

HISTORY TURNED INSIDE OUT: TENSIONS BETWEEN BODY AND VOICE IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SPANISH CINEMA AT THE END OF SPAIN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY*

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents a comparative study of the endings to three films with a number of elements in common: *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), *Evening Performance* (Función de noche, Josefina Molina, 1981) and *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982). The first similarity these three films share is contextual: all three were released in what could be described as the final stage of Spain's transition to democracy, which covers the twenty months from Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero's coup attempt in February 1981 to Felipe González's victory in the general elections of October 1982, an event that, for many historians (Preston, 1986; Morán, 1991; Soto, 1998; Tusell, 1999), represented a symbolic consolidation of democracy in Spain. Another point in common is that all three films posit a conflict between present and past, albeit each one in its own way. This conflict very specifically concerns the films' female protagonists, who find themselves at a

crossroads between the old traditions inherited from previous generations and the creation of modern identities. Each of these characters constructs a kind of temporal polyphony through her body and (especially) the voices that inhabit it. This article explores the potential tensions and subversions produced by the protagonists of these three films in the context of the political landscape of Spain at a moment when it had quelled the last threats of a return to dictatorship and was seeking to define itself as a modern nation. In *Making Bodies, Making History*, the German literature scholar Leslie Adelson argues that women's bodies can effectively contain history: "[i]f we are willing to contemplate the body as a secret history [...], then we must also be willing to entertain history as an even better-kept secret for the body" (1993: 1). Drawing on Adelson's argument, this study explores the ways these three characters use their bodies and voices to articulate a space for rewriting the historical moment into which they are inscribed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OBJECTIVES

Each of the bodies of the protagonists in *Sweet Hours*, *Evening Performance* and *Vida/perra* is inhabited by multiple voices. It could be argued that they constitute three polyphonic subjectivities, in line with the theoretical perspective of the feminist thinker Teresa de Lauretis and her studies of female subjectivity, which she defines as “the concept of a multiple, shifting and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with, language” (1986: 6). Similarly, the notion of polyphony is defined here in line with the ideas of another feminist critic, Hélène Cixous. In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous reflects on the concepts of voice, body and writing in relation to the female subject, which she associates with an always ambiguous, multiple form of enunciation, a “language of 1,000 tongues” that contrasts with the monolithic character of phallogocentric logic, as it “does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible” (1976: 889). In this horizon of possibilities described by Cixous, in this language of many tongues, it is reasonable to imagine that a single voice can at the same time be multiple voices.

Articulated around this idea of the multiple voice, the polyphonic subjectivities analysed here evolve over the course of each film to emerge clearly in their respective endings, which are characterised by three variations on the use of the same formal resource: an acousmatic division of the voice. The notion of the acousmatic voice discussed here is drawn from film theorist Michel Chion's concept of *acousmètre*, defined as “a disembodied voice, without the image of the person speaking” (2004: 12) and as a “voice without a location” (2004: 39), which is neither “inside nor outside” (2004: 30); in other words, a voice that acts from outside the frame but intervenes in it in unpredictable ways. At the same time, Chion's theories have been refined by a number of stud-

ies by feminist critics, such as Mary Ann Doane (1980), Sarah Kozloff (1988), Kaja Silverman (1988) and Amy Lawrence (1991), who have explored the relationships between voice, body and image in cinema from a gender perspective.

The endings of all three films analysed here use the acousmatic voice in unique and unexpected ways. Eschewing the strategies of narrative cinema, these films delve fully into the radical differences between voice and image, the disjunctions between sound and meaning, which, as Doane explains, abandon the uniformity sought in classical cinema and produce a filmic body characterised by dispersion, fragmentation and heterogeneity. Drawing on ideas posited by Pascal Bonitzer (1975), Doane identifies the development of a politics of the voice based not on its meaning but on its sensory and sensual dimension (1980). In *Sweet Hours*, this dimension is represented by Berta's (Assumpta Serna) face, which becomes possessed by a voice from a bygone era. In *Evening Performance*, it is a polyphonic overlapping enacted by Lola Herrera, with a voice of today superimposed on a voice of the past. And the ending to *Vida/perra* contains a gesture by its protagonist, Juani (Esperanza Roy), that can be interpreted as an attempt to listen to an ancestral voice that she is unable to hear, while in its place is an acousmatic voice that echoes in the void. The objective of this article is to analyse these different uses of the acousmatic voice and its function as a vehicle for the construction of three different polyphonic female subjectivities, each of which conveys the contradictions and paradoxes of a political context of instability and change.

In the echoes of this polyphony, this study aims to identify the possibility of reconstructing a narrative from the perspective of women, a narrative that was obscured by the androcentrism of the official historical narrative of the period (Larumbe, 2004; González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). This is what Ramón Buckley alludes to when he refers to the “‘masculine’ nature” of

THE OBJECTIVE IS TO ANALYSE THE DIFFERENT USES OF THE ACOUSMATIC VOICE AND ITS FUNCTION AS A VEHICLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THREE DIFFERENT POLYPHONIC FEMALE SUBJECTIVITIES, EACH OF WHICH CONVEYS THE CONTRADICTIONS AND PARADOXES OF A POLITICAL CONTEXT OF INSTABILITY AND CHANGE

Spain's transition to democracy, which he describes as "the 'patriarchy' that persisted despite the death of the 'patriarch'" (1996: XIV). Carmen Peña Ardid would take up this idea years later in her introduction to an anthology on the cultural history of this period in Spanish history (2019), while Pamela Beth Radcliff explains that the ideological consensus of Spain's political leadership during the transition took no interest in feminism, which was dismissed as selfish, unhelpful and divisive (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). Radcliff goes on to argue that Spain had no model of "democratic citizen" at this time, because "[i]n contrast to the Franco regime, which had created a clearly defined and articulated place for women as housewives, the nascent democratic discourse was full of contradictions and conflicts between equality and frames of reference based on difference" (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009: 69). While the model of the traditional wife and mother was rejected, so was the model of the feminist, resulting in discord over rights that presumably did not apply to the whole population.

The three films analysed here reflect the mutability and diversity of the feminine theorised by De Lauretis and Cixous in the specific context of the Spanish transition to democracy. While integrating the experiences of disjunction between voice and image that characterised modern cinema, these films served to reflect the lack of clarity

in relation to the public role of women at this pivotal moment of political change, as an unresolved issue that the official narrative of the democratic transition failed to address. The ultimate aim of this analysis is to identify what Buckley calls "history turned inside out" (1996: 135), referring to the twist in the narrative that can discover "an alternative to the transition itself in feminism" (1996: 165). It is not merely a question of expanding history by adding in these forgotten elements, but rather about reinterpreting history itself (González Ruiz, Martínez Ten & Gutiérrez López, 2009). As Cixous argues, whenever a woman speaks, whatever she says, "she draws her story into history" (1976: 881).

A FACE POSSESSED BY A VOICE FROM A BYGONE ERA

At the end of *Sweet Hours*, a pregnant Berta (Assumpta Serna) is shown walking around Juan's (Iñaki Aieria) apartment, putting some books in their place and cutting a dead leaf off an indoor plant. On the soundtrack we hear an old recording of the waltz "Recordar", sung by the 1930s singer and film star Imperio Argentina, while Berta lip-syncs to the song. Waiting for her in the bathtub is Juan, whom she treats affectionately as if he were her son, scolding him for how he smells, tickling him and stroking his face. Finally, she resumes her lip-syncing of the song, turning her gaze to the camera. The shot ends on her face wearing an expression brimming with hope and a beaming smile, while her lips move in perfect time with the voice from a bygone era (Image 1).

This ending is the culmination of a process of re-enacting memory with elements of the present, a process that constitutes the key device in *Sweet Hours*. Over the course of the film, Juan, a theatre director, reconstructs episodes from his childhood in the same apartment that he lived in as a child, with hired actors while he plays his child alter ego. In this way, he seeks to better un-



Image 1. In the final shot of *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), Assumpta Serna looks to the camera, her expression brimming with hope, while lip-syncing to the Imperio Argentina song “Recordar”

derstand his mother, Teresa, a woman silenced by the family hierarchy who committed suicide when he was still very young, and who is played by Berta, a young actress, in the theatrical reconstruction. As the film progresses, a game of mirrors is constructed between these women, both played by Assumpta Serna, and the budding romance with Berta is interspersed with scenes of Oedipal love for an affectionate but enigmatic mother. In the final sequence, the personification

of Teresa moves beyond the theatrical stage and enters everyday life, turning her into a synthesis of lover and mother who, through the lip-syncing scene, also effectively fuses the image of the present with a voice of the past.

“Recordar” is a waltz originally written in French by Charles Borel Clercy and translated into Spanish by José Salado, which Imperio Argentina performed as a duet with Manuel Russell in the musical *Su noche de bodas* [Her Wedding Night] (Louis Mercanton & Florián Rey, 1931) (Bloch-Robin, 2011), although the version used in *Sweet Hours* is sung by Argentina alone. Saura had previously used this song in *The Garden of Delights* [El jardín de las delicias] (1970), as well as other songs by Imperio Argentina in *Cousin Angélica* [La prima Angélica] (1974) and *Cría Cuervos* (1976) (Hidalgo, 1981). In all these films, the old recording is associated with an evocation of the past, whether through reconstructions, embodied memories or photographs, always as a musical accompaniment to the action of the characters. In *Sweet Hours*, the song plays a vital role: the line “Recordar las dulces horas del ayer” [“Remember the sweet hours of yesterday”] gives the film its title, and in the rehearsal and production stages Saura would play it and other songs of the era on a tape recorder so that the cast would become familiar with them (Hidalgo, 1981). “Recordar” is always associated with the character of the mother, a connection that is powerfully established in the opening title credits, in which Imperio Argentina’s voice accompanies the turning pages of a journal containing drawings, photographs, postcards, first communion mementos and handwritten notes originally compiled by Assumpta Serna as a way of asking Saura about the character of Teresa, and subsequently taken by the filmmaker to use in the film’s opening scene (Vidal, 1993). The song will be heard again throughout the film to evoke the past, and then at the end it will be lip-synced by the protagonist, a practice never used in Saura’s abovementioned film. Like the acousmatic voices

analysed by Chion, it is a voice that will float in the air without a recognisable source before eventually finding its place in a specific body.

Various authors have pointed out the ironic aspect of this ending, as its exaggerated, artificial nature creates a distance between Juan's nostalgic exercise and Saura's gaze on the past (D'Lugo, 1991; Bloch-Robin, 2011; Planes Pedreño, 2020). The constructed quality of this final scene, both technically and historically, is foreshadowed in two previous sequences. The first is in a dubbing studio, where Berta must repeat a phrase over and over again to match the lip movements of a character in a foreign film, exposing the effort needed to synchronise mouths and voices. Then later, in Juan's apartment, Berta takes on the role of a new version of Teresa and incorporates the waltz into her performance; she does up her hair, puts on an apron, and begins humming the start of the song while she washes the dishes. Her ironic remark "if the feminists could see me now...", inserted like a footnote, exposes the diffraction between Teresa and Berta, between the mother in the past and the actress in 1981. At the end of the film, the technical difficulties of dubbing and the ideological doubts verbalised in the kitchen dissipate, giving way to a fluid matching of voice and image, past and present, which is seemingly perfect and seamless, like those "spontaneous and effortless" numbers which, according to Jane Feuer (1980), conceal the hard work and development that goes into the traditional musical. The ending to *Sweet Hours* is thus the culmination of a transformation that instrumentalises a female body in the present to portray one from the past, stripping the body of its contemporary agency to synchronise it with the reminiscences of a filmmaker who needs to immerse himself in his memories.

Berta seems aware of this, as throughout the film we see her trying to intervene actively, telling Juan she is not convinced by Teresa's depiction as a selfless mother and urging him to abandon his idealised image of his childhood, thereby

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becoming what Marvin D'Lugo calls a "demystifier of cultural representation" (1991: 182). According to Assumpta Serna, these dialogues were not in the original screenplay but were suggested by her (Lambies, De Lucas & Elduque, 2025), as throughout the filming she expressed an explicit interest in participating in the construction of the character by asking the filmmaker questions, compiling the journal and reviewing the rushes (Hidalgo, 1981; Vidal, 1993). However, in *Sweet Hours* this female interjection receives no answer: neither the woman of the past nor the woman of the present is given room to become active, autonomous characters in either Juan's memory or Saura's film, beyond their role in the re-enactment of the male protagonist's ghosts. Berta's body, interrogated in the present, is what Leslie Adelson would describe as a body containing a secret history: Teresa's history, the story of an independent woman who took control of her life in a patriarchal society. But it is a story that never gets to be told. This ambiguity continues through to the lip-syncing scene at the end of the film, which allows contradictory allegorical readings: Imperio Argentina was symbolically appropriated by the Franco regime, and thus her appearance could be identified as a patriotic construct associated with Spanish folklore (D'Lugo, 1991); however, as "Recordar" is a song that became popular during the Second Spanish Republic in the early 1930s, the voice that Teresa/Berta makes her own could equally be the voice of the Republican woman whose freedoms were curtailed by the biopolitics of the dictatorship.

Finally, intersecting these levels is the woman's gaze to the camera. This is a device that also appears earlier in the film, specifically in a scene of seduction in which Teresa lets down her hair and performs a striptease for the transfixed young boy Juan, played here by child actor Pablo Hernández Smith. Significantly, Marianne Bloch-Robin (2011) connects the boy's transfixed gaze with the last photograph of Teresa in the journal shown in the film's opening scene. It is also a moment of agency for Assumpta Serna, allowing her to interrogate the camera and the spectator directly. Like Teresa and Berta, with this gaze she expresses a kind of control that is gentle rather than cruel. In this way, the ending to *Sweet Hours* goes much further than synchronising the identities of a singer, a mother of the 1940s, a woman in 1981 and an actress in a Carlos Saura film. As Mary Ann Doane (1980) points out in her reflection on the erotic, sensory dimension of the voice-over in modern cinema, given that the body has always been a site of oppression of women, it is logical that it should be precisely in the body that the new battles would be waged, and thus the connection between Imperio, Teresa, Berta and Assumpta is not one of identity but of a polyphony that raises more questions than it answers.

A VOICE OF THE PRESENT SUPERIMPOSED ON A VOICE OF THE PAST

At the heart of Josefina Molina's *Evening Performance* is the notion of a polyphonic duality, which is reflected in the game of mirrors between an actress and her character. The film, which has a clearly documentary tone, revolves around Lola Herrera's experience during her first months playing Carmen Sotillo in the theatrical adaptation of Miguel Delibes' novel *Cinco horas con Mario* [Five Hours with Mario], performed for the first time in Madrid in November 1979, also under the direction of Josefina Molina. In interviews at the time, Herrera described her relationship with the

character as follows: "She seemed to me a vulgar woman who was nothing like me. But little by little, in certain lines of my monologue, I began to see elements of my life. The parallels between aspects of Carmen's life and mine became so great that I began suffering an identity crisis. I had discovered everything there was of me in Carmen, and I found myself through her" (Angulo, 1981: 45). This unexpected process of identification reached a dramatic climax in early March 1980, when, after its overwhelming success with audiences in Madrid, *Cinco horas con Mario* premiered in Barcelona. On the first night, a mere fifteen minutes into the performance, Herrera fainted on stage. Various authors, including Susan Martín-Márquez (1999), identify this fainting incident as the inspiration for the film.

Martín-Márquez also suggests that *Evening Performance* was the product of a shared interest between Josefina Molina and José Sámamo in making a film that reflected on the identity of women in postwar Spain. Other authors, such as Isolina Ballesteros, stress that the creative process of *Evening Performance* displays an intention to create an image of "the Spanish woman of the transition with all her problems and contradictions, still at the crossroads between the restrictions of previous decades and the freedoms of the new Spain" (2001: 52). The diptych established between Carmen Sotillo and Lola Herrera reflects this crossroads. The relationship between these two figures exposes the tensions between two eras. Carmen Sotillo is a figure of the past, a recently widowed woman who offers a monologue over the coffin in which lies the body of her dead husband, to whom she can finally express all the resentment she had kept to herself for so long without fear of reprisal. On the other hand, Lola Herrera offers no monologue, engaging instead in a dialogue with an equally confessional tone with her ex-husband and fellow actor Daniel Dicenta, whom she compares at one point in their conversation with the corpse in the play: "I mean,

sometimes in that thing representing a casket... sometimes I see you. The Mario I recognise in that box has your face." It could be argued that the film constructs a counterpoint between two eras: the era of the widow of the Franco regime, the woman who had to wait for her husband to die before she could break her silence and say everything she had always kept to herself; and the era of the divorced woman (*Evening Performance*, it is worth noting, was released in the same year that divorce was finally legalised in Spain). According to Ballesteros, the role played by Lola Herrera is not so much the role of the liberated woman of modern Spain as the role of a woman trapped between two eras, trying to shrug off an image of the past that still weighs heavily on her.

Of the three films analysed here, *Evening Performance* is the one that has been studied the most, and from the widest range of perspectives. In a recent article, Gonzalo de Lucas analyses Lola Herrera's work in the film in order to "track the tensions between representation and self-representation through the actor's body" (2024: 74). De Lucas draws on research by authors such as Sophie Mayer and Andrea Soto Calderón to discuss the healing functions of images in the feminist documentary tradition, which in the specific case of *Evening Performance* are constructed around the word: "The performative device of the images here contains the pause and the timing that brings out Lola Herrera's stifled, hesitant, silenced word" (De Lucas, 2024: 84). The search for the word lies at the heart of *Evening Performance*.

THE SEARCH FOR BALANCE IS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE DISCOURSE THAT HERRERA ARTICULATES OVER THE COURSE OF THE FILM, IN WHICH SHE SEEMS TO BE FULFILLING AN AIM TO ORGANISE A NEW LOGOS, ONE THAT IS BALANCED, PRECISE AND JUST

mance, both in the direction taken in the long conversation between Herrera and Dicenta, which is the key moment of the film, and in all the spaces opened up to the protagonist's voice-over. On the film's use of voice-over (a quintessential form of the acousmatic voice), Isolina Ballesteros offers a noteworthy observation: "The significance of Lola's voice-over lies not only in the fact that it assigns the female protagonist a linguistic status that she rarely enjoys in male cinema, where the woman talks a lot but her real participation in the production of narrative discourse is non-existent, but also in the fact that this voice, which does not correspond to the image of Lola when it speaks, breaks the system of mirrors and offers her the possibility of escaping a representation in exclusively bodily terms" (Ballesteros, 2001: 43-44). The voice-over's disruption of the system of mirrors culminates in the polyphony triggered in the film's final images.

The ending to *Evening Performance* shows Lola Herrera on the half-lit stage at the beginning of the play, reciting her character's first lines. The camera, which begins the shot with a close-up on the actress, quickly pulls away up the aisle of the packed theatre until she is just a tiny figure in the shot (Image 2). Carmen Sotillo's voice, with its solemn cadence, suddenly sounds very distant, and almost at once another voice is superimposed on it: Lola Herrera's own voice, speaking acousmatically from outside her character, as if it were her inner voice we are hearing. "How many times have I said these words?" she wonders, transforming her portrayal of Delibes's long-suffering widow into something mechanical, emotionally hollow and repetitive, as if the healing process had finally been completed and the actress had managed to separate herself from the script. "What can you do when you don't like your own life? Perhaps it's my fault. I have tried to imitate the women who educated me," she goes on, recognising a kind of mimetic inertia that prompted her to adopt what she learnt from her female role models of pre-

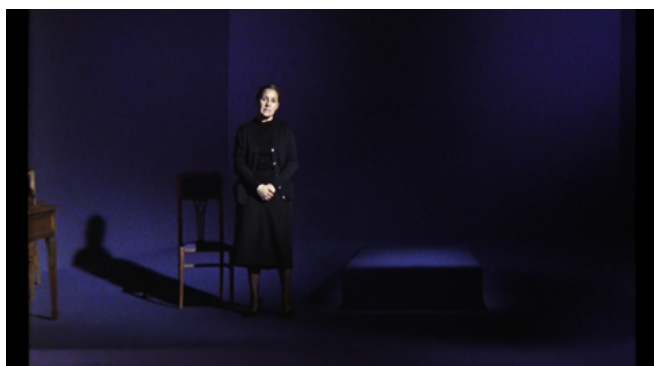
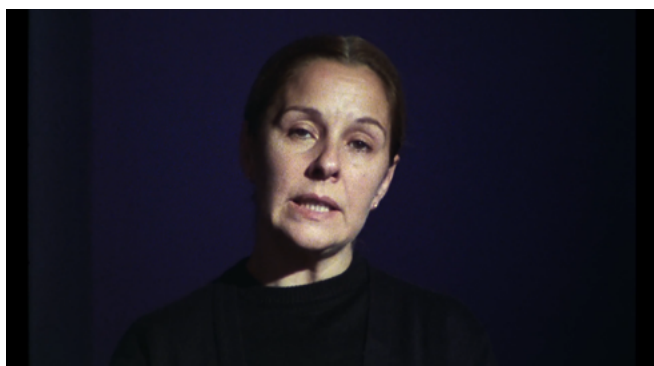


Image 2. In the final images of *Evening Performance* (Josefina Molina, 1981), the camera pulls away from Carmen Sotillo while in the foreground we hear Lola Herrera's voice-over

vious generations. In this sense, the ending to *Evening Performance* is similar to *Sweet Hours*, although it effectively inverts the elements: while in Saura's film, it is the old voice of an actress from a bygone era that possesses an actress in the present, in Molina's film it is the voice of the present that imposes itself on the voice of the past.

The shot described above dissolves into one taken from a high angle, almost an overhead shot. The camera pulls away again, this time with an ascending movement that once again turns the

woman reciting her lines on stage into a distant figure. Lola Herrera's inner voice continues to speak, trying to find a balance between the anguish she feels over the past and a tenacious desire to move forward into the future: "Once again I remember the fainting spell; it frightens me. No, don't let the machine stop on me." In reality, this search for balance is present throughout the discourse that Herrera articulates over the course of the film, in which she seems to be fulfilling an aim to organise a new logos, one that is balanced, precise and just, that responds to the needs of women during Spain's transition to democracy and that represents them; a language that allows women to draw their stories into history, as Cixous puts it. Thus, in the last seconds of the film, when the grieving figure of Carmen Sotillo is no more than a strip of purple light on the edge of an otherwise completely dark shot, the protagonist's voice concludes with a renewed sense of purpose, opening up for the first time to the possibility of a fulfilling future: "Tomorrow I have to get up early. I have so many things to do." With these last two lines, Lola Herrera's voice departs definitively from the image of the woman of the past and presages the beginning of a different history, perhaps the modern woman's, which it seems is about to begin being written.

THE ANCESTRAL VOICE THAT NEVER GETS TO BE HEARD

Like *Cinco horas con Mario*, *Vida/perra* is articulated from beginning to end around the continuous soliloquy of its protagonist, Juani (Esperanza Roy), the only character in the film. Juani is a lonely single woman whose sad figure wanders through a series of uninhabited settings, including a deserted beach, a party hall full of empty chairs and the rooms of a large apartment, all of which constitute a phantasmagorical inversion of the real world (Lambies, 2025). The succession of images offered by all these settings constructs a

kind of representation of Juani's inner world, in which the overflowing stream of her thoughts takes the form of an uncontrolled, contradictory monologue. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, "[t]o negotiate that contradiction, to keep it going, is to resist the pressure of the binary epistemological model towards coherence, unity, and the production of a fixed self/image, a subject-vision, and to insist instead on the production of contradictory points of identification, an elsewhere of vision" (1984: 77). The mise-en-scène of *Vida/perra* reflects this elsewhere of vision, constructed as a series of mental landscapes in which Juani's monologue can only ever be an inner monologue that mixes the present with the past and confuses reality with imagination. Juani is thus always addressing a host of absent characters, some alive and others dead, none of whom ever respond to her calls or make any kind of appearance on screen. It may seem that Juani's head is inhabited by a deafening polyphony of voices, but ultimately, this polyphony is only ever formulated as an impossibility.

The idea of this impossible polyphony is hinted at throughout the film, every time Juani tries to establish a dialogue with any of these spectres of the past who never reply, and it becomes especially clear in the final sequence. Juani's long monologue culminates in a desperate invocation of the ghost of her dead mother, pleading with her between screams and sobs, looking at the camera with her arms stretched out, in a close-up that shows a hysterical, tear-streaked face typical of women's faces in the horror genre (Image 3). She cries out: "What did you look like, Mum? Help me! Help me! Right now I can't remember what your face looked like! And worse still, I can't hear you!" As she utters these last words, she brings a hand to her ear. Then she falls silent for a moment and calms down, as if imagining the ghost whispering something into her ear. The monologue continues a little longer. Finally, Juani's face, strained and soaked with her sweat and tears, turns to look at



Image 3. Esperanza Roy's long monologue in *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982) culminates in a desperate invocation of her dead mother's ghost, whose voice is never heard

us once more. She is no longer speaking, and yet her voice resounds in our ears, uttering the same series of exclamations she shouted just before, now transformed into pre-recorded echoes. Once again, with the phrase "And worse still, I can't hear you!", Juani brings her ear closer to the camera, this time with a sudden movement that is much more disconcerting than before, with both hands raised. It is her final attempt to listen for the spectral voice that does not let itself be heard now and probably never did. Instead, all Juani hears is her

own acousmatic voice, like an echo reverberating in the void inside her head, while the ghost's voice has fallen silent forever.

The ending to *Vida/perra* is a tragic inversion of the ending to *Sweet Hours*. Juani's gaze to the camera is the gloomy counterpoint to the gentle gaze Assumpta Serna offers the spectator in the final shot of Saura's film. The fusion of two different eras resulting from the perfect synchronisation of Serna's smiling lips with Imperio Argentina's voice is rewritten here in Esperanza Roy's sweaty, convulsive screams as a temporal rupture: in contrast to *Sweet Hours*, in *Vida/perra* the voice of the past never gets to be heard, either because it does not exist or because it imposes its own silence, underscoring the impression of loneliness conveyed by the film's protagonist, a woman whom even the ghosts seem to have abandoned, and who has thus been left bewildered and lost in an era to which she does not belong. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Juani constitutes an extraordinary addendum to the evolution of the spinster archetype studied by Núria Bou and Xavier Pérez in Spanish cinema under the Franco regime, epitomised by the characters of Betsy Blair in *Calle Mayor* [Main Street] (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956) and Aurora Bautista in *La tía Tula* [Aunt Tula] (Miguel Picazo, 1964). In the case of Blair, these authors identify a series of gestures, gazes and facial expressions used to express her desire "to live in another reality, to project herself into another world, to flee from the oppressive atmosphere of Spanish society" (Bou & Pérez, 2022: 39). It is precisely this longed-for other reality that *Vida/perra* recreates in its mise-en-scène, suggesting the idea of Juani as the spinster who has definitively departed from the material world to take refuge in a parallel world that she herself has constructed, where she can experience a kind of liberation that is at the same time a kind of prison sentence.

While in *Evening Performance* Lola Herrera is a woman trapped between two eras, in *Vida/perra* Juani is a woman cut off from her own time,

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confined to the margins of history in a limbo of oblivion. In his book *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion (2004) makes reference to voices of cinema that pine for the image, longing to find a body that will take them in. In *Vida/perra*, this longing operates in the opposite direction, as here it is a body trying in vain to find those wandering disembodied voices that will want to inhabit it and fill it with meaning. On the other hand, the fact that *Vida/perra* transforms the mother's voice into a gaping silence vests the whole film with a feeling of atavistic emptiness that grows increasingly acute from one scene to the next. It is thus unsurprising that the film should end, immediately after Juani's last gaze to the camera, with the same shot with which it began, showing Juani sitting in a chair on the beach, talking to herself as she looks out over the waves. Another image is superimposed on this one: the old black and white portrait of a woman, perhaps the picture of the mother that Juani searches for with such wild desperation at one point in the film. The vision of the mother is projected like a static, silent face that never speaks and never will, but whose presence looms over Juani's body and holds it in that parallel dimension where the only possible temporal logic is the logic of time suspended in the eternal repetition of events.

In view of the above, the protagonist of *Vida/perra* could be understood as a symbol of a certain type of woman who was left out of the hegemonic historical narratives of both the Franco regime and the transition to democracy that followed it. The obscene and inappropriate language used by

Juani, her lewd gestures and militant isolation reveal a character who never found a place among the old values of National Catholicism, which identified the ideal of the good Spanish woman in the country's dutiful wives and prolific mothers, which meant that "[i]n the Francoist era, a woman remaining single was ultimately viewed as a personal tragedy and a reason for social disgrace" (Morcillo Gómez, 2015: 117-118). At the same time, Juani's resentment toward the customs of the society of her time and the hermit status to which she seems to have been condemned suggest she does not feel that the modernity that the newly democratic Spain sought to embrace includes her either. *Vida/perra* adds an interesting twist to the theories developed by Adelson in *Making Bodies, Making History*: instead of a body capable of containing the historical narrative, Juani's body refuses to be in history, and thus ends up opposing it without even trying.

CONCLUSIONS

In her exploration of the experiences of sound in modern cinema, Mary Ann Doane (1980) draws on the ideas of Pascal Bonitzer (1975) regarding the relationship between the fragmentation of the authoritarian voice-over and its erotic aspect, although she warns that the politics of the voice needs to be considered beyond this sensual dimension, which itself is problematic from a gender perspective. For Doane, the voice's relationship with the bodies of characters and spectators must also be based on a topological understanding of cinema as a series of spaces whose hierarchy articulates the film's representation and meaning, with the uses of the voice playing a key role in defining them. In *Sweet Hours, Evening Performance* and *Vida/perra*, for example, the narrative levels constructed with the acousmatic voice, whether as a lip-syncing of the past, a reflection in the dressing room or an echo with no response, act as spaces of meaning whose difference facilitates

an interrogation of female bodies split between past and present, reality and representation. The polyphony that characterises the endings to these three films should also be understood as a deployment of possible embodiments, of different places that characters, actresses and spectators may inhabit. For a period like the Spanish transition to democracy, which was characterised by a series of official discourses about the modernisation of the country, these polyphonic spaces offer an alternative to the predominant historical narrative through voices that were relegated to the margins of a monolithic discourse. In their way of exposing a conflict between eras, these voices offer a possible reinterpretation of the historical contradictions of the period of the transition. As Cixous (1995) suggests, this polyphony—which is also a language of a thousand tongues—reveals that when women speak, they draw their stories into history to interrogate it, interrupt it and empty it... to turn it inside out. ■

NOTES

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HISTORY TURNED INSIDE OUT: TENSIONS BETWEEN BODY AND VOICE IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SPANISH CINEMA AT THE END OF SPAIN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Abstract

This article compares the endings of three Spanish films made in the final years of the Spanish transition to democracy: *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, Carlos Saura, 1981), *Evening Performance* (Función de noche, Josefina Molina, 1981) and *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982). The three endings all share a common feature: the dislocation between the voices and bodies of their female characters, and the acousmatic divergence this produces. Drawing on Michel Chion's concept of the acousmatic voice, and especially his revision based on the feminist postulates of authors such as Mary Ann Doane, the article identifies a correlation between the endings of these three films and Hélène Cixous's theories about the relationship between voice, body and writing and the role they play in shaping women's history. Using this theoretical framework, which also includes the theories of Teresa de Lauretis on the construction of female subjectivity, the aim of the study is to demonstrate that in the tensions between voice and body created by all three characters analysed, a space of representation emerges that establishes an alternative to the historical narrative of the Spanish transition to democracy.

Key words

Acousmatic voice; Female body; Female characters; Feminist theory; Spanish transition to democracy.

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LA HISTORIA VUELTA DEL REVÉS: TENSIONES ENTRE CUERPO Y VOZ EN LOS PERSONAJES FEMENINOS DEL CINE ESPAÑOL DEL FINAL DE LA TRANSICIÓN

Resumen

Este artículo compara los finales de tres películas españolas de los últimos años de la Transición, *Dulces horas* (Carlos Saura, 1981), *Función de noche* (Josefina Molina, 1981) y *Vida/perra* (Javier Aguirre, 1982), a partir de un elemento en común: la dislocación entre voz y cuerpo de sus personajes femeninos y el desdoblamiento acusmático que produce. Partiendo del concepto de voz acusmática de Michel Chion y, especialmente, de su revisión desde postulados feministas efectuada por autoras como Mary Ann Doane, el artículo encuentra un correlato entre los finales de estas tres películas y las teorías de Hélène Cixous sobre las relaciones entre voz, cuerpo y escritura y el papel que estas juegan en la configuración de la historia de las mujeres. De acuerdo con este marco teórico que también incluye las teorías de Teresa de Lauretis sobre la construcción de la subjetividad femenina, las páginas que siguen tratan de demostrar que, en las tensiones entre voz y cuerpo que crean los tres personajes estudiados, aflora un espacio de representación que instituye una alternativa al relato histórico de la Transición.

Palabras clave

Voz acusmática; Cuerpo femenino; Personajes femeninos; Teoría feminista; Transición española.

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