Investigating Cultures of Equality

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Chapter 7

Resisting Cultures of Inequality through Feminist Counter-Visuality Practices in Contemporary Spanish Fiction and Non-Fiction Cinema

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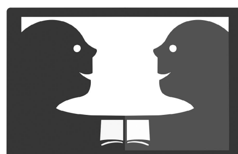

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7 Resisting Cultures of Inequality through Feminist Counter-Visuality Practices in Contemporary Spanish Fiction and Non-Fiction Cinema

Adelina Sánchez Espinosa and Orianna Calderón-Sandoval

Introduction

Within an androcentric epistemology, vision—understood as the will to control and possess what are conceived to be passive objects of study—has been serving as the dominant metaphor in knowledge-making (Puig de la Bellacasa 2009, 298). Vision and knowledge must be seen as inextricably linked since we only see what is made 'seeable' (Rajchman 1988, 91) within the constraints of thought in a specific period of time. Nevertheless, decades of feminist theoretical and philosophical scholarly work have opened our eyes to the absences and contradictions which have been naturalised by the androcentric discourses underpinning our deeply patriarchal societies. With an intention to reconfigure the prevailing schemes of producing knowledge, Donna Haraway, a key thinker within the field of feminist epistemologies critically engaging with visual technologies in science, calls for a feminist rearticulation of the concept of objectivity in terms of accountability and 'situated knowledges' that would allow us 'to become answerable for what we learn how to see' (1988, 583). By doing so, Haraway postulates a feminist reclaiming of vision, understood not as a false, totalising, master capacity to separate subject from object (of study) or to order all differences, but rather as partial perspectives of multiple subjectivities, accountable for their dynamic positionings. As she emphasises, 'vision is always a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices' (1988, 585). Only by recognising and accounting for this, does it become possible to set into motion processes that could lead to contestable and contested knowing, that is, to the emergence of response-able knowledges, as opposed to traditionally fixed and categorical ones (1988, 589).

For Haraway, the concept of response-ability stands for cultivating the capacity to respond *with* and *for* others (Haraway in conversation with Kenney 2015, 231). Karen Barad—a theoretical physicist and feminist theorist—calls for the elaboration of response-able knowing, that is, one which is sensitive and responsive to the dynamics of historicity. Within her

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epistemological framework, which she calls 'agential realism', Barad draws on a novel understanding of agency as 'an enactment, not something that someone or something has' (2007, 235). For her, 'Agency is about changing possibilities of change entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses' (2007, 235). This conceptualisation leads her to place a strong emphasis on connections between agency and response-ability, understood in terms of 'the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to power imbalances' (Barad in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 55). Theoretical work, Barad insists, should be 'response-able' in the sense that it must remain open to the world's constant re-configurings, allowing the object of study to respond, and demanding permanent accountability from the researcher (2012, 155).

The 'god tricks promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully' (1988, 584) which Haraway denounces in scientific knowledge production are also present in the ways in which the Western gaze has been trained. In his description of the gaze solicited by the traditional European oil painting between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, John Berger highlights the impact of perspective on the dominant ways of seeing. Any painting that uses perspective, he argues, 'makes the single eye the centre of the visible world' (1972, 16) and, in so doing, it elicits a God-like beholder who is not seen, but to whom everything exists to be looked at. With the invention of the camera in the nineteenth century, the spectator's position as 'the unique centre of the world' (Berger 1972, 18) was challenged, since the mobility of the movie camera 'demonstrated that there was no centre' (1972, 18). Nevertheless, the camera was soon reappropriated by practices that maintain the status of the androcentric eye, such as what Jean-Pierre Oudart defines as 'suture' (1977–1978), that is, strategies like the shot/countershot editing that create the illusion of unified subjects exchanging gazes in an undisturbed continuum.

Dominant visualities in cinema have been characterised by what Laura Mulvey identified as the 'male gaze' (1988 [1975]). Such a gaze, similarly to the relation that patriarchal scientific technologies of vision establish with the world, turns the female characters into passive objects to-be-looked-at and thus to-be-appropriated by the male gaze of the characters, which often coincides with that of the spectators. This has been at the point of departure for the feminist task of 'making visible the invisible' (Kuhn 1994, 67) in audiovisual texts. In feminist film theory and critical visual studies, the reclaiming of vision and visuality has led to the development of 'counter-cinema' (Johnston 2000 [1973]) and 'counter-visuality' (Mirzoeff 2011), which—rather than being 'anti' positions—operate as counter-practices, re-inhabiting visual discourses from response-able perspectives.

In this chapter we look at feminist forms of resistance to persuasion in visual discourses and ponder on whether these practices can help us to construct what we could term 'a feminist toolbox for response-able gazes'. A theoretical revision of feminist rebellions against androcentric visual discourses is followed by the close reading of selected scenes from recent

Spanish fiction and non-fiction films. These films, we argue, operate as technologies of social response-ability in the face of some of the key issues present in the current feminist agenda in Spain: gender-based violence, abortion, the right to one's own body, and the subversion of gender binaries (Calderón 2019; Solá and Urko 2013). We apply the method of close reading, that is, a careful interpretation of a textual passage or film scene, as revisited and reappropriated by contemporary feminist methodologies for which a dialogue should be established between formalist and post-structuralist approaches to the text and 'the *contextuality* and *historicity* of any reading' (Lukic and Sánchez 2011, 106; original emphasis). This critical perspective on close reading, which foregrounds the power relations traversing the text with gender as a key entry point, allows us to identify and develop ways of seeing beyond dominant visualities.

The chapter is divided into four sections. First, we trace a genealogy of feminist re-visions, which briefly summarises such contributions as Adrienne Rich's claims for re-viewing (1972), Judith Fetterley's resisting readership (1978), John Berger's ways of seeing (1972), Peter Wollen's counter-cinema (2002 [1972]), Claire Johnston's understanding of women's cinema as counter-cinema (2000 [1973]), Laura Mulvey's critique of visual pleasure (1988 [1975]), Teresa de Lauretis's pleasure reappropriation (1984, 1987c), Nicholas Mirzoeff's visuality regimes, counter-visuality, and right to look (2009, 2011), and Sayak Valencia's gore necro-visualities (2010; see also Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016). The second section examines a classical example of dangerously persuasive visual discourse: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). This is followed by two instances of transgressive gazing by well-known feminist filmmakers, Sally Potter and Jane Campion. Then, in the third section we close-read selected scenes from *Todo sobre mi madre/All about My Mother* (Almodóvar 1999), *Solas/Alone* (Zambrano 1999), *Te doy mis ojos/Take My Eyes* (Bollaín 2003), and *Los años desnudos/The Naked Years* (Ayaso and Sabroso 2008), as well as from three documentaries *La mujer, cosa de hombres/Woman Is a Man's Thing* (Coixet 2009), *Yo decido. El tren de la libertad/My Choice. The Freedom Train* (Collective 2014), and *Serás Hombre/You Will Be a Man* (De Ocampo 2018). In the concluding section, we reflect on the various forms of counter-visuality employed in these films as part of the aforementioned 'feminist toolbox for response-able gazes'. The feminist persuasive re-education enacted by and through these films can turn them into technologies of social response-ability with the potential to co-compose the worlds we inhabit and to open up ways of seeing otherwise.

Textual and Visual Transgressions: A Genealogy of Feminist Rebellions in Film Criticism

Second-wave feminism provided a framework for a growing questioning of gender representations in cultural artefacts. Literature and cinema have served as important vehicles for androcentric discourses, functioning as what Teresa de Lauretis calls 'technologies of gender' (1987a). In order to

avoid being absorbed by the misogynistic assumptions embedded in patriarchal cultural products, one must learn to look back and against the grain. As Adrienne Rich states: 'Re-vision [is] the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival' (1972, 18). Judith Fetterley builds on Rich's words as she develops her own claim for a resisting readership, which is inherent to feminist literary criticism. As she writes,

> The first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us. The consequence of this exorcism is the capacity for what Adrienne Rich describes as re-vision . . . And the consequence of this re-vision is that books will no longer be read as they have been read and thus will lose their power to bind us unknowingly to their designs.
>
> (Fetterley 1978, XXII–XXIII)

In visual studies, the urge for textual transgressions has to be complemented with the development of transgressive gazes,[1] of which Berger is a pioneer. He explains that the ways of seeing elicited by the nude painting are structured within a sexist gender division in which the principal subject being depicted is always a woman:

> Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.
>
> (Berger 1972, 47)

The naked bodies of women are turned into objects to be looked at by the spectator-owner of the painting, who is predominantly conceived as male. Berger exposes that these oil painting conventions establish a way of seeing in which men remain subjects with an objectifying gaze directed outwards, while women are turned into objects or abstractions, forced to adopt an internalised male gaze directed inwards. This operates as a sort of patriarchal inner panopticon with which women 'survey like men, their own femininity' (1972, 63).

The perspective of a God-like beholder is kept in dominant cinema, which rests on analogical representation and combines editing strategies—like the aforementioned 'suture'—with classic narrative structures of rupture and resolution. In 1972 Peter Wollen coins the term 'counter-cinema' to refer to oppositional practices which contest mainstream productions, namely, estrangement, narrative intransitivity, aperture, and unpleasure, among others (Wollen 2002 [1972], 74.) It is a year after, in 1973, that Claire

Johnston starts to talk about feminist cinema in terms of counter-cinema. She emphasises that the realist aesthetics of classical cinema are to be challenged by feminist films and explains the reasons behind this as follows:

> What the camera in fact grasps is the 'natural' world of the dominant ideology. Women's cinema cannot afford such idealism; the 'truth' of our oppression cannot be 'captured' on celluloid with the 'innocence' of the camera: it has to be constructed/manufactured. New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film.
>
> (Johnston 2000 [1973], 29)

Feminist counter-cinema 'works against and challenges dominant cinema, usually at the level of both signifiers and signifieds' (Kuhn 1994, 152). If we are to subvert bourgeois and patriarchal ideology, then form itself has to be challenged. Similarly, the relation between film text and spectator must stop being one of passive reception and complacent identification with unidimensional characters and become a critical reflection instead.

Psychoanalysis has been pivotal in understanding the fascination with cinema, starting with Sigmund Freud's concept of scopophilia, that is, 'the drive to pleasurable looking' (Kuhn 1994, 44). This is linked with voyeurism, or being able to look into a private world, objectifying what is seen without running the risk of being looked at. What feminist film theory has made explicit is that such pleasures are gendered as well. Published for the first time in 1975 in *Screen*, Laura Mulvey's pioneer essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' asserts that visual pleasure is exclusively designed for a male spectator who identifies with the main character/active owner of the gaze, while the female characters occupy the passive position of objects to-be-looked-at.

The display of women as sexual objects is the leitmotif of visual spectacle in mainstream cinema. But despite this objectification, the female characters on screen continue to evoke the threat of castration. Thus, two strategies are used to neutralise this threat: turning her into a fetish (fetishism) or trying to solve her mystery so as to finally devalue, punish, or redeem her (sadism). Mulvey proposes a deconstruction of the three-gaze system within the cinematic apparatus: the gaze of the filmmaker-camera, that of the spectator, and that of the characters on screen. In dominant cinema the former two (camera and spectator) are hidden and subordinated to the third one, the gazes exchanged by the characters on screen.

Mulvey's essay has been of great importance in developing understandings of the gendered dynamics of the Hollywood cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. However, it has limitations, starting from the fact that it fixes visual pleasure within sexual difference, conceiving subjects under the universal and essential categories of 'Man' and 'Woman'. Its psychoanalytic framework negates any possibility for the so-called female visual pleasures,

same-sex, or gender-radical desires. It also ignores 'differences among women—of ethnicity, class, age and sexuality' (Smelik 1993, 77). To Mulvey there are not many alternatives for the female spectator's gaze, which is why she calls for the deconstruction, or indeed destruction, of visual and narrative pleasure. However, ten years after the publication of her influential essay, Teresa de Lauretis states that films directed by feminist women have actually opened up new cinematic spaces for the female gaze:

> when I look at the movies, film theorists try to tell me that the gaze is male, the camera eye is masculine, and so my look is also not a woman's. But I don't believe them anymore, because now I think I know what it is to look at a film as a woman. I do because certain films, by Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, Lizzie Borden, Sally Potter, and others, have shown it to me; they have somehow managed to inscribe in the film my woman's look—next to, side by side, together with, my other (cinematic) look.
>
> (1987b, 113)

Just as female spectators adopt the male gaze when they identify with the male hero in classical cinema, all spectators, regardless of their gender, might identify with the female gaze inscribed in films such as *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Akerman 1975). This could be described as an appropriation of the three-gaze system, so that the points of view and identification with characters and camera are all female. Still, such a position could be labelled as a mere reversal of roles, which do not attain liberation from the straitjacket of sexual difference. Hence, although recognising that a female gaze can be of strategic importance for the affirmation of female spectatorship, it could be more productive to talk about a feminist gaze, or that of the feminist subject located in and out of gender.[2] Instead of destroying visual pleasure, de Lauretis stands for a subversive cinema capable of working 'with and against narrative' (1987b, 108), thus producing 'a feminist social vision' (1987c, 134) that is no longer focused on deconstructing the man-centred vision, but on constructing other ways of seeing.

In his writing about power relations and the gaze, Nicholas Mirzoeff establishes a clear distinction between visuality and vision. While the latter refers to the physical processes of sight, the former designs different historical manifestations of the visual experience. Mirzoeff argues that visuality is a political concept 'to think with and against' (2011, 474). What he opposes to the authority of visuality is 'the right to look' (2011, 475), that is, a refusal to allow authority to impose its way of seeing. He coins the term 'counter-visuality', structured around the tension between the 'need to apprehend and counter a real that does exist but should not, and one that should exist but is as yet becoming' (2011, 477). Therefore, counter-visuality 'is the performative claim of a right to look where none technically

exists that puts a counter-visuality into play' (2011, 478). Instead of reflecting reality like a mirror, counter-visuality 'tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative' (2011, 485).

Sayak Valencia and Katia Sepúlveda elaborate on Mirzoeff's approach in the context of what Valencia calls 'gore capitalism', that is, the economics of globalisation in areas where predatory exploitation is erected as part of the logic of the market (2010, 15). The 'necro-visuality' (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016, 84) of gore capitalism is sustained by a rigid construction of gender and, especially, by the association of masculinity with violence. The clearest representation of the latter is to be found in the 'endriago subjects',[3] which embody a dystopian version of marginalised masculinities: men who 'decide to make use of violence as a tool of empowerment and acquisition of capital' (2010, 90).[4] Building on Susan Sontag's concept of 'fascinating fascism' (1980 [1975]), which refers to the techniques of visual seduction in Nazi propaganda, Valencia and Sepúlveda propose the expression 'fascinating violence' (2016) to describe current (necro)visuality regimes. They define fascinating violence as 'a technology of visual seduction that appropriates affects and appeals to the codes of emotionality and identification, creating an extensive community simulation rooted in the values of gore capitalism and its cult of violence' (2016, 84).[5]

In necro-visuality regimes, the production of images that glorify violence operates as a form of social control that normalises violence (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016, 80). This is particularly evident when such violence is inflicted on lives already labelled as precarious, a term coined by Judith Butler to refer to those whose lives are regarded as less worthy of mourning than the hegemonic ones (2004). In order to dismantle the regimes of necro-visuality, Valencia argues, it is necessary to subvert hegemonic and complicit masculinities, that is, to draw up alliances, become a woman, become a migrant, become precarious (Valencia 2010, 175). In short, the only way out of such regimes is to find subjectivities which do not legitimise themselves by means of violence and hyper-consumerism.

Feminist Counter-Visuality Practices: Reappropriating the Gaze in Cinema

The theoretical tools previously summarised allow us to disclose the persuasive visual strategies employed by patriarchal discourses, and have also nurtured counter-practices of feminist filmmakers who look for other ways of seeing within their audiovisual texts. A classic example of dangerously persuasive visual discourse is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and its focus on the 'to be looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 1988 [1975]) of the female protagonist, Marion. Through a feminist 're-vision' (Rich 1972) and 'resistant reading' (Fetterley 1978) of this film, it is possible to expose how Marion

is constantly consumed by male gazes but cannot enact 'the right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011) herself until it is too late. At the beginning of *Psycho* the story is told mainly from the point of view of Marion, a real estate secretary who steals a large sum of money from a client. In a surprising plot twist, she is murdered by Norman Bates, the owner of the motel in which she decides to spend the night during her escape. Marion's difficulty to actually look is foregrounded by cinematic and narrative codes. In one scene, she is invasively questioned by a state patrol trooper whose eyes she cannot see, since he keeps his sunglasses on throughout the dialogue. Later, she has to stop at the Bates Motel because she cannot see the highway due to the heavy rain.

In her claim for the use of feminist textual analysis to uncover the persuasion mechanisms and the repression of the feminine that underlie classical patriarchal cinema, Annette Kuhn discusses French critic Raymond Bellour's analysis of *Psycho* (2000 [1979]). They both concentrate on the sequence right before Marion's murder, a dialogue between her and Norman followed by the moment when he spies on her. Bellour argues that the murder is prefigured by complex associations that link Marion, Norman, his mother, and the overwhelming presence of the stuffed birds. The way the shots are presented conveys the feeling that Marion is disturbed by her being looked at by the menacing birds, which are then replaced by Norman's insistently aggressive gaze. He is framed in ways that associate him with the shadows, beaks, and wings of said birds. On the wall, we can also see a painting of *Susanna and the Elders* by Willem Van Mieris (1731) whose subject matter is precisely the lascivious voyeurism of two old men, and it is this painting that Norman removes in the next scene in order to spy on Marion, as she gets undressed. His bulging eyeball peeping through a tiny luminous hole is shown in close-ups alternated with subjective shots which force spectators to adopt his point of view.

In opposition to Norman's murderous gaze, the sequence ends with a close-up showing dead Marion's open eye, again unable to see. Taking into account that right before her murder, several shots had emphasised Marion's self-pleasure at the shower, the whole sequence illustrates Mulvey's point about the use of sadism and fetishism as strategies for counteracting the threat of female sexuality, desire, and pleasure. In Hitchcock's film, the female character is neutralised by being cut up

> not only at the level of cinematic representation, by a practice of editing which fragments the body of the woman in the film image, but also at the level of the narrative itself, in that the woman may be murdered . . . It is as if at the same time as the woman (Marion) must be punished for her crime (stealing money), so the feminine must be repressed because of the threat it poses to the patriarchal order.
>
> (Kuhn 1994, 102)

Following de Lauretis' claim for a reappropriation of visual pleasure (1984), we now turn to examples of transgressive gazes within films made with that intention: Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992) and Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady* (1996). Both films are adaptations of novels, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). They both employ what de Lauretis calls 'the fourth look' (1984, 148), characterised by a direct look from the characters towards the camera, thus interpellating the spectators in their act of looking and destabilising dominant cinema's conventions.

Orlando incorporates gender subversion in its plot since Orlando, the main character, lives across four centuries, first as a man and then as a woman. Sally Potter's audiovisual translation of Woolf's self-consciousness technique takes the form of complicit gazes directed by the protagonist towards the spectators at different moments of the film. As for Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*, it is the preface sequence which elicits an anachronic estrangement from us, the viewers, as we read the film credits. While the film is about Isabel Archer, a young woman with romantic ideals who faces several challenges after inheriting a large sum of money at the end of the nineteenth century, the preface starts with the voice-overs of young women talking about love and sexual awakening. Next, the credits appear on top of images of girls in their 20s wearing contemporary clothes, dancing with childlike abandon, enjoying each other's company, and looking directly into the camera. Campion seems to point at the fact that the issues of female desire portrayed in the novel are just as pertinent now as they were in the Victorian era. She is also conscious of her response-ability towards the novel she adapts: as a current filmmaker she can freely give voice to the sexual concerns Henry James could only hint at due to Victorian censorship.

While these films are well-known examples of female gazes, we now want to turn to contemporary Spanish films which, we argue, respond to de Lauretis's claim for 'a feminist social vision' (1987c, 134) capable of constructing other ways of seeing for feminist subjects. Our method is the close-reading of a selection of scenes, which are situated in their '*contextuality* and *historicity*' (Lukic and Sánchez 2011, 106; original emphasis) and hence serve as examples of counter-visualities in dialogue with urgent feminist issues.

The Spanish Feminist Agenda through Fiction and Non-Fiction Cinema: Close-Reading of Selected Scenes

In what follows we close-read seven scenes from recent Spanish fiction and non-fiction films. The scenes have been selected because of their pivotal importance in the films they belong to. Their relevance, we argue, is attained by means of counter-visuality strategies, used in order to effect feminist persuasion and response-ability before the current challenges faced by the

feminist movement in Spain. Some of these issues, as mentioned earlier, are gender-based violence, abortion, the right to one's own body, or the subversion of gender binaries.

Let us start with Agrado's monologue in *Todo sobre mi madre/All about My Mother* (1999) by Pedro Almodóvar. Here the director resorts to the representation of theatre within cinema, so that diegetic performance becomes an ally for exposing the performativity of gender (Butler 1990) in a monologue by a transsexual character. Gazing back at the audience from a theatre stage within the diegesis of the film, Agrado enumerates her surgeries and the harassment she has faced, before proudly stating: 'You are more authentic the more you resemble what you have dreamt you are' (Almodóvar 1999, 01:15:09).[6] Ultimately, the exchange of complicit and sympathetic gazes between Agrado and her audience at the theatre works as a strategy for a direct interpellation on the spectators beyond the screen whose attention is hence directed towards the main points in the film: biopolitics and the assignation of gendered roles such as motherhood and the need to question traditional conceptions of the family. This scene is an interesting example of what de Lauretis calls narrative cinema 'with a vengeance' (1987b, 108), for it subverts a leitmotif of dominant cinema—the display of woman as sexual object—in both form and content. Standing at the centre of the stage, Agrado is first framed as a vision, a sight. But the potentially objectifying gaze is soon challenged by two formal strategies that facilitate empathy and response-ability from the audiences within and outside the diegesis of the film. These strategies are the countershots that show the audience from Agrado's point of view and the close-ups of her face looking at the camera, which elicit 'the fourth look' (de Lauretis 1984, 148) from spectators. Via these formal decisions, Agrado's monologue is also an instance of what Mirzoeff describes as a refusal to allow authority to impose a unique way of seeing and instead opening the possibility for 'an exchange of looks in which all parties both look and are looked at in the mutual pursuit of an understanding of the other' (2009, 15). Agrado also enacts her 'right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011, 475) in her verbal discourse, which is a counter-visuality claim in itself. In describing her gender transition, she widens our constraints of thought regarding our ways of seeing femininity and 'authenticity'.

Solas/Alone (Zambrano 1999) and *Te doy mis ojos/Take My Eyes* (Bollaín 2003) deal with the physical and psychological effects of gender-based violence, an issue land-marked in Spain in 2004 by the implementation of the Organic Law for Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence (Ley Orgánica de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género). *Solas* tells the story of a mother and a daughter, Rosa and María, who have faced gender-based violence in their relationships with men. This violence has estranged them for years with María living in Seville, after having run away from the toxicity of their family home in the village, and it is only now that they can briefly reunite. The strategy employed

by Benito Zambrano is parallelism: the contrast of two scenes foiling each other so that the second one comments on the first one and answers what was kept silent before. In the first scene, Rosa is taking care of her husband in a hospital in Seville. Bedridden, aggressive and embittered, he asks her if he has been a 'good man' to which she replies with a hesitant 'yes', timidly adding: 'you hit me sometimes' (Zambrano 1999, 00:56:35). He starts losing his temper and asks again if he behaved 'as a man' so she reassures him: 'we always had food at home' (00:56:43). Still not satisfied with this answer he insists again so that she ends up by replying that she does not understand what he is trying to say. To this, his reply is abuse: 'Bah. Stupid old woman. You never understand anything'. The daughter, who has heard the insulting end of the conversation, tells her mother that it is a bit late for such questions. 'He must not have an easy conscience. I do' (00:57:19) is Rosa's final answer. In the second scene, Rosa is about to return to the village since her husband has been released from the hospital. On saying goodbye to Emilio, her daughter's neighbour, a kind old widower, she tells him he is 'a good man' and that his wife was a lucky woman. He modestly replies that he made her suffer but when Rosa asks him if he ever hit her, he emphatically says he would never have done such a thing. Rosa then smiles to herself and asserts: 'See? I was right. You are a good man' (01:12:28). The parallelism between these two scenes makes it possible for the female character, Rosa, to dare speak up in a way that allows spectators to make sense of her previous silences imposed by patriarchal authority.

In *Te doy mis ojos*, Icíar Bollaín tells the story of Pilar, a woman who faces increasing violence from her husband, Antonio, and is incapable of seeing and acting upon it. We can detect two strategies in this film: first, as with *Todo sobre mi madre*, a certain kind of staging and role-playing to unmask the set phrases used by abusive men in toxic relationships. In one scene, Pilar goes to the coffee shop with her female friends, one of whom, Lola, has had an argument with her lover. When he comes back asking for forgiveness, the shot shows the couple in the street, while two of the friends imagine the phrases he is using to convince Lola to give him another chance. As the scene unfolds, we can see the distressed face of Pilar as she recognises herself in Lola. The second strategy employed by Bollaín is a palimpsestic narration stemming from a visual art metaphor, which allows for an intertextual reading between present day Pilar and Ovid's/Titian's *Danae*. In a way, this example uses both of the aforementioned strategies, that is, staging and parallelism. This counter-visuality through art is essential to understand the main thesis of the film, which is the need of the female character to retake control of her gaze, the need to recover her eyes in order to fight back the violence she was unable to see before.

Pilar, who wants to become a tour guide in an art museum, explains Titian's painting, *Danaë and the Shower of Gold*, to a group of students: Danae is locked in a tower by her father, so that no man can get near her, 'but Jupiter is in love with her and enters the tower, turning himself into

gold dust to have her . . . She gives herself to him in body and soul' (Bollaín 2003, 01:10:20). Pilar is not aware that Antonio is spying on her and becoming increasingly angry as the comments from the students start having erotic connotations. Mirroring her own situation, she tells them:

> Some of its owners, like Jupiter, wanted *Danae* right nearby. But others were like her father, locking it up so no one saw it. One king even wanted to burn it, but he didn't manage to, and here it is where everyone can see it.
>
> (01:11:25)

The third scene which can serve as an example of a counter-visuality strategy is from *Los años desnudos/The Naked Years* (2008), which portrays the situation of the Spanish film industry during the post-dictatorship 'Transition' period (1975–1985). Franco's death, and the said freedom that came with it, gave rise to the production of hundreds of soft-porn movies, labelled as the cinema of 'el destape' (uncovering), in which women's bodies were commodified under the discourse of sexual liberation. The opening scene of the film shows a casting attended by one of the protagonists, wannabe actress Sandra Valle. She appears in full shot, looking directly into the camera, so that the spectators are placed in the position of the male evaluator, whose voice-over asks Sandra to undress. She does so self-consciously, keeping her sunglasses on as self-protection against the aggressive male gaze, until she actually speaks against such a gaze through a monologue from Federico García Lorca's play *Doña Rosita, the Spinster*. In a close-up of her face, Sandra says: 'I don't like you looking at me like this, I'm bothered by those faithful dog gazes. Those pitying looks disturb me and annoy me' (Ayaso and Sabroso 2008, 00:02:50).

In this way, directors Dunia Ayaso and Félix Sabroso resort to shock, counter-fetishism, ironic voyeurism, theatre within theatre and intertextuality as a response to the aforementioned commodification of women's bodies. This also reveals one of the main ideas of the film: 'the men who would understand women like you have not been born yet' (01:02:43), as a transgender character tells Sandra in another scene. This phrase summarises one of the key issues in women's films during the 'Transition' that, although women's rights might have been repressed during the Franco years, they were only dormant. Spanish women were quick to continue the open vindication of their rights as soon as the dictator died. And they did so with a vengeance (de Lauretis 1987b, 108). Spanish men, mis-educated by 40 years of Francoism into patterns of hegemonic masculinity, were unable to accompany them along this path of liberation at the time. By emphasising this point, Ayaso and Sabroso also pay a tribute to Pilar Miro's *Gary Cooper thou who art in Heaven* whose underlying message, formulated 27 years previously in 1981, was concerned with the failure or inability of Spanish men to support women's equal rights.

By close reading the selections of scenes from these four films, we have identified various feminist counter-visuality practices, which elicit a response-able gaze from spectators regarding the social issues focused upon. The two films that deal with gender-based violence avoid falling into a depiction of 'fascinating violence' within a 'necro-visuality regime' (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016), and rather resort to parallelism and contrasting of scenes, staging, role-playing, and palimpsestic narration with visual metaphors. Audiences are asked to make sense of what is first silenced but then outspoken in *Solas*, and to accompany the protagonist of *Te doy mis ojos* in her process of 'making visible the invisible' (Kuhn 1994, 67) mechanisms of abusive relationships disguised under the veil of romantic love. The other two films employ the theatre within cinema as an ally for exposing the performativity of gender (*Todo sobre mi madre*) and resisting the commodification of women's bodies (*Los años desnudos*). Their narratives 'with a vengeance' (de Lauretis 1987b, 108) complement content with formal strategies, in ways that confront spectators with our thoughts' limitations and the 'violence implicit in our visualizing practices' (Haraway 1988, 585).

We now move our discussion towards three non-fiction films, in which audiovisual language is put at the service of 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson 1946), as Grierson's classical definition conceives documentary cinema. The raw materials with which these films work are objects and subjects that exist or existed and that were not exclusively created for the camera. In their re-framing reality and co-creating what they show—for the camera and the filmmaker always intrude onto the situation being filmed and rewrite it through the editing (Bruzzi 2000, 8)—documentary films can be examples of counter-visuality devices in which the operation described by Mirzoeff is more clear, namely, making 'sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative' (2011, 485).

The first non-fiction film is *La mujer, cosa de hombres/Woman Is a Man's Thing* (Coixet 2009), which is a chapter from a Spanish Radio and Television Corporation (RTVE) series. Isabel Coixet's strategy is contrasting television advertisements and shows produced by RTVE since 1960 with fragments of television news reporting on feminicides. For instance, a so-called humorous sketch in which a man throws his wife out of the window follows the real news of a man killing his partner in the same way (Coixet 2009, 00:02:52). Through this strategy the short film ingeniously raises awareness of the naturalisation of gender-based violence in the media representations of necro-visuality (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016, 84) and its connection with the 'real' violence against real women.

The collective documentary *Yo decido. El tren de la libertad/ My Choice. The Freedom Train* (2014) portrays the massive demonstration held on 1 February, 2014, against an amendment to the abortion law presented by the Spanish Minister of Justice at the time, Alberto Ruiz Gallardón. Nearly 80 women from the Spanish film industry were involved in the production

of this film. The counter-visuality strategy that we want to highlight in this case is the use of political performance within non-fiction cinema as a way to strengthen the indignation conveyed by talking heads. The editing of the film manages to present its arguments in favour of women's right to their own bodies showing, for instance, a humorous flash mob in the subway which represents abortion as the safety instructions when boarding a plane. A dozen young women, dressed as flight attendants, make a demonstration of travel instructions as a voice-over says:

> Put on your seatbelts . . . and close your minds. We remind you that thinking, complaining, or aborting is strictly forbidden . . . There are two emergency exits: illegal abortions, located between life and death; the other requires leaving Spain in order to have a safe abortion. However, this exit is reserved for first class ladies only . . . We remind you that the last thing this counter-reformation wants is to protect women's lives. Thanks for choosing Patriarchal Airlines.
>
> (00:13:32)

In our last example, *Serás Hombre/You Will Be a Man* (2018), the counter-visuality strategy employed by director Isabel de Ocampo is turning the gaze from women as victims towards men as perpetrators of gender-based violence. She explores the construction of masculinity within a patriarchal framework, through a mixture of realism and performativity in her portrait of two men, one of which is Rafa, an ex-pimp who embodies the 'endriago subject', described by Valencia as the dystopian version of empowered masculinities in necro-visuality regimes (2010). Rafa's first appearance in the film is in his sordid brothel office, advising a newbie pimp to see women as money if he wants to make it big in the sex trafficking business (de Ocampo 2018, 00:03:35). In another eloquent scene, Rafa asks another newbie why he wants to become a pimp, to which he replies:

> I don't want to be a sheep in a company, as I was, for one thousand euros. Treated like shit, while they get rid of you whenever they like. That's also being a sheep. Not such [*sic*] bad reputation as prostitution, but it's being a sheep. You work hard, with a degree and everything. And when Ford decides, you get thrown out after six months . . . Those wolves are well considered because they drive BMWs and Mercedes and work during the day. I'm going to be a wolf. I won't mistreat any woman. But I will have guts and rise in my business.
>
> (01:03:58)

In a context of structural violence, where the desirable conditions of life become the prerogative of a few and frustration is emphasised by a hyper-consumer society, 'endriago subjects' embody subordinate masculinities that, in a perverse reinterpretation of entrepreneurial freedom, resort to

violent mechanisms in order to move from the position of victims to that of victimisers. Rafa's charisma is contrasted with the aesthetics of ugliness in a descent into the hells of sex trafficking, in this documentary film which avoids showing women as victims but does fall into 'fascinating violence' (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016) exploitation.

Nevertheless, the film also incorporates other voices reflecting on masculinities outside androcentric regimes. In the last sequence, as we see various men walking away from the camera, gender-based violence expert Miguel Lorente raises an interrogation: 'that's the question that men ask themselves: why do I have to give up all of this if it works for me? Why should I change something that works for me?' (01:27:15). The way in which these questions are presented, at the same time that one of the men looks into the camera—though with his face blurred—operates as a peculiar kind of 'fourth look' (de Lauretis 1984, 148) that thus interpellates not only those within the film's discourse, but also the spectators.

In close reading these scenes from non-fiction films, we have thus identified three feminist counter-visuality practices that elicit response-able gazes. The documentary film that explicitly deals with gender-based violence, *La mujer cosa de hombres*, presents a different kind of parallelism and contrast, by juxtaposing the 'necro-visuality' (Valencia and Sepúlveda 2016) of advertising that trivialises feminicides with television news reporting on these crimes; in this way, the film confronts spectators with the way in which they have (un)learnt to see violence within the framework of uncritical media consumption. In a different way, *Serás hombre* also deals with violence, employing a mixture of realism and performativity to dissect the performance of masculinity in necro-visuality regimes. Finally, *Yo decido. El tren de la libertad*, whose subject matter is the defence of the right to abortion, uses political and humorous performance as an original way to strengthen feminist claims in the public arena.

Final Thoughts: Feminist Counter-Visuality Practices for Producing Knowledge Otherwise

Throughout this chapter we have explored ways in which what we call feminist counter-visuality practices can help to resist cultures of gender inequality re-produced in audiovisual discourses and beyond. Such practices can range from theoretical insights like Mulvey's male gaze (1988 [1975]) and Fetterley's resisting readership (1978) to formal subversions such as 'the fourth look' (de Lauretis 1984) and content transgressions through narratives 'with a vengeance' (de Lauretis 1987b). All of these, we argue, can be part of 'a feminist toolbox for response-able gazes' that allow us to respond to visual discourses on more equal grounds.

Feminist counter-visuality practices on both sides of the camera and the screen can produce knowledge otherwise at different levels. As stated in the introductory paragraphs, our ways of seeing have been trained by diverse

mechanisms, including 'technologies of gender' (de Lauretis 1987a) such as painting and cinema. All of these have built what we can call an androcentric 'visuality regime' (Mirzoeff 2009, 2011), in which our gazes are built in line with vision as possession, the naturalisation of social in/equalities, and knowledge-making as controlling passive objects with a God-like 'vision from everywhere and nowhere' (Haraway 1988, 584). Response-ability is obscured both because stances of mutual response and looking back are limited and due to lack of awareness and accountability from spectators and creators. What 'a feminist toolbox for response-able gazes' might render possible is the cultivation of such a response-able attitude. Feminist counter-visuality practices, balancing between the lived reality of gender inequalities and the imagined potentialities, can aid us make sense of the androcentric unreality created by these regimes.

Close-reading audiovisual texts from a feminist perspective can serve as a key method for investigating cultures of gender in/equality, regaining vision critically, and training response-able gazes in knowledge-making. By combining theoretical tools with attention to formal strategies in a selection of scenes from Spanish fiction and non-fiction films, we can respond to visual discourses on more equal grounds, opening up possibilities for doing theory *with* and *through* films, starting from the texts but understanding these as always already entangled with a socio-political context. The Spanish films that we have discussed in this chapter translate very urgent socio-political issues into the audiovisual language, such as gender-based violence, gender performativity, and the right to one's own body. We have close-read them from an intersectional feminist perspective, which is our own explicit intellectual and political agenda. Decades of feminist thought have given us tools for dismantling the master's house, paraphrasing Audre Lorde's famous phrase,[7] while also building totally different places to dwell in and to see from.

Notes

1 For a framework which traces a genealogy from what has been termed as fe/male gazes up to what can be understood as transgender, queer, and feminist gazes, see Sánchez and Calderón (2020).

2 De Lauretis emphasises the risk of defining a specific female gaze and a genre of women's cinema, for this 'only means complying, accepting a certain definition of art, cinema and culture, and obligingly showing how women can and do "contribute", pay their tribute, to "society" . . . [it] is to remain caught in the master's house and there . . . to legitimate the hidden agendas of a culture we badly need to change' (1987c, 131).

3 The endriago monster is a literary character that combines a man with a hydra and a dragon.

4 The original text reads as follows: 'los sujetos endriagos deciden hacer uso de la violencia como herramienta de empoderamiento y de adquisición de capital'. For all quotes from Valencia (2010) as well as Valencia and Sepúlveda (2016), translations are ours.

5 The orginal text reads as follows: 'una tecnología de seducción visual que se apropia de los afectos y apela a los códigos de emotividad e identificación, en la media que crea un simulacro de comunidad extensa enraizada en los valores del capitalismo gore y su culto a la violencia'.
6 The language spoken in the cited films is Spanish, with English subtitles. We have used these subtitles for the translations.
7 As Lorde underlines, 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (2007 [1984]).

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