DISMANTLING THE *VOYEUR*'S INTRUSION: THE POSITION OF THE GAZE IN THE FILMS OF CHANTAL AKERMAN

ARIADNA MORENO PELLEJERO

INTRODUCTION

The *voyeur*, the figure who watches others without being seen, has been represented in art forms as diverse as painting, engraving and literature at various times over the course of art history. However, the term has only been used since the end of the 19th century in literature, and more recently in fields such as painting and cinema.[1] The *voyeur* is usually depicted as a man who gets pleasure out of the erotic experience of observing a woman in her private activities. In classical cinema it has often been associated with spies, reporters, psychiatrists or police investigators who are following a woman (Denzin, 1995). The gazes of these *voyeurs* may be used as a vehicle for the gaze of the spectator, who is placed in the position of the *voyeur*-character, and indirectly in the position of the *voyeur*-director. This trope has led feminist film theorists, especially since the 1960s, to question the way the gaze is directed on women, who are presented as eroticised objects in so much mainstream cinema (Mulvey, 1989 [1975]: 16-17).

In recent years, some theorists have also identified a form of mediatised *voyeurism* based on invading the privacy of the Other on social media. This Other participates in a kind of public exhibition of their private life for the purpose of entertainment, while the observer is given apparently real images and information without having to interact with them (Calvert, 2004: 8; Sanabria, 2008: 164).[2] In this way, television and social media platforms have become *voyeur*istic spaces where we can expose private moments of happiness and personal gratification to others, turning ourselves into observed *voyeurs* who create and consume media autobiographies based on collective models such as selfies, potentially leading to the projection of a whole range of asymmetrical passions like admiration or envy (Guardiola, 2018: 83; Mesías-Lema, Eiriz, 2022: 2).

The films of Chantal Akerman, on the other hand, achieve a ritual form that reveals what otherwise might go unnoticed based on her personal quests as a woman filmmaker and the daughter of Auschwitz survivors (Moreno Pellejero, 2023). In all her work, Akerman is conscious of the importance of the position of the gaze for changing how she approaches the Other and how she presents herself, allowing spectators to distance themselves from her gaze and the gaze of her characters. In this way, she dismantles some of the constructs that have relegated women to the background in cinema and presents an alternative to the way we normally relate to virtual images.

Research on Akerman's oeuvre has focused on questions of gender and hyperrealism (Margulies, 1996), self-representation (Otero, 2007), and post-modernity (Pravadelli, 2000), without exploring the reflection it offers on *voyeurism*. None of the many studies of and tributes to the filmmaker have considered this question, despite their recognition of a shift in the gaze towards women in her films (Delorme, 2015; Uzal, 2021; Ruby Rich, 2016; White, 2019; Mazière & Reynolds, 2019; Schmid & Wilson, 2019; Algarín Navarro, 2020). However, Ivone Margulies points to the possibility of understanding Akerman's filmography in anthropological and ethnographic terms with her observation of the distance at which Akerman positions the camera and films everyday life (Margulies, 1996: 7). Similarly, in a study of experimental cinema that includes *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1976), Catherine Russell refers to the possibility of defining certain films that arise from their directors' personal searches as "autoethnographies" that could form part of *microcultures*, broader historical processes or social issues. This is a notion that has subsequently been applied to Akerman's work by various theorists (Russell, 1999: 17, 277, 311; Kiani, 2018; Moreno Pellejero, 2021), who dismiss the conception—originally questioned by B. Ruby Rich (2005 [1978])—of the ethnographer as a clinical, objective observer of reality, as well as the association of ethnography with a *voyeuristic* gaze that leads to an impulse to tell stories about the modern "self" in cinema, to look at but not really listen to the Other (Denzin, 1995: 211).

AKERMAN IS CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POSITION OF THE GAZE FOR CHANGING HOW SHE APPROACHES THE OTHER AND HOW SHE PRESENTS HERSELF, ALLOWING SPECTATORS TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM HER GAZE AND THE GAZE OF HER CHARACTERS

Right from her earliest films, Akerman offers us the opportunity to reflect on how we gaze and how we show ourselves. In *Saute ma ville* [Blow Up My Town] (1968), amid the chaos and disorder in her parents' kitchen, Akerman sees her reflection in a mirror and reacts to it as if she were reacting to a person who was able to watch her secretly. In her second short film, *L'enfant aimé ou je joue à être une femme mariée* [The Beloved Child or I Play at Being a Married Woman] (1971), the character portrayed by Claire Wauthion looks at herself in the mirror while identifying parts of her body in a performative act of self-affirmation and recognition; Akerman would use this scene again years later in her installation *Dans le miroir* [In the Mirror] (2007). In the first episode of *Je, tu, il, elle* [I, You, He, She] (1974), Akerman plays Julie, who, while lounging naked in her bedroom, notices a man watching her from outside; she responds by getting up and returning his gaze, in a revealing moment of confrontation with the *voyeur*, who awkwardly flees the scene after being discovered. On the other hand, in *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), the camera is positioned to show the domestic space from various angles that are repeated with the introduction of

different variables over the three days that the protagonist is shown carrying out her household chores.

However, in this study the focus of analysis will be on three films in which Akerman dismantles the *voyeur*'s intrusion with the way she positions the camera to capture the scene or in which the person observed in the scene returns the *voyeur*'s gaze. The three films, *Hotel Monterey* (1972), *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna,* [Meetings with Anna] (1978) and *La Captive* [The Captive] (2000), have not received much scholarly attention and yet are especially significant for the director's way of approaching the Other, for the female character's confrontation of the *voyeur*'s intrusion, or for exposing the psychological complexity entailed in the figure of the *voyeur*.

HOTEL MONTEREY: AKERMAN'S FIRST APPROACHES TO THE OTHER

In *Hotel Monterey* (00:13:23 to 00:19:14), we meet some of the guests in this hotel in New York City where Akerman stayed in 1972. Akerman's fourth film employs a structure based on slowly sequenced camera movements and serial repetitions of different areas of the hotel that contribute to the creation of an immersive experience, fostered by the silence of the austere corridors and hotel rooms, and the motionlessness of the guests that Babette Mangolte's camera finds there. After a sequence of shots of the hotel lobby and another of the movement inside a lift, we come to the sequences in the guest rooms, where the director carries out her first stylistic experiments with the prolonged frontal shots that would be characteristic of her later work, influenced by the importance given to form in the structural films of directors like Michael Snow.[3] These shots present spaces that are empty or occupied by guests, who are presented in painterly portraits from a certain distance.

Particularly noteworthy is a symmetrical full shot of a hotel room with a bed in the middle, in a motionless image that is sustained for around 42 seconds. After a cut, we see the room with the bed in a new arrangement, and Akerman appears sitting with her back to the camera, in a shot that lasts for around 24 seconds. This is a shot that makes the camera's presence evident to the spectator, although the person portrayed pays no attention to that presence [IMAGE 1]. In the next shot, the camera is positioned behind a door, with an intrusiveness suggestive of a *voyeur* as it shows

Image 1. Akerman caught by the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



Image 2. Shot in which the *voyeuse*'s gaze is interrupted by the door closing in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



what seems to be the filmmaker herself under the sheets of the bed in the room shown previously. But the door is closing, interrupting the camera's (and spectator's) invasive act of spying on the woman in the privacy of her bedroom [IMAGE 2].

The next guests shown in their rooms are positioned in front of the camera. One is an old man who is aware he is being watched; he is shown seated, looking at the camera with a slight smile in a full shot [IMAGE 3]. The posture and dignity of this elderly man recalls the stateliness of the portraits painted by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, such as *Monsieur Bertin* (1832), although Akerman's portrait conveys a somewhat more friendly and less stern character than Bertin. She also makes use of the movement and extension over time offered by the cinematic medium, recalling the portraits that come to life in Andy Warhol's work. However, in Akerman's film we glimpse only a momentary flutter of the eyebrows or a slight movement of the hand of the anonymous protagonist, while Warhol shows stars carrying out an action, such as Robert Indiana eating a mushroom for approximately 45 minutes in *Eat* (1963), a film that influenced the temporal focus of Akerman's work in New York (Moreno Pellejero, 2023: 136).

We also meet a pregnant woman in her room, occupying the centre of a full shot taken from the hallway. The camera's position gives depth to the image and uses the threshold of the door to frame the young woman, who is illuminated by a light source inside the room to the left, outside the shot [IMAGE 4]. The door is completely open and appears inside the shot rather than being concealed, evoking the domestic scenes of 17th-century Dutch painting. Along similar lines, Corinne Rondeau compares the inside and outside views captured in the corridors in *Hotel Monterey* to the numerous rows of doors and lines characterising the composition of the scenes of women reading letters indoors in the paintings of Johannes Vermeer (Rondeau, 2013: 72). In works like Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (1657-59), a young woman reads a love letter while facing an open window on the left, through which daylight floods the scene. Although we are being given access to the intimacy of a domestic setting, the curtain in the foreground reminds us that we are witnessing a private moment, and that she could hide herself from view.

Above. Image 3. A guest poses for the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Below. Image 4. A young pregnant woman is captured by the camera in *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman, 1972). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman





AKERMAN TRIES TO APPROACH THESE PEOPLE THROUGH THE OBSERVATION AND EXPERIENCE RESULTING FROM THE PASSING SECONDS AND MINUTES THAT SHOW IN THEIR FACES AND BODIES

In Akerman's film, the woman does not look at the camera, but she is positioned in front of it in a moment of private solitude inside her hotel room. She pays no attention to the spectator, but the camera confirms her presence with the stillness and duration of a shot lasting for approximately 57 seconds. As the camera is not concealed and the door is not closed, she is probably aware that she is being watched. This maintains something of the *voyeur*'s intrusion, but it also reveals the director's and camera operator's position in relation to the spectator and the people portrayed, without resorting to the eroticising of the woman's body or the pretext of a love story, to show the inside of a room with a person occupying it in a reflective posture.

Akerman tries to approach these people through the observation and experience resulting from the passing seconds and minutes that show in their faces and bodies. She seeks to trigger her spectators' senses in response to what they are witnessing without imposing a particular message; in this way, she can move our sensations towards places never before visited (Martínez Morales, 2022). In her way of approaching the Other of herself, Akerman is profoundly influenced by the ethical perspective of Levinas, for whom she felt a special affinity as a Jew and the child of Auschwitz survivors. The Desire for the Other, in the Levinasian sense, leads her to try to understand the faces of those she meets on her travels, observing them, overcoming the silence or the lack of verbal comprehension, seeking some kind of humanity in the portraits of the Other. In opposition to the selfhood that has characterised Western European philosophy, Levinas proposes alterity, a different gaze upon the face of the Other (Levinas, 2002).

Akerman quotes Levinas: "When you see the face of the Other, you already hear the words 'Thou shalt not kill'" (Akerman, 2011b). This ethical principle is expressed in the positioning of the camera and the gaze in her films when it is placed at the service of alterity, understanding the Other as the face through which to give something without imposing oneself; this gives rise to the appearance of the Other, where the face is the site of vindication of the essence of humanity (Levinas, 2002: 232). Contributing to this is the stillness of the camera and the respectful manner of approaching the characters Akerman encounters on her journey, evident in the distance the camera maintains from the privacy of the subjects portrayed in quiet reflection and in the use of full shots. All this gives the spectator the position of an outsider, while the subjects are at the spaces they inhabit despite the transitory nature of hotels as places of temporary accommodation.

LES RENDEZ-VOUS D'ANNA: CONFRONTING THE GAZE WITH SELF-AFFIRMATION

In the fourth shot in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, the title character arrives at the reception of the first hotel she will be staying at in Germany on a tour to present her new film (00:04:42 to 00:05:10). Played by Aurore Clément, Anna is presented as Akerman's alter ego, based on her own experiences travelling for work.[4] The protagonist is thus a recognised filmmaker visiting different European cities to promote her most recent film. *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* was made during a more advanced period in Akerman's career than *Hotel Monterey*, when she was combining the formal style of the avant-garde structural film with a narrative focusing on everyday questions of modern European cinema.



Image 5. Anna catches the voyeur watching her in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

The image in question is a medium frontal shot taken from the hotel reception desk. In the foreground we see Anna in the lobby, facing the camera, and in the background a stranger is watching her [IMAGE 5]. At one point she seems to sense his presence, prompting her to turn around while the receptionist is attending her, and she sees the man who has been observing her (00:04:52 to 00:04:54). When he realises that he has been caught, the *voyeur* pretends to sip at his drink (00:04:53 to 00:05:03) and remains sitting awkwardly in the background until a change of shot when Anna heads for the lift. With this response she not only interrupts the *voyeur*'s act of spying on her but also inverts the role of *voyeur* subject, turning him into the object observed by her.

ANNA NOT ONLY INTERRUPTS THE VOYEUR'S ACT OF SPYING ON HER WITH HER CONFRONTATION BUT ALSO INVERTS THE ROLE OF VOYEUR SUBJECT, TURNING HIM INTO THE OBJECT OBSERVED BY HER

Darren Hughes identifies a rupture with the perfect symmetry of the film's opening shots (at the train station and the hotel entrance), in which Anna occupies the centre of the image at a 90-degree angle, at the moment in this shot when she confronts the stranger's gaze (Hughes, 2010). In this fourth shot, Anna is to the right of the centre of the frame facing the camera, while the *voyeur* is positioned in the background to the left, thereby breaking the symmetrical perfection to reveal a battle between the two characters over the centre of the shot (Hughes, 2010).

Akerman's approach in this film also allows us to identify the *voyeur* by witnessing the whole scene with both characters contained in our field of view, rather than placing us in the *voyeur*'s position. This in turn constitutes a change in the way of directing the gaze theorised by Mulvey, in relation to the visual pleasures offered by a certain style of classical cinema that depicted the woman as the *leitmotiv* of erotic spectacle while the man played the active role identified with the male spectator who sees himself reflected on the screen (Mulvey, 1989). However, one of the criticisms made of Mulvey by other feminist film







From top to bottom. Image 6. Anna listens to the first man she meets on her travels in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Image 7. Anna marks her position in the centre of the image while saying goodbye in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Image 8. In her last meeting Anna listens to her lover, whose reflection is visible in the glass behind her, in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

theorists is her failure to consider that the female spectator may identify herself with the active role of the man on screen, or adopt a critical perspective on the scene observed (Doane, 1999: 240).

Teresa de Lauretis argues that the female spectator's identification with the scene observed is complex in much mainstream cinema. The female spectator might identify, on the one hand, with the passive object (the woman, the body, the landscape), or on the other, with the active position (the man's and the camera's gaze). Nevertheless, de Lauretis suggests that films like Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), instead of assigning the woman a role of erotic object, give the female spectator the opportunity to recognise the image, stop to contemplate it and try to make sense of what escapes her (de Lauretis 1992: 228; 1987: 142).

In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, Akerman also dismantles the *voyeur*'s intrusive, non-consensual gaze explicitly through the confrontation described above, although this does not keep Anna from acknowledging her own sexuality. She can desire or look with longing at a man or at another woman, or she can be the object of desire of another who is in turn the object of her desire. This ties in with Jackie Stacey's perspective on Mulvey's theory when she posits the possibility that women, as subjects of the story, may gaze erotically at a man or another woman, and that this may be extended to the gaze of female spectators (Stacey, 1999). Anna encounters different lovers at the stops she makes on her journey and maintains a rather more intimate relationship with a woman we never see, although she talks about her to her mother.

Despite this, Anna's intimate encounters with the men shown in the film are unsuccessful, like the first encounter on the night in the hotel she arrived at in the shot described above. The next day, Anna goes to the birthday party of the man's daughter, where he talks to her about his wife leaving him and about Germany's past. At one point, a symmetrical full shot shows both characters, the man on the left and Anna on the right, looking at him in an attentive posture (00:30:43-00:34:15). She is shown to be listening to the sto-

ries of his life, establishing a certain degree of reciprocity between them, albeit not romantic (IMAGE 6). Anna's emotional separation is more obvious when she is about to leave his home, as she occupies the centre of the full shot when they say goodbye (00:34-54 to 00:37:08). He tries to convince her to stay, but she asserts herself and takes possession of the centre of the image before going on her way (IMAGE 7).

In her last encounter with a lover, in Paris, Anna once again adopts an attentive posture while he talks to her about his exhaustion (01:42:38 to 01:43:14). Instead of viewing the scene from the perspective of one of the characters, we see a medium shot of Anna in a bathrobe facing the camera, looking at her lover, whose figure is reflected in the glass behind her (IMAGE 8). For Levinas, listening is as essential as looking, as in the act of listening we attain the "living presence" of the Other, which teaches us something (Levinas 2003: 148-149). Anna listens to the men she interacts with on her travels, just as she listens to a family friend, and her mother listens to her. In the same way, the director, reflected in Anna, and the spectators listen to the stories of her characters.

Maud Ceuterick describes *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* as the kind of film that rewrites the space, power and body of the woman in the travel narrative, which has traditionally been largely a narrative of men (Ceuterick, 2020: 23). This is reflected in the dominance of a strange nomadic quality in the film that Gilles Deleuze associates with the literature of Virginia Woolf, as he suggests that in the work of both women the states of the body undergo a slow ceremony whose attitudes he defines as a "feminine *gestus*" capable of capturing the stories and the crises of the world (Deleuze, 2010).

Essential to this *gestus* is not only Anna's movement in her erratic wanderings, but also the positioning of the camera or of Anna in relation to the other people she meets. There is a self-affirmation in that positioning that gives her a quality similar to the "nomadic subjects" theorised by Rosi Braidotti, subjects in a state of constant change and movement with their capacity to expand their thinking in the recognition of their identities and differences, where there is room for multiplicity (Braidotti, 2000: 189-202). Anna is portrayed as a nomadic subject and the way Akerman presents her gives spectators the opportunity to expand their thinking and their gaze in an unintrusive direction.

Image 9. Simon watches Ariane and Andrée in a home movie in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman



LA CAPTIVE: REVEALING THE *VOYEUR* TO THE SPECTATOR

In *La Captive*, Akerman draws on the characters of Albertine in Marcel Proust's *The Prisoner* (1923), whose name she changes to Ariane, and the story's narrator, who in the film becomes Simon. The result is a free adaptation of the story of control and vulnerability, of Simon's domination of Ariane and of the little spaces of freedom she finds. *Voyeurism* already plays a central role in Proust's novel, as the story is shown through the narrator's investigative eye (Bolla & Gómez, 2015: 3).[5] However, although *voyeurism* is a constant in Akerman's film, the story is not told from Simon's perspective. Instead, it is shown by Akerman, whose gaze is differentiated from Simon's by mar-

king her presence behind the camera while he is on screen.

Albertine's absence marks the narrator's memory that serves as the source of the story in *The Prisoner,* just as Ariane's absence does at the start of the film, which begins with the same sound and image of waves with which it ends. Following this opening, we are shown footage of Ariane with a friend on the beach, although the spectator does not yet know who either of the young women are. We then cut directly to a medium shot of Simon, who is watching this home movie projected on a screen (00:03:33 to 00:03:38). Simon repeats the words "to me", "to me", "to me really…". We then see the footage of the young women while we hear Simon repeating in a voice-over "to me really…", "to me really…" as if he were trying to decipher these words in Ariane's face.

Simon's shadow appears in the frame and blocks out a part of the home movie projection (IMAGE 9). His dark silhouette remains there for a few seconds, until the young woman in the footage runs towards the sea (00:03:42 to 00:03:56). The placement of Akerman's camera is not in the position of the *voyeur* but behind his back, allowing the spectators to see him in the act of watching, so that instead of a story about the eroticism or beauty of Ariane's private world, what we will witness is a story about her captivity and that of a *voyeur* incapable of escaping his own obsession.

THE PLACEMENT OF AKERMAN'S CAMERA IS NOT IN THE POSITION OF THE VOYEUR BUT BEHIND HIS BACK, ALLOWING THE SPECTATORS TO SEE HIM IN THE ACT OF WATCHING, SO THAT INSTEAD OF A STORY ABOUT THE EROTICISM OR BEAUTY OF ARIANE'S PRIVATE WORLD, WHAT WE WILL WITNESS IS A STORY ABOUT HER CAPTIVITY AND THAT OF A VOYEUR INCAPABLE OF ESCAPING HIS OWN OBSESSION

After this opening sequence, we are taken back in time to a Parisian square where we hear the sound of a pair of high heels (00:03:57 to 00:04:17). The young woman we saw previously in the footage of the beach then appears on screen. In the next shot, we see her getting into a convertible, and a slight camera movement reveals Simon inside a car parked behind the one Ariane has just climbed into. We hear her car start up and once she begins driving Simon follows her, to the sound of Sergei Rachmaninoff's symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead* (1909). This begins a chase sequence that takes inspiration from a similar scene in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), when Scottie follows Madeleine in his car through the streets of San Francisco, accompanied by a musical composition by Bernard Herrmann.

The sequence in Akerman's film has a duration of 5 minutes and 33 seconds and comprises 25 shots (00:03:57 to 00:09:32). This is more typical of a classical cinema narrative than her usual style of filmmaking with shots lasting for several minutes. Nevertheless, it falls far short of the approximately 160 shots that Hitchcock uses the first time Scottie stalks Madeleine in *Vertigo* over the course of 13 minutes and 15 seconds (00:17:46 to 00:31.01). Hitchcock's sequence covers a longer period of story time than it does in Akerman's film, and it is enhanced by shots of a wide variety of locations, from the plaza and the initial chase in the car to the hotel that Madeleine finally arrives at, passing by a cemetery and a museum along the way.

In Akerman's film, full shots taken from the car driven by Simon, showing Ariane's convertible and the bonnet of Simon's car (IMAGE 10), alternate with medium shots of Simon's pale, sad and worried face while he follows her (IMAGE 11). Shots of Simon's face appear five times, adding intensity and tension to the chase sequence (00:03:57 to 00:06:53), while *Isle of the Dead* vests the moment with greater significance, and the

complexity of the editing gives shape to a suspense sequence that takes inspiration from *Vertigo* without adopting a classical cinema style (Atherton, 2020). Rachmaninoff's melody is repeated throughout the story, reappearing when Simon stalks Ariane without being seen, underscoring his obsession and contributing to the tension.

The chase continues with a pallid Simon following Ariane hypnotically up a narrow flight of stairs while the music turns up the tension of the scene. The sound of Ariane's heels echoes in Simon's mind; he is present in all the shots, always entering the frame behind her (00:06:54 to 00:07:53). We see Ariane talking to the receptionist at a little hotel, and then turning to the left and walking out of the frame, in an image dominated by Simon's shadow while he watches her (IMAGE 12). Simon himself then quietly approaches the receptionist and asks for Miss Ariane Rey; after this, we see him rushing down the stairs, we hear a car start up and Ariane drives out of the frame, ending the initial chase sequence. In the next one, we are privy to Simon's rather asphyxiating relationship with this young woman, who lives with him in one of the apartment buildings constructed during the Haussmann renovation of Paris in the 1860s, and laid out according to the lodgings described by Proust (Mangolte, 2015). Here he welcomes his friend, Andrée, whom he asks to accompany Ariane on her activities, even suggesting to her what they should do during the day.

In Hitchcock's film, the *voyeur*'s presence and gaze are revealed on screen to the spectator in a story geared towards suspense. However, the *voyeur* stalks the woman with what is apparently just cause. In the second part of the film, this justification is contrasted with the suspicious behaviour of the female character and the old friend who had been hired to stalk her, who, unlike the young woman, will not be punished for his actions. This storyline is very different from the state of captivity resulting from Simon's constant attempts to control Ariane in Akerman's film, in



From top to bottom. Image 10. Ariane is followed by Simon, whose car bonnet is visible in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Image 11. The images of the car bonnet in the foreground and Ariane driving away in the background, alternating with shots of Simon's face inside his car in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Image 12. Simon's body in the darkness emphasises his voyeur status as he follows Ariane when she enters a small Parisian hotel in *La Captive* (Chantal Akerman, 2000). Collections CINEMATEK - © Fondation Chantal Akerman

which the male character's *voyeurism* and obsessive desire are not employed as traditional Hitchcockian mechanisms of suspense and surprise, but instead are presented mainly as an expression

of the character's neurosis (Beugnet & Schmid, 2002).

Akerman presents Simon's jealousy and obsession from a distance in the film, although she also focuses on his weakness, which is the causal factor behind his and Ariane's captivity, and something that Akerman herself identifies with. In an interview with Elisabeth Lebovici, she mentions a conversation she had with her cousin, who told her that in America they would never accept a weak man as the main character in a film; Akerman thus suggests that her work is also about gender definitions (Akerman, 2011b). Martine Beugnet takes a similar view in her description of *La Captive* as an extraordinary critique on and subversion of the myth of gender stereotypes (Beugnet, 2007: 132). Despite the distance taken from the *voyeur*'s gaze and the depiction of his desire to possess Ariane, Akerman presents a weak and vulnerable character on screen, thereby contributing to the dismantling of the binarism that associates the male with an idealised ego. Sharon Lubkemann makes a similar argument when she suggests that Akerman's work transgenders the camera's gaze (Lubkemann Allen, 2008).

A *VOYEUSE* WHO REVEALS HER PRESENCE IN AN ATTENTIVE APPROACH TO THE FILMED SUBJECT

While Akerman offers her spectators the opportunity to adopt a gaze outside the traditional structures that tend to relegate women to the role of object of desire, she also engages them with her films through the distance and alienation produced by her full frontal shots. In this way, she portrays the face-to-face confrontation between two individuals on an equal footing, inviting the spectator to occupy a real place in relation to what is being shown on screen (Akerman, 2011a). This approach is reminiscent of the face-to-face relationship with the Other in Levinas's work, which Akerman draws on to invoke the spectator's sense of responsibility towards the Other encountered in the film. This is what Akerman considers her ethical stance, which involves ensuring equality between image and spectator (Akerman, 2011a).

Akerman is a *voyeuse*, but unlike the *voyeur* who appears at different times in art and film history, she does not hide. Instead, she exposes her own presence in a respectful, reciprocal relationship with her Other, while trying to create a relationship between equals with spectators, who are invited to view her films from a certain distance, recognising their position as outsiders in relation to what they see. And vitally important in all of this is the place where she positions the camera, sensitive to the Other of herself, and the actress's way of dismantling the *voyeur*'s intrusion.

Akerman cares about ethics in the aesthetic of her films, both in those closer to fiction and in those more aptly defined as structural films. She proposes alternatives to the traditional way of making films and of showing the Other that are quite distinct from the images that dominate the mass media, social media platforms and much mainstream cinema. At the same time, when Akerman *represents herself*, either through her work as an actress, her alter egos or her connection to the people she encounters on her nomadic wanderings, she takes the most intimate approach with an honesty that connects with the subjective experiences of her spectators, far removed from the longing to be looked at and the idealised exhibition so common in contemporary virtual media (Mesías-Lema, Eiriz, 2022). Akerman's films propose a gaze respectful of diversity through an approach that allows her to take what she feels to be a part of herself as her starting point. ■

NOTES

1 Florence Fesneau points out that the first time the word *voyeur* as we understand it today was used was in 1898 by Alphonse Daudet, while the notion of *voyeurism* would not enter the lexicon until 1955, when

it was coined by the psychologist Henri Piéron. In the chapter "Fin de Bal" in *Soutien de famille: moeurs contemporaines*, Daudet uses the notion of the *voyeur* with reference to a man who observes his stepdaughter in intimate circumstances with excessive and suggestive affection. Despite the predominance of male *voyeurs* in the arts, Fesneau notes a few *voyeuses* who exhibit obsessions and desires similar to those displayed by their male counterparts. She identifies an early example in Plate XIV of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* in the 18th century and highlights its appearance around the same time in the paintings and engravings in *L'Art de jouir* (Fesneau, 2018: 177-178; Daudet, 2014).

2 The scholar Clay Calvert distinguishes four categories of what he calls "mediated *voyeurism*": 1) *vídeo-vérité voyeurism*; 2) reconstruction *voyeurism*; 3) tell all/show all *voyeurism*; and 4) sexual *voyeurism*. The first category is based on the notion of *cinéma verité*, referring to the distinctive quality of non-fiction in which unplanned moments of real life take place before the camera. The second concerns the reconstruction or dramatisation of a real event that the camera was unable to capture when it actually happened so that we are able to view it. The third relates to television programs in which individuals tell private stories, and the fourth is associated with erotic, sexual and pornographic material online. We spectators are in turn mediatised *voyeurs* who do not need to be physically present in the place of the observed event. All of this raises questions about the ethical regulation of this gaze that intrudes upon the privacy of others on new media (Calvert, 2004: 8-9, 205).

3 Akerman met Mangolte when she arrived in New York at the age of 22. Mangolte, who was 30 at the time, had come to the city a while earlier on the recommendation of Marcel Hanoun, who worked with her on *Le Printemps* [Spring] (1971), *L'Été* [Summer] (1969) and *L'Hiver* [Winter] (1969). In New York, Annette Michelson introduced her to Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, Yvonne Rainer and Richard Foreman. With Mangolte, Akerman explored the work of Snow, Andy Warhol, Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage and Ken Jacobs, among others. Both Akerman and Mangolte were fascinated by Snow's *La région centrale* [The Central Region] (1971), in which a camera movement of varying speed shows all the points of a sphere on a Canadian landscape. This experience would inspire *La Chambre* [The Room] (Akerman & Mangolte, 1972), which the filmmakers shot in a friend's bedroom, and *Hotel Monterey* (Mangolte, 2019: 37).

4 Clément recalls meeting Akerman for the first time in 1976 in Rome, when she was working on the film shoot for Mario Monicelli's *Caro Michele* (1976) together with Delphine Seyrig. At that time, Akerman was already developing *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* and it was probably Seyrig who suggested she consider Clément for the main role. Initially, Akerman was not convinced that Clément was the right choice to play the self-referential character, but a year later, Akerman offered her the role after showing her *Je, tu, il, elle*. Clément felt very close to Akerman and they would go onto work on several other projects together and to become good friends (Clément, 2021: 82-84).

5 The theorists Luisina Bolla and Noelia Gómez argue that the *voyeur*'s investigative eye appears in all of Proust's novels. They focus their analysis on the episodes in the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time* dealing with Vinteul's daughter and with Sodom and Gomorrah, which they compare to the ending to George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, a transgressive eye that leads readers to the position of "criminal accomplice" to what they see, in an ambivalence between horror and seduction that vests the eye with a contradictory nature encompassing both pleasure and pain (Bolla & Gómez, 2015: 3, 8).

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DISMANTLING THE *VOYEUR*'S INTRUSION: THE POSITION OF THE GAZE IN THE FILMS OF CHANTAL AKERMAN

Abstract
The aim of this article is to explore alternatives to the *voyeur*'s gaze represented in the arts through a selection of Chantal Akerman's films. In her work, Akerman dismantles the gaze usually associated with a kind of secret intrusion into women's privacy and erotic moments in sculpture, literature and painting, which still today prompts reflections on the gaze in cinema, mass media and social media. Studies of Akerman's work have focused mainly on gender issues, self-representation, hyperrealism or postmodernity in her films, without considering their reflection on *voyeurism*, which is central to her ethical and aesthetic approach in terms of how she looks at the Other, and how she presents herself. The position of the gaze in Akerman's work is explored here by focusing on the films *Hotel Monterey* (1972), *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, (1978), and *La Captive* (2000), analysing how she approaches and presents the Other of herself, how she confronts the *voyeur*-character, or how she reveals him to the spectator.

Key words
Chantal Akerman; Voyeur; Gaze; Feminisms; Gender Studies.

Author
Ariadna Moreno Pellejero (Zaragoza, 1988) holds a Ph.D. in Communication from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, with her thesis *The Ritual Form of Chantal Akerman's Cinema: Towards an Embodied Spectator*, supervised by Gonzalo de Lucas. She received the 1st prize at the XXXV CAC Awards for audiovisual communication research and the 1st Honorable Mention at the 2023 RADE Awards for Research, Arts and Humanities. Ariadna is BA and MA in Art History from Zaragoza and Barcelona universities. She works at the UNITA European Alliance at UNIZAR. As a cultural manager, she has collaborated with Etopia in Zaragoza, OCHOYMEDIO cinema or the Cultural Section of the Spanish Embassy in Quito and she curated the European Film Festival in Ecuador. Contact: ariadna.mope@gmail.com.

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DESMONTAR LA INTRUSIÓN DEL *VOYEUR*. LA POSICIÓN DE LA MIRADA EN EL CINE DE CHANTAL AKERMAN

Resumen
El objetivo de este artículo es pensar alternativas a la mirada del *voyeur* en las artes a través de la propuesta de algunas películas de Chantal Akerman, en las que la directora desmonta tal mirada habitualmente asociada a cierta intrusión y secretismo en momentos de intimidad y erotismo de las mujeres en las artes plásticas, literarias y visuales, y que todavía hoy suscita reflexiones sobre la mirada en el cine, los medios de masas o las redes sociales. Los estudios sobre el cine de Akerman han dado importancia a las cuestiones de género y la autorrepresentación, el hiperrealismo o la postmodernidad, sin llegar a centrarse en la reflexión en torno al *voyeurismo*, fundamental en su propuesta ética y estética sobre cómo mirar al otro y cómo presentarse a sí misma. Aquí, abordaremos la posición de la mirada en el cine de la directora, centrándonos en las películas *Hôtel Monterey* (1972), *Los encuentros de Ana* (Les rendez-vous d'Anna, 1978) y *La cautiva* (*La captive*, 2000), en las que analizaremos cómo Akerman se acerca y presenta al otro de sí misma, cómo enfrenta al personaje-*voyeur* o lo evidencia ante las personas al otro lado de la pantalla.

Palabras clave
Chantal Akerman; voyeur; mirada; feminismos; estudios de género.

Autora
Ariadna Moreno Pellejero (Zaragoza, 1988) es doctora en Comunicación de la Universitat Pompeu Fabra, con la tesis *La forma-ritual del cine de Chantal Akerman: Hacia un espectador encarnado*, dirigida por Gonzalo de Lucas. Ha recibido el 1º galardón de los XXXV Premios CAC a la investigación sobre comunicación audiovisual y la 1ª Mención Honorífica en los premios RADE 2023 de investigación, Artes y Humanidades. Es licenciada y máster en Historia del Arte por las universidades de Zaragoza y Barcelona. Trabaja en la Alianza europea UNITA de UNIZAR. Como gestora cultural, ha colaborado con Etopia en Zaragoza, el cine OCHOYMEDIO o la Sección Cultural de la Embajada de España en Quito y comisarió el festival de cine europeo de Ecuador. Contacto: ariadna.mope@gmail.com.

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