacher and creator. The three central axes of this piece reflect what has been described as “Jordà’s thought” (Balló and Elduque 2023: 7): the boundaries between documentary and fiction, and between lyrical and essayistic cinema; cinema as a self-reflexive mirror, where illness and death appear forcefully;

and filmmaking as a collective act. These elements shaped both his teaching practice and his films, and have been the subject of scholarly analysis.

In his career, filmmaking and teaching constantly fed into each other: not only did he bring reflections on his own work into the classroom, such as the narrative comparison between *Un cos al bosc* (Joaquim Jordà, 1996) and *Human Desire* (Fritz Lang, 1954), but his participation as a professor in the UPF Master's in Creative Documentary also allowed him to make his film *Monos como Becky* (2012), thanks to the program's funding and the involvement of his students in the shooting (Balló 2011). His dual role as creator and teacher was fundamental in shaping his "disciples": "students who would later establish themselves as film professionals, such as Isaki Lacuesta, Oliver Laxe, Carla Subirana, Marta Andreu, Amanda Villareja or Núria Esquerra" (Rubio López 2023: 79). Beyond his own students, Jordà influenced an entire generation of young Spanish filmmakers in the new millennium (Balló 2011; Cobo-Durán and Liberia Vayá 2021).

To think about Joaquim Jordà's work is to remember that the image is a tool for addressing the viewer, always showing that behind every documentary record there are people. In his best-known films, such as *Numax presenta...* (1980) or *Monos como Becky*, he appears as a filmmaker-conversationalist (Benavente and Salvadó 2009), who approaches his subjects with the camera so that we may understand those who face it and hold the gaze, establishing a direct bond with the audience. While approaching others, he also portrays himself and reflects on his own identity. This video essay seeks to continue his understanding of cinema as a play of mirrors (Benavente and Salvadó, 2009), looking for Jordà's reflection in his less explored facets, such as his significant teaching work.

*This video essay was part of the exhibition *Descobrir Joaquim Jordà*, curated by Jordi Balló, Glòria Salvadó, and Albert Elduque in 2022 at Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

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Biographies

Nuria Cancela is an associate professor at ESCAC (The Film and Audiovisual School of Catalonia) and holds a Ph.D. in Communication from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra since 2024, with a doctoral thesis focused on the performance and star image of the actresses who embodied the archetype of the *femme fatale* in the Spanish cinema during Francoism. She has published her research in high-impact journals such as *L'Atalante*, *Historia y Comunicación Social*, and *Hispanic Research Journal*, and presented it at international conferences such as NECS and Celebrity Studies. She has also a hybrid and creative profile related to audiovisual creation and dissemination: she published multiple visual essays, was a museum curator, is one of the creators of the podcast “Todas las amigas que conozco” about the audiovisual representation of female friendship, and is a member of the board of directors of “Surcos: Asociación de Estudios Cinematográficos.”

Samantha da Silva Diefenthaler (Itaituba, Brazil) is a researcher and lecturer with a Ph.D. in Communication from Universitat Pompeu Fabra (2024). Her forthcoming book, *Kitchen comedy: Comedia, mujeres e insurrecciones domésticas* (Aldea Global, 2026), based on her doctoral thesis, examines female comic roles in early cinema from a feminist perspective. Her research spans literary and film theory, semiotics, and gender studies, with publications in prestigious journals and publishers such as *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*, *Cátedra*, and McGraw Hill. She has presented her work at international conferences and produced video essays. As a lecturer, she has taught at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, and ESCAC (The Film and Audiovisual School of Catalonia), integrating theoretical frameworks and practical tools in the analysis of media and gender.

Review by Sandra Galván, Assumption University

Cancela and Da Silva Diefenthaler have created a video essay that revives and emphasizes the educational dimension of Catalan filmmaker Joaquim Jordà, an inseparable aspect of his cinematic practice. Using the imaginative device of “attending” a class taught by the director, the piece brings together the core principles of his filmic thought: questioning traditional boundaries between documentary and fiction, combining

poetic and essayistic forms of audiovisual narration, conceiving cinema as a collective practice, both creative and interpretative, and reflecting on the dispositive as self-reflexive mirror. In this way, the video essay not only examines Jordà's work but also functions as a videographic practice, activating the same principles of videographic research that he promoted, and positioning the piece within the tradition of pedagogical video essays that explore the transmission of cinematic knowledge through the practice of montage itself.

The project stands out for its rigorous and heterogeneous montage, combining fragments of Jordà's filmography with sequences from filmmakers such as Méliès, Lumière, Lang, and Godard, recordings of his lessons, material from his personal archive, and testimonials from former students. This visual and sound assemblage accompanies and expands Jordà's voice-over narration, guiding viewers through fragments of his lessons and conversations with students. However, the formal design acknowledges its interpretative nature: the narration is necessarily partial and subjective, as the video essay incorporates the filmmaker's own perspective and intentional manipulation of both images and voice. At the same time, the montage establishes a multimodal viewing regime that encourages critical and active engagement, in line with Jordà's pedagogical approach, generating a clear epistemic effect for the audience.

The use of the video essay, with its hybrid nature, proves especially coherent with Jordà's aim to question the conventions of audiovisual language and reveal the mechanisms that disrupt the illusion of truth, an aspect he himself valued: "I like that you are filming the preparations, that you are showing the tricks" (5:10). While not overly experimental strategies, the video essay employs formal devices such as split screen, image superposition, the combination of multiple audiovisual materials, and voice-over narration to foster an evocative reading of Jordà's cinematic vision. A particularly remarkable moment occurs midway through the video essay, marking a turning point in Jordà's creative trajectory: an extended shot prolongation of a frame from *Monos como Becky* (1999), in which the director awakens from surgery and looks directly at the camera (8:12). This gaze functions as a metaphor for the operation of the cinematic camera, and for the director's own gaze transformed perspective following his stroke, a moment coinciding with his appointment as Director of the Master in Creative Documentary (Pompeu Fabra University), which heralded a filmic trend that has shaped the first decades of twenty-first-century Catalan cinema.

"A Class with Joaquim Jordà" represents a significant contribution both as pedagogical exercise with and through images, and for its capacity to reassert Jordà as a reference figure: not only for his career as a filmmaker, but also, and especially, for his

legacy as a teacher, whose reflections on cinema continue to resonate in contemporary Catalan and Iberian film practice.

Review by Guillem Molla, University of Massachusetts Amherst

“A Class with Joaquim Jordà” is a carefully constructed video essay that offers a meditative, fragmentary approach to the cinematic thinking of Catalan independent filmmaker Joaquim Jordà. Situated at the intersection of cinema, archive, and pedagogy, the piece positions itself meaningfully within the field of academic videographic criticism by translating a set of theoretical reflections into an audiovisual form that is analytically rigorous while remaining deeply affective.

Nuria Cancela and Samantha da Silva Diefenthaler reconstruct a voice—grave, calm, and dialogical—as both the narrative thread and the methodological principle of the work, articulating a reflection on mediation and the embodied presence of the author within documentary practice. Connected to the exhibition *Descobrir Joaquim Jordà* (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2022), the video essay reframes pedagogical experience as an audiovisual argument, balancing heterogeneous materials through a montage that privileges complementarity over opposition. At times, Jordà’s voice-over elaborates conceptual positions that the images put into play; at others, his on-screen presence unfolds in dialogue with various interlocutors, turning pedagogy itself into a collective cinematic event.

In this regard, the superimposition of fragments from Godard and from Jordà himself over a frozen frame in which fictional and representational devices coexist is particularly effective, foregrounding the filmmaker’s commitment to finding a language capable of dissolving the boundaries between fiction and documentary. It must be “like an emulsion,” as Jordà himself states in the video essay, “where you can’t tell one water from the other.” The montage thus aligns the video essay with a conception of documentary that understands the author’s physical and discursive presence as an epistemological condition rather than a problem to be resolved. In Jordà’s case, the result can be read as a form of autofiction that does not construct an invented self but instead layers autobiography, essay, and fiction as a political gesture, opening a space of critical distance from which to rethink reality.

The piece also develops, with pedagogical clarity, Jordà’s assertion that all filming entails distance. This idea takes shape through the inclusion of a medical consultation scene from *Beyond the Mirror* (*Més enllà del mirall*, 2006), which visualizes the trajectory of the image from retinal stimulus—where it remains only light, a fragile reflection—to its cognitive interpretation once it reaches the primary visual cortex. The video

essay thus makes visible the theoretical stakes of Jordà's cinema: the image is not simply what is seen but what is constructed through memory and consciousness. In this way, generic hybridity becomes part of a broader inquiry into perception, linked to Jordà's experience of agnosia and alexia following the cerebral stroke he suffered in 1997, coinciding with the founding of the Master's Degree in Creative Documentary at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, where he would later teach.

As a contribution to the field of videographic criticism, "A Class with Joaquim Jordà" stands out for the clarity of its purpose and its affective approach to cinematic reflection. Jordà's words—shared with collaborators, interviewers, colleagues, and students, many of whom are now established filmmakers—ground the work in a relational and pedagogical ethos that integrates theory and practice as a whole. The result is a video essay that functions simultaneously as analysis, archive, and posthumous masterclass, offering a compelling model of how videographic criticism can approach film theory as a lived, transmitted, and dialogical practice.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

