

## Inwards and Outwards: Disability Through the Cinema

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Just as living with a disability is a personal, unique and fundamentally intimate experience, the perception of disability and the attitudes towards those suffering from it are extremely personal and are governed by several social, cultural and psychological factors as well as by scales of values, the geographical and temporal context, etc. In addition, when disability does not directly affect us, when we do not feel it in our own flesh or soul, the image awakened often depends on scenarios suggested by the media. As Marta Badía points out in her article entitled *People with visual impairments in films, "the cinematographic representation of people with disabilities contributes to society's general perception of this group"*. And, that dramatization -that "fiction" of the person suffering from a disability- is usually adapted to the seven stereotypes identified by Nelson and analyzed by the author of this article specifically in people with visual impairments; stereotypes that can also be extrapolated to any other sensory, anatomic or physiological limitation. Curiously, six of them are linked to negative connotations (pitiful and pathetic, sinister, evil and criminal, "better dead", misfit, a burden to family and society, and incapable of succeeding, in life) and there is only one positive, although disproportionate, connotation: that of hero. This is disproportionate because the key lies in achieving the highest degrees of normalization possible, not in the unjustified praise of the quality of being different. David Aparicio and María Gómez-Vela, in their paper *Of mute servants, deaf young ladies and other stereotypes*, and M<sup>a</sup> Inés Monjas and Francisco Arranz, in their analysis *Cinema as a resource for learning about people with disabilities: twenty-five films from the last decade*, also stress the capacity of the cinema as a means for the "transmission of ideas and the development of attitudes and values" and as an educational tool to be used by society in order to facilitate an "approach to and knowledge of people with disabilities". These films also confirm that the image that cinema transmits of this population group has evolved positively, especially during the last decade, towards an

image that conforms better to the reality of people with disabilities. Here, we refer to reality and not illusion or distress; it is not about optimism or pessimism, about always seeing the glass half-empty or half-full. It is about assuming realities and providing opportunities from the point of view of understanding, of help (not pity), in short, of sensibility. However, disability cannot be understood as a catch-all term for "deficiencies", where everything fits, and nor can solutions be sought in a comfortable and fictitious "coffee-break for everyone". Not all types of disability are equal, and nor do all people with disabilities have the same limitations, possibilities, capacities, opportunities or needs. In this sense, an adaptation of this "normalization" to individuality, to difference, is essential. The cinematographic portrayal of Ramón Sampedro, a person with a disability who was famous both in reality and in fiction, is analyzed by Antonio-León Aguado, Meni González, Cristina Rozada and María Ángeles Alcedo six years after *The Sea Inside* (2004), by Alejandro Amenabar, won an Oscar, and it shows to what extent the experience of disability is personal. In similar situations, some individuals might be happy while others are overcome by their condition, adding incapacity to disability and making normal interactions within their immediate circles impossible, which in the case of Ramón Sampedro becomes materialized in a pathological desire to die and the refusal to take advantage of support measures that could make not only his own life easier, but also that of those who surround him, whom he forces to live a life that is not their own, thus experiencing disability without a disability.

Thanks to all the authors who have collaborated in this special edition for introducing us into the world of disability through the fun and art that are intertwined in cinema, that marvellous window on human nature made by humankind and for humankind in the widest sense of the term.

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