

# Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Age II:

## *The Territories of the Contemporary*

Edited by

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# AUDIO VISUAL CREATION AS AN ACTIVIST AND EDUCATIONAL TOOL AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY: A CASE STUDY

MAU MONLEÓN PRADAS

## Introduction

Violence against women is the ultimate consequence of inequality between women and men, which is based on the construction of masculinity and femininity and on how the relationship between them is defined. In this sense, the eradication of structural and symbolic gender violence is the *real challenge* for the 21st century, so that direct, physical and psychological violence can also be radically eliminated.

Perhaps territory that needs more work is in the fight against symbolic violence; the violence of images and words; the sexism that is transmitted at the speed of light and the speed of megapixels, which spread as dominant cultural imaginary.<sup>1</sup>

Women, as well as girls and adolescents, are imposed on by gender mandates, the roles and appearances that their bodies must have, and are therefore taught to be malleable, submissive, and in a victim position, through policies of the body that serve both capitalism and the patriarchy.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, feminist movements continue to vindicate women's rights as human rights, but the enormous gap between legislation and the real situation of women, girls and adolescents, leads us to start an urgent and alternative dialogue, to generate a debate, as well as positive actions, that also include the creation of educational and activist materials for equality capable of competing with dominant patriarchal media cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *La dominación masculina* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Mari Luz Esteban, *Antropología del cuerpo. Género, itinerarios corporales, identidad y cambio* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2013).

Technology has favoured specific changes that can only be conceived in relation to feminist praxis. For example, the Fourth Women's Conference, held in Beijing in 1995, addressed both an assessment of the progress of women in the world and the need to consolidate their role in the structural change of society. There, the term empowerment was consolidated, referring to the need to promote the participation of women in all aspects related to the construction of society and it was thanks to the Internet that the majority of the women who could not attend this conference were able to virtually participate in it and its conclusions.

The new technologies —and especially Internet— have also favoured the birth of social “cyber feminism”, a new form of activism that according to Montserrat Boix is the culmination of an “artistic cyber feminist movement.”<sup>3</sup> Initiated in the early years of the nineties under the umbrella of *net art*, this movement added to its works social criticism from a feminist perspective. Today we find countless bloggers and feminist video activists who use the network as a channel for social diffusion and agitation.

Specifically, what they have in common with postfeminism is that they see in ICT a transformative potential that comes from the possibilities of appropriation of these technologies by women. In addition, postfeminism considers that new technologies offer new possibilities for the hybridization, deconstruction and performativity of predetermined categories such as gender, but also technology and its relationship with gender. Thus, cyber feminists, techno-feminists and Queer Feminists claim a technology feminism that recognizes their own potentialities, as well as their contingent and localized foundations.<sup>4</sup> As Grint and Gill put it, for feminists, research on technology is not just about bringing knowledge but also about an emancipatory project in itself.<sup>5</sup>

This background is important when it comes to contextualizing our project *Nosotr@s hablamos. Superando discriminaciones en la adolescencia*, as we have started from this idea of emancipation and overcoming, based on audio-visual production. It is also important to mention previous and contemporary reference studies to our work, which

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<sup>3</sup> Montserrat Boix, “Hackeando el patriarcado: La lucha contra la violencia hacia las mujeres como nexos. Filosofía y práctica de Mujeres en Red desde el ciberfeminismo social”, in *Mujeres en Red. El periódico feminista* (2007), online at: <http://www.mujeresenred.net/spip.php?article880>.

<sup>4</sup> See Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”, in *Socialist Review* 80, and Catharina Landström, “Queering feminist technology studies” in *Feminist Theory* 8, 1 (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Keith Grint and Rosalind Gill, eds., *The Gender-Technology Relation: Contemporary Theory and Research* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995).

have emerged in most cases in university contexts, and from a perspective of praxis and feminist theory have attempted to respond to problems related to the claim of equality between the sexes.<sup>6</sup>

At present, the very idea of violence has been extended to include behaviours that used to be invisible or considered socially acceptable. Among them, we can speak about psychological harassment and attitudes of contempt inside and outside a relationship, but also, and this is a more recent development, about violence that originates from cultural representations or, in a broader sense, from communication and media industries<sup>7</sup>: cinema, publicity, public campaigns, press, etc. In this way, to the work already carried out in the field of education, there has been an incipient intervention in a more complex cultural field that currently is placed at the center of social pedagogies.

To the extent that our study focuses on a very particular segment of the population -the young- it is also important to underline how the viewpoint of this generation of “digital natives”, as they are called, is different regarding the media used.<sup>8</sup> As a starting point, we need to consider that the online experience of these boys and girls reinforces patriarchal stereotypes, as it is evident in online hate groups, bullying online, or threats on social networks against feminists, for example promoting the despective term “feminazi”.

In our analysis, we will try to expose a part of the project *Nosotr@s hablamos. Superando discriminaciones en la adolescencia* which has been published by the University of Valencia and sponsored by the Institute of Women.<sup>9</sup> The project takes part in the important space occupied by

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<sup>6</sup> Cristina Vega, “Situarnos en la historia. Movimiento feminista y políticas contra la violencia en el Estado Español”, in Virginia Villaplana and Berta Sichel, eds., *Relatos culturales en torno a la violencia de género* (Madrid: MNCARS, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See in this sense the definitions and artistic representations compiled in the platform to fight against gender violence (ACVG), online at: [www.artecontraviolenciadegenero.org](http://www.artecontraviolenciadegenero.org).

<sup>8</sup> Elías Arab and Alejandra Díaz, “Impacto de las redes sociales e internet en la adolescencia: aspectos positivos y negativos” in *Revista Médica Clínica Las Condes* 26 (1) (2015), 7-13.

<sup>9</sup> The title could be translated as: *W@ speak. Overcoming discrimination in adolescence*. It is an educational proposal that arises as a continuation of previous research, carried out in the framework of successive calls for the National I+D+I Research Plan, Sectorial Program for Studies on Women and Gender. The publication *Nosotr@s hablamos. Superando discriminaciones en la adolescencia*, (2011) by the authors Amparo Bonilla Campos, Isabel Martínez Benlloch, Mau Monleón Pradas and Cristina Vega Solís, with the special collaboration of Jennifer Tapias Derch, is part of the research “Overcoming discrimination and violence:

interpersonal relations in human development —and especially, in adolescence relationships of friendship and love. People, based on established social relationship patterns, configure roles that structure our identity and enable a development of our potentialities and ability to participate actively in society, that is, to identify and occupy spaces of citizenship. It will be through the process of socialization as the prescriptions regarding our sexuality are acquired that, in addition to allowing us to internalize the social “must be” in an androcentric society like ours, provide us with tools to act “appropriately” with those values in adult life.

*Nosotr@s hablamos* shows the effects that the idealizations and cultural prescriptions about sex produce in the construction of subjectivity, as well as the media uses and abuses in the representation of women and the violence exercised against them. The project also notes that the burden of symbolic violence that underlies female subjectivity is concealed under benevolent forms of sexism transmitted in the collective imagination, and is present in the difficulty of perceiving the asymmetry of relations between the sexes and detecting subtle forms of violence.

We start from the hypothesis that the conception of violence against women in the educational field is impregnated with visions and knowledge derived, among others, from the media, and that these must be subject to consideration in teaching, revealing the myths, the stereotyped beliefs, as well as the tensions and asymmetries that underlie the normative models of gender.

The project *Nosotr@s hablamos* is structured through two main conceptual axes: the first is video art<sup>10</sup> that is activist and pedagogic nature,

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Participatory Proposal for Equality between the Sexes in Adolescence”. This study was funded by the Women’s Institute in the framework of the Research Projects of the National I+D+I Plan. Program: Strategic action on the promotion of equal opportunities between men and women. Project 151/07. The Intermediate Creation Laboratory (LCI) has collaborated.

<sup>10</sup> Audio-visual Material: DVD, 30 min. Participants: Aida Sandalinas; Álex Molina; Angela Gadea; Andrea Salvador; Camila Tapias; Celia Uchina; Isaac Andujar; Isaac Folch; Ionut Néstor; Javier Ribes; Jorge Ferrando; Juli Luján; Liliya Ruseva; Laura Alemany; Luna Pérez; Luis Alberto; María Valero; Miguel José Torrent; Miriam Gonzalez; Nacho Saldías; Nacho Brines; Roxana Mazieu; Tirsia Molina. The structure of the script has been made by: Isabel Martínez Benlloch, Amparo Bonilla Campos and Mau Monleón Pradas. In charge of audiovisual direction is Mau Monleón and camera operator and editing Jennifer Tapias Derch. Collaborators: School “La Florida”. Catarroja (Valencia): Empar Martínez Bonafé and Merxe Sánchez; IES “Isabel de Villena”. Valencia: Àngels Martínez Bonafé and Rosa Sanchis.



which has served as support for the recording and subsequent qualitative analysis of adolescent discourse. The second axis is articulated around the didactic guide, structured in relation to the audio-visual production through three fundamental parts. These parts are repeated for each of the chapters of the video, the theoretical framework, the testimonials on the part of the adolescents, and finally the activities proposed in relation to the previous sections.

In this article we will focus in particular on the audio-visual material, and not so much on the didactic guide, as we are interested in highlighting the methodologies by which this video creation can become an activist and educational resource, which questions the politics of identity from feminist assumptions. For this, our hypothesis is based on three fundamental reasons that give rise to the objectives of the project:

- The existence of a process of change in the conception and representation of gender-based violence in which media cultures play a prominent role, including audio-visual production.
- The pre-eminence of these media cultures in the processes of production, circulation and reception of knowledge inside and outside the educational context.
- The lability of adolescence against gender prescriptions and the adjustment to the beliefs and values of the peer group.

Therefore, our main objective in *Nosotr@s hablamos* is the examination of the myths, beliefs and prejudices that surround the sexual differences between adolescents that from the cultural imaginary and justify the asymmetries of power between the sexes. Likewise, the tolerance towards covert forms of violence and the manifestation of attitudes and behaviours that underlie discrimination, reveal the mechanisms of concealment of symbolic violence, which is often more evident in its effects than in its own manifestations. More specifically, the detailed objectives that have been pursued throughout the process of conceptualization and realization of the audio-visual project are, among others:

- To analyse the various discourses that today make up, with enormous power, the youthful imaginary and, in particular, representations of violence against women, mainly through materials from cultural media (television, youth and women's press, sensitization campaigns, etc.) starting from a critical vision to illuminate the markedly ideological character of these discourses.

- To analyse and help to question, through the testimonies of boys and girls, the beliefs about friendship, love, expectations of the future, and violence against women. That is to say, to explore the cultural and social opinions, attitudes and practices that the young people accept in their interrelation with people of the other sex.
- To analyse the permanence and ruptures of the gender prescriptions that are involved in the construction of subjectivity, and provide conceptual elements for active intervention and overcoming conflicts.
- To analyse the attitudes, values and beliefs related to gender violence and raise the debate about how they influence the resolution of conflicts in the educational context.
- To propose a creative video activist tool that questions the symbolic imagery and offers strategies for overcoming discrimination and for training on gender equality.
- To provide materials for the implementation of participatory educational experiences for training in gender equality and to expose symbolic violence.

We can say that there have been two fundamental phases in our project: the first one consisting of written interviews with adolescents in Schools (quantitative phase) —the objective being to determine both a first approximation of the contents (audio-visual script) as well as which of the young candidates were going to participate in the video. The second (qualitative phase) is the one referring to the audio-visual production itself. Later on, we will explain these two phases, with a particular focus on the second one.

The realization of the video (together with a teaching guide) has made it possible to implement an educational proposal within the framework of specific subjects in the Spanish curricula such as “Education for Citizenship”<sup>11</sup>, in order to promote equality between the sexes in adolescence. Our publication has been distributed and used as didactic material in the mentioned subject in two Schools in Valencia, and this

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<sup>11</sup> Education for Citizenship and Human Rights (EpC) is the name given to a subject designed for the last cycle of Primary and Secondary Education in Spain by the socialist government of Rodríguez Zapatero and was approved by the Spanish Parliament in accordance with the Organic Law of Education. It consisted of the teaching of democratic and constitutional values. The subject disappeared completely in 2016. Minister Wert of the Popular Party replaced it with the current one: Civic and Constitutional Education.

experience has allowed us to obtain authentic feedback on how these materials have been used in teaching.

Regarding the pedagogical application of our publication, we would like to emphasize that teachers have recognized the value of materials in implementing concepts of equality between the sexes and especially among adolescents, where material is scarce or non-existent.

## The Project

In our project, video art is defined as an artistic non-narrative audio-visual piece. In our case, we have carried out a project within audio-visual activism, which combines a documentary base with social criticism from a gender perspective for equality education.

An exhaustive approach to the concept of activist audio-visual material would force us to review much of the literature written by various authors to detail this praxis from different fields such as militant cinema<sup>12</sup>, video activism<sup>13</sup>, media activism<sup>14</sup>, or radical video<sup>15</sup>, among other concepts that have emerged recently. We will try to define and characterize our project within this activist condition.

For Concha Mateos and Mario Rajas, video activism is defined by types of social action that generally show a communicative character, being able to be used as tools and resources of political intervention by certain groups, individuals and actors that are not part of the dominant power of information.<sup>16</sup> Video activist intervention entails a certain motivation whose transformative political aim can be directed towards different tactical goals, among them the purpose of counter informing, summoning action,

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<sup>12</sup> Andrés Linares, *El cine militante* (Madrid: Castellote D.L., 1976).

<sup>13</sup> See Marta Galán Zarzuelo, “Cine militante y videoactivismo: los discursos audiovisuales de los movimientos sociales”, in *Revista Internacional de Comunicación Audiovisual, Publicidad y Estudios Culturales*, 1, 10, (2012), 1091-1102 and Nuria Vila Alabao, “Videoactivismo 2.0: Revueltas, Producción Audiovisual y Cultura Libre”, in *Toma Uno*, 1, 1 (2012), 167-176.

<sup>14</sup> Matteo Pasquinelli, ed., *MEDIACTIVISMO (Activismo en los medios). Estrategias y prácticas de la comunicación independiente. Mapa internacional y manual de uso* (Roma: Derieve Approdi, 2002), online document at: [http://matteopasquinelli.com/docs/Pasquinelli\\_Media\\_Activism\\_cas.pdf](http://matteopasquinelli.com/docs/Pasquinelli_Media_Activism_cas.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Tina Askanius, *Video Activism 2.0. Space, Place and Audiovisual Imagery* (Harvard: Regional Aesthetics / Locating Swedish Media, 2010), 337-358.

<sup>16</sup> Concha Mateos and Mario Rajas, “Videoactivismo: conceptos y rasgos”, in *Videoactivismo. Acción política, cámara en mano* 71, (2014), 15-56.

articulating participation and betting on building an alternative, collective identity to the dominant culture.

Another characteristic of video activism would be to produce outside the commercial space, choosing political intervention and social transformation as the axis of its work and the most marginalized social sectors, as well as social and political organizations as its protagonists.

In our case, it is not so much a marginal “collective” but it is about the “otherness” itself represented by women as a collective. In this sense, giving voices to adolescents through their testimonies, provides us with the starting point to articulate their participation, as well as to question and build a new collective identity.

One of the characteristics that define this video activism has to do with the goals and objectives that support our practices: our main objective is transformation, where we highlight the use of educational tools to intervene in political and social reality with the intention of fostering reflection and interaction with the audience, proposing feedback to influence a behavioural change in the receiver of the information. In addition to this activist character, our project has a markedly pedagogical character that introduces itself in the social reality of adolescents through classroom education.<sup>17</sup>

We believe that media cultures are the result of interaction with audiences who “use” the media, so that what happens at the level of receiving messages must also be subject to scrutiny. This approach can offer a remarkable extension of the field from which to consider non-violent education from a more integrated perspective. By integrated we understand here a situated analysis about how the changes in the social perception of the macho violence, especially those that develop from the media agendas or from the cultural productions, are impacting on the models and budgets of the educational system, on its contents and teaching practices. In this sense, the separation between the places of “high culture” or “authoritative culture”, from where knowledge is produced, and the places of mass culture, would not be so strong. In any case, it would constitute a border more porous than usually thought. The budgets and registers that cross both cultures continue to be impregnated with a word/image dichotomy that today, in the context of fragmented visual culture, becomes increasingly fragile.

It is therefore necessary to understand the differences between these two forms of communication and discuss the assumption that rational

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<sup>17</sup> It is implemented in the mentioned subject as pedagogical material and is distributed free. See the online document at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311100800\\_Nosotros\\_hablamos\\_Superando\\_discriminaciones\\_en\\_adolescencia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311100800_Nosotros_hablamos_Superando_discriminaciones_en_adolescencia).

knowledge and the transmission of knowledge are only made through books and written media. Taking distance from the assumptions that the audio-visual media serve only for entertainment, Martín Barbero and Germán Rey consider that education should be rethought.<sup>18</sup> Audio-visual media have changed the learning habits and communication of students, distributing knowledge and information in a very different way to the sequential, logical and linear progressive characteristic of book culture and educational institutions as we know them. Increasingly, in schools, there is a conflict between what these authors call the “culture of the book” —compulsory— and the “other culture”, that emerges from the current communicative ecosystem: another way of seeing and reading that challenges both the linear logic and the discipline of the traditional educational system, which is currently defensive about the diversification of knowledge in the prolific and decentralized environment of images, information and knowledge that make up the media.<sup>19</sup>

Audio-visual material is today one of the most direct ways in which young people express themselves and perceive the gender mandates and the heterosexual normativity built by the patriarchal system. Cinema, video, video-clips, video art, video activism, etc. are forms assumed by consumer society that, thanks to the socialization of technological means, currently enable the questioning of dominant stereotypes and an alternative creation of sexualities —new femininities and new masculinities.<sup>20</sup>

Video itself has been our focus of study since it affects the society in which it plays a crucial role, not only for its content, but also for its own characteristics. As described by McLuhan, one could say that the form of a medium is embedded in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship in which it influences how the message is perceived.<sup>21</sup> The personal and social consequences of the audio-visual medium as a technological extension of ourselves —as a result of a new scale introduced in our affairs— has been decisive in the production of our cultural imagery since the 1950s, with the tendency to impact symbolic images in movement, able to attest, to document, to transform, to subvert or to reaffirm identities.

Visual culture has not contributed to a substantial transformation of the identities and values associated with the sexes, which remain strongly

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<sup>18</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero and Germán Rey, *Los ejercicios del ver. Hegemonía audiovisual y ficción televisiva* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Martín Barbero and Rey, *Los ejercicios del ver. Hegemonía audiovisual y ficción televisiva*.

<sup>20</sup> Octavio Salazar Benítez, *Masculinidades y ciudadanía: los hombres también tenemos género* (Madrid: Dykinson S.L., 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

anchored in the traditional imaginaries of masculinity and femininity. However, audio-visual tools and strategies have been a fruitful field of thematic and formal intervention for critical and feminist film production, a field which, nevertheless, remains marginal in terms of mass culture and its influence on educational action.

In the field of feminism there are very valuable precedents in research and audio-visual practice for artistic, educational and activist purposes, such as the figures of American performer Suzanne Lacy, Swiss video artist Ursula Biemann or the Spanish activist group Precarias a la Deriva. The work of these and other women is framed within the feminist communicative strategies that have worked in different directions, diverging from criticism to normativity towards a production of new and alternative worlds.

In our project, these two perspectives continue to be important, the productive look that seeks and creates new representations and the critical look, which reviews the commonality to what we are exposed on a daily basis. That is why our video will feed on both perspectives, leaning more towards the second, without renouncing the first.

Therefore, our project is developed within some of the presuppositions of feminist film theory and cultural studies as a general theoretical and methodological framework that since the 1970s has specialized both in the analysis of female representation in audio-visual material, and since the 1980s in the analysis of the cinematographic genres that put women in the centre of the narrative.<sup>22</sup>

The type of audio-visual approach that we have pursued in the elaboration of the participative proposal that is presented has demanded an intensive treatment of the information that, although it does not allow a universalization of the results, permits an emotional and interpretive deepening that carries a greater potential of sensitization and educational formation. For this purpose, the method of interview filming has been used.

We will now present the two phases of research and work that have been carried out from interviews with adolescents. In the first place, a quantitative study was carried out, where a series of psychological tests were applied, including a written questionnaire with the purpose of evaluating beliefs, attitudes and behaviours around the relationships of friendship and love and violence against women in adolescence, which we have called "Questionnaire on Relations between the Sexes (QRS)". This

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<sup>22</sup> See Zurian Hernández and Beatriz Herrero, "Gender Studies and Feminist Film Theory as a Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Research in Audiovisual Culture", in *Área Abierta* 14, 3 (november 2014).

part was designed and realized mainly by a group of psychologists, whose results led to a process of factorization and validation that could facilitate its possible standardization and application.

After the conclusions of the aforementioned QRS were accepted, which allowed us to elaborate the questions for the interviews and the script of the video creation. These conclusions are based mainly on the scale of detection of sexism in adolescents, a scale that allows us to detect different forms of sexism, including hostile and benevolent sexism, paternalism, heterosexual intimacy, or gender complementarity, among other conclusions to be highlighted.

In short, a total of 588 young people were interviewed in the aforementioned initial quantitative study, whose profile corresponds to a mean economic level and a middle class. In order to be able to carry out this study with young adolescents we went to public Schools of the Valencian Community. In total, nine Schools representing the middle-class profile of young people were chosen.

In the second place, in the qualitative study, a total of 15 young students between 15 and 19 years old were chosen for the final interviews, both for their ability to communicate in front of the camera and for the quality of their responses. In this case, we worked on a type of questionnaire that seeks answers of qualitative value, leaving the interviewees free to explain their points of view, contradictions, gender mandates and acquired roles. Finally, we worked with 15 students from two Schools for the video: “La Florida” School in Catarroja (Valencia) and IES “Isabel de Villena” in Valencia, since they represented the same diversity of samples we had already obtained through the QRS.

Through interviews with these young people, we have tried to unveil the stereotyped beliefs that continue to be maintained in adolescence about the subjective position of girls and boys, in order to denounce the effects of lack of education on equality. Our objective has always been based on the protagonism and the active participation of these teenagers. Direct interviews have been a good tool for revealing such oppressive mechanisms and prejudices.

30 interviews were carried out between the individual interviews and those conducted by pairs or groups of pairs, from which the fragments were selected for each chapter of the video. The criteria have always been to offer diversity of opinions as well as a direct criticism to the asymmetry between the sexes through the covered subjects.

The in-depth interviews with young adolescents are based on the participatory Research-Action or IAP methodology, a contribution of a qualitative type with which we have sought to obtain reliable and useful

results to improve collective perception, basing our research on the participation of the young people themselves.<sup>23</sup> This way, adolescents have ceased to be the “object” of study, becoming the protagonist “subject” of research, controlling and interacting throughout the research process (design, phases, evolution, actions, proposals, etc.), through personal involvement with community of participants.

The interviews have permitted us to approach the stereotyped beliefs that continue to be maintained in adolescence about the subjective position of girls and boys and to verify the effects of lack of education on equality. They have also allowed us to outline the creation of new frameworks for analysis and reflection that acknowledge the emergence of alternatives between the sexes, based on the interests of girls and boys themselves, their perceptions and assessments of the cultural imaginary, and their possible questioning. The declarations of adolescents become open to debate through their association with the images of the media along with the structure of questions posed by the video within a Socratic methodology, associated with the feminist practice called “consciousness raising.”<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, among the percentage of adolescents interviewed, for the final sample we selected a total of four more women than men; this was due to the need to give voice, from positive discrimination, to those who are invisible and in many cases undermined in our society by being “young” and also “women”.

Our video of 30 minutes reproduces the reflections of a total of 15 adolescents interviewed, trying to reveal the stereotyped beliefs that still remain in this age group/era around the social and subjective positions of girls and boys, and denounce, at the same time, the effects of lack of education on equality. Through the analysis and counterpoint of their own discourses, we wanted to create new frameworks for analysis and reflection that enable the emergence of alternative relationships between the sexes, supported by changes in mentality that, in turn, will affect subjectivity.

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<sup>23</sup> Tomás Alberich, “Investigación - Acción participativa y Mapas Sociales” (November 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Consciousness raising or Awareness raising (also called sensitization), is a form of activism, popularized in the United States by radical feminist women in the late 1960s. It often takes the form of a collective of people who try to focus the attention of a wider group of citizens on some cause or condition. These groups address common problems including diseases (e.g. breast cancer or AIDS), conflict (e.g., Darfur genocide, global warming), movements (e.g. Greenpeace, PETA, Planet), and political parties or politicians. Informing the public of a public interest is often considered as the first step in changing the way institutions operate.



As one of the aesthetic and political strategies, we have used the found footage of images from mass media, cinema, advertising and Internet, to give the whole an open evocative sense that, rather than affirming, tries to question the dominant semantics through the interconnections between sounds and images. Some fundamental references have been the video artists and video activists belonging to the radical feminism of the seventies in the United States, such as Martha Rosler or Dara Birnbaum, but also women cinema directors, such as Chantal Ackermann.

Regarding the interviews, based on the analysis of the answers obtained, the final selection was included in each chapter of the video in two complementary ways: the first by direct recording of the young adolescent speaking, and the second by his or her voice-over. The moments of voice-over allowed us to work with images of the media that were referred to directly or indirectly, to use the aforementioned found footage, as well as to introduce “illustrations” of culture and the dominant patriarchal visual imagery.

In summary, the audio-visual material presented here aims to promote equality between the sexes in adolescence, from a perspective of educational action and social intervention through video activism, taking into account the vision and interests of each one of the subjects involved in the process of using this material and, in particular, the target group. We present for this an integrated and transdisciplinary program, the result of the joint work of researchers in the field of psychology, sociology, art and audio-visual language.

All these methodologies have allowed us to work with a type of audio-visual material that derives from different budgets and has a very specific purpose. The project claims the presence of women not only as a user of technology but, especially, as an active participant in the policies of production and distribution of audio-visual material and in social and educational policies linked to technology. From the positions of video art and video activism there are several challenges in this regard, and undoubtedly the promotion of the presence of women in scientific and technical studies has been one of our goals to reach, being a team of women from different disciplines, realizing both the audio-visual script as well as the production and postproduction of this audio-visual material.

Therefore, a participatory methodology of a dialectical nature has been proposed within video art, for academic use and reflection, which aims to provide a critical perspective for the implementation of educational strategies that enable such alternatives, with the conviction that changes in mentality will affect subjectivity. This is why the adolescent community has been the protagonist of this project.

## **Overcoming Discrimination by Questioning the Body, Family, Love and Sexuality**

To finish we would like to explain the structure of the video in relation to the answers obtained. The structure of our audio-visual material is perfectly complemented by the educational guide. In the guide, each chapter is subdivided into two sections: the first one develops the theoretical contents necessary for the implementation of the activities, contents that are also presented in summary form at the beginning of the second section, dedicated to the different activities proposed. In this second section, for each chapter, we articulate the contributions of the adolescents that appear in the audio-visual material to finally propose a set of tasks that cover the theme proposed in each chapter. In this way, the chapter viewing of the video allows the development and debate of the theoretical framework.

This is important specifically because the audio-visual material has been conceived in such a way that it can be viewed and understood independently of the teaching guide, and yet perfectly complemented by it at a structural level in the formation of the chapters that make up the script of this project. This audio-visual autonomy allows you to sample in exhibitions, web platforms and other off-line and online distribution channels.

In short, the audio-visual discourse has been structured into three fundamental chapters (about 8 minutes each) and an epilogue (about 4 minutes). The analysis of the answers obtained allowed us to cover the fundamental problems in each chapter of the video, from our fundamental criterion of questioning the patriarchal point of view regarding each one of the proposed topics.

The brevity of the present analysis does not allow us to explain each of the questions and answers of the interviews, so we will make a short, expositive summary that allows us to understand the dynamics proposed in each chapter of the video. To do this, we will begin the explanation of each chapter with the questions asked, then we will continue with some of the answers obtained, and conclude with a reflection on the theme proposed in each chapter of the video.

### **The Body. What do I demand of my body?**

This first part of the video, covered the fundamental question set out in the title of the chapter on identity. For this purpose the following four basic questions were formulated:

- How do you identify yourself and with what model of person do you identify?
- What things characterize you and which would you change?
- What differences do you think there are between men and women?
- What activities do you think identify men and women?

In general, the answers to these questions revealed the demands of men and women towards their own bodies and towards the representations and roles that they must play. Boys and girls unveiled the need to question their own body about established stereotypes: masculinity, strength and security of males versus femininity, weakness and insecurity for women. Several responses referred to the reification of the particularly feminine bodies promulgated by the mass media, and the gender binarism that establishes standardized roles. In general, the women expressed that they usually compete between themselves for a typified and perfect body, whereas the men expressed that they compete to be the alpha male, that is, via power.



Fig. 1 & 2. Video Still Frames, *Nosotr@s hablamos*.

This chapter introduces us to the analysis of the representations of the body from the gender mandates. For this, it has been essential to embrace the “meaning of sexual difference” in the video’s script, reflecting on the effects that our condition as sexual subjects produces on subjectivity, since our body integrates dimensions of the cultural imaginary and the symbolic order that are manifested in how we are and how we feel.

According with Marta Lamas, “in each culture the sexual difference is the constant around which society is organized (...) The cultural symbolization of anatomical difference takes form in a set of practices,

ideas, discourses and social representations that give attributions to the objective and subjective behaviour of the people according to their sex.”<sup>25</sup>

At present, the representation of the body, that is the body image, increasingly occupies a relevant place in social interaction. Bodies turned into the virtual and hedonistic refer us to the pure appearance, emerge reified, especially in the case of women, and their significance is increasingly complex. Unveiling topics about the nature of women's bodies leads us to consider the relationships that underlie the sex/gender system.

The images as social representations of the body in our technology-mediated society as well as the testimonies of adolescents bring us to the questioning of the demands on our body and the demands that adolescents are forced to comply with, due to the pressure of a media society that stigmatizes whoever is different. The body is revealed as an articulator of society and the psyche.

### **Family Album. How does family mark me?**

In this second chapter, we analysed the fundamental question about how the family marks us. For this, the following three basic questions were formulated:

- What models do you see in your parents?
- What things do you admire and which would you change?
- How do you see yourself in the future?

The answers to these questions challenged the differences between men and women, conveyed through the family by education from childhood. From birth, separation by gender is expressed in the colours blue for boys and pink for girls, as well as in the difference between symbolic and role games to which boys and girls are subjected. The young women expressed their asymmetrical relationships with their father and mother, where the family exercised important control over the girls and were much laxer with boys. Conflicts between parents and daughters, lack of communication and often exposure to a relationship that generates low self-esteem in women compared to the high self-esteem in males were also shown. This is reflected in the future views of boys and girls, where the girls want to form a family while the boys project a future of professional and personal success.

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<sup>25</sup> Marta Lamas, “Cuerpo e identidad”, in Luz Gabriela Arango, Magdalena León and Mará Viveros, eds., *Género e Identidad. Ensayos sobre lo femenino y lo masculino* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995).

This second chapter delves into the influence that the family nucleus exerts on peer relationships as a primary area of socialization and as a significant environment during adolescence. Masculinity and femininity continue to be seen today as prototypes of essential expression that basically characterize the person and that are manifested in any social situation through routine acts, especially in the family. Gender, besides being considered as an identity, is also a role and a staging:

Inequality-discrimination-violence are part of a particular circuit of mutual feedback that unfolds through the social production of the various forms of acceptance that legitimize both inequality and discriminatory practices and, at the same time, make invisible violations. [...] It can be considered that the processes of inequality-discrimination-violence are not strictly invisible but have been made invisible. [...] They have become invisible in a complex socio-historical process.<sup>26</sup>

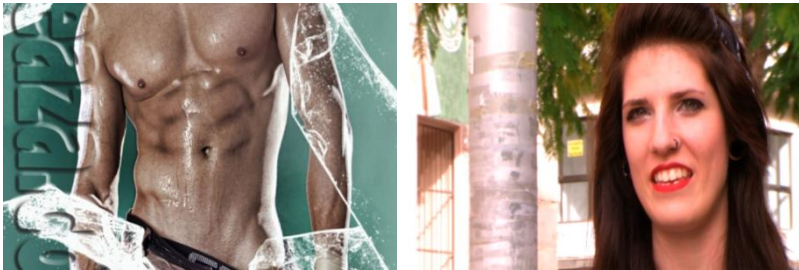


Fig. 3 & 4. Video Still Frames, *Nosotr@s hablamos*.

In order to make visible the discourses of power and inequality on which the roles are based, it is necessary to disaggregate by sex any type of social information data and to re-conceptualize men and women as distinct groups, constituted in concrete and historically changing psychosocial relationships, but always asymmetrical. As Bourdieu argues, structures of domination are, in addition to historical, the result of a continuous work of reproduction that is carried out through physical and symbolic violence and involving both individual agents and institutions: Family, Church, School, and State.<sup>27</sup>

For this reason, it has been necessary to analyse the ways in which gender ideology —the cultural imaginary around sexual difference—

<sup>26</sup> Eva Giberti and Ana Fernández, *La mujer y la violencia invisible* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu, *La dominación masculina*.

continues to disseminate, despite the declaration of equality, changes in family structure and mixed schools. Its relevance in the construction of subjectivity itself and its impact on violence against women —from the subtle and naturalized forms of violence that produce and sustain gender models— oblige us to take into account the question of the legitimacy that this ideology finds in the representations of masculinity and femininity and in the relations between women and men in the cultural imaginary.



Fig. 5 & 6. Video Still Frame, *Nosotr@s hablamos*.

In this sense, stereotypes or preconceived ideas have been revised blurring the limits of individuality by unifying the characteristics of the people that constitute a category and allowing homogenization of the individuals who belong to it. Stereotypes justify, in a simplistic way, the nature of relationships between groups, since stereotyped knowledge which has a strong emotional charge- filters, in a reductionist way, objective reality.<sup>28</sup>

In short, this chapter emphasizes how control, exercised by parents on girls, is translated into stereotypes and is subsequently transferred to relationships with boys in the guise of protection.

### **Love and Sexuality. What do I expect from the other?**

In this third and last section we analysed the fundamental theme of love and sexuality in relationships. For this purpose, the following four basic questions were formulated:

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<sup>28</sup> Amparo Bonilla, "Género, identidades y violencia" in Isabel Martínez Benlloch, et al., *Imaginario cultural, construcción de identidades de género y violencia: formación para la igualdad en la adolescencia* 103 (Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer / Colección Estudios, 2008), 15-34.

- What do you think is the ideal man and woman?
- In a relationship, (male / female; male / male; or female / female) how do you think each partner acts?
- What are the problems that can develop in any relationship?
- Do you know any cases of jealousy, control or dependencies?

The answers to these questions revealed a greater empathy from girls towards the feeling of romantic and emotional love, in front of a more visceral and sexual behaviour in boys. The couple's expectations of the girls were described as long-term relationships and love, while the boys expressed a desire for social success in choosing couples, as well as domination and control. In this chapter, real problems of gender violence, control and harassment suffered by the girls were revealed. We also noted responses about unwanted pregnancies in adolescent women and the lack of responsibility and commitment on the part of the boys.

This chapter addresses the analysis of the subjective positions of girls and boys on a nuclear issue such as intimate sexual and affective relationships. The representation of “romantic love” is not only conditioned by culture, but is often a privileged instrument of control that emanates from the hegemonic social order, so that the relationships of couple are susceptible to suffer from the asymmetries of power between the sexes:

Love is historical and always symbolic (...) We learn love ideologies, we learn the specific contents of love through mandates, norms, beliefs. In living, each person tries to make love ideologically learned. In reality, most of us experience amorous frustrations because we can rarely realize the loving imagery to which we are linked.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 7 & 8. Video Still Frame, *Nosotr@s hablamos*.

<sup>29</sup> Marcela Lagarde, *Para mis socias de la vida* (Madrid: Horas y Horas, 2005).

Sexuality is also central to the lives of people and societies by acting as the axis of social organization and delimiting spaces and conditions of life that influence human feelings, thoughts and actions. To understand sexuality as a social production, and not as impulses, was a turning point in the dominant conceptions. Likewise, the contributions of feminist theories to the introduction of new categories of analysis, such as the concept of gender and its articulation with the body and sexuality, have contributed to establishing a conceptual framework which is embedded in a complex process of construction and socio-historical, cultural, political and subjective production.<sup>30</sup> But the social models of sexual behaviour do not refer to a simple normative system that acts from outside, nevertheless they are inscribed in identities through which the behaviour and the control operates, and therein lies its enormous power.<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 9 & 10. Video Still Frame, *Nosotr@s hablamos*.

In this regard, Jeffrey Weeks argues that sexuality is a history of changing sexual (erotic) practices, systems of regulations, social definitions and subjective meanings, as well as discourses.<sup>32</sup> Sexuality is an “abstraction”, a way of conceptualizing experiences in various vital potentialities, namely: that of belonging to a sexed species and being a generalized subject; to experience erotic pleasure; that of procreation and

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<sup>30</sup> See Carole Vance, *Placer y peligro. Explorando la sexualidad femenina* (Madrid: Revolución S.A, 1989), Gayle Rubin, “El tráfico de las mujeres: notas sobre la economía política del sexo”, in *Nueva Antropología*, vol. VII, 30 (1986), 95-145, and Marcela Lagarde, *Para mis socias de la vida*.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad. Vol. 1: La voluntad de saber* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Weeks “La construcción cultural de las sexualidades. ¿Qué queremos decir cuando hablamos de cuerpo y sexualidad?”, in Ivonne Szasz and Susana Lerner, eds., *Sexualidades en México. Algunas aproximaciones desde la perspectiva de las ciencias sociales* (México: El Colegio de México, 1998), 199-221.



that of developing affective bonds. Thus, it constitutes an unstable and vital category, a product of relations of power.

The daily practices are full of metaphors that allude to mandates and social representations. These symbolize the opposition and complementarity between men and women and are incorporated indistinctly in the subjectivities of women and men, which means that sexism is not a male heritage.<sup>33</sup> In addition, sexist attitudes can be directed at the two sex groups, but it is clear that androcentrism makes it easier for pejorative appraisals to target mostly the women's group in general, as well as those men with homoerotic desires—who betrayed the male generic to transgress the “natural” order of sexuality—or to those more sensitive or “effeminate”. The heteronormative hegemony thus establishes that the experience of sexuality is asymmetric and constitutes a space where unequal positions of power are staged and reaffirmed.<sup>34</sup> As an example, Raquel Osborne affirms that it is still difficult for many women to separate, at certain moments, the love of sexuality.<sup>35</sup> Unlike what happens to men who have learned to separate the two spheres in excess, the women have brought them together.

In this third audio-visual chapter, the importance of decision-making on sexual and loving life during adolescence is emphasized, as it contributes to the development of autonomous subjects. Love is a vitalizing experience and, therefore, it is worth investing energy to provide tools that enhance love, but without fear of separation when relationships are not healthy. As in the previous chapters, we have used the appropriation of filmic images and mass media. Likewise, interviews with adolescents have served to generate a critical discourse, and through the found footage and the compilation we have tried to propose and update debates, as well as to obtain more questions and answers.

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<sup>33</sup> Norma Fuller, “La constitución social de la identidad de género entre varones urbanos del Perú”, in Teresa Valdés and José Olavarria, eds., *Masculinidades y equidad de género en América Latina* (Santiago de Chile: FLACSO, 1998), 56-69.

<sup>34</sup> See Silvia Tubert, “La construcción de la identidad sexuada en la adolescencia” in Isabel Martínez Benlloch, et al., *Imaginario cultural, construcción de identidades de género y violencia: formación para la igualdad en la adolescencia*, 103 (Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer / Colección Estudios, 2008), 50-87, Bourdieu, *La dominación masculina*, and Fuller, *La constitución social de la identidad de género entre varones urbanos del Perú*.

<sup>35</sup> Raquel Osborne, *La construcción sexual de la realidad: un debate en la sociología contemporánea de la mujer* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993).

## **The Epilogue. *Overcoming Discrimination***

The last part of the video is an epilogue that questions equality in Spanish society. For this purpose, a single fundamental question was formulated:

- Does real equality exist in our society?

Everyone answered this question. Although initially many teenagers thought that there was equality between women and men, the final interview revealed that real equality had been questioned. Most girls responded that there were no equal opportunities and that women still had to take care of domestic and care tasks. The majority of boys felt that real equality was almost impossible, like world peace, and that it would only be achieved if one began to value each other and to educate in values from childhood.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, in this final section we have definitively opted for the interview as a participatory methodology and it is for this reason we used only testimonies of adolescents that are presented by way of reflection, starting from the direct speeches and motivated by the mentioned question. In this last part of the audio-visual, it is a matter of trying to create a framework for debate in order to make discriminations visible and to encourage the exploration of new cultural models of action and relationships that favour equality, but also to offer a vision of empowerment that is dynamic and positive about the possibility of achieving equality in our western society through debate, listening, reflection and motivation towards change of the unique, patriarchal and dominant way of thinking. In this sense, we emphasize the revealing ability contained in the use of the direct interview that has allowed us to activate the debate towards social change, trying to overcome current discrimination and supporting the struggle for equality between men and women.

## **Conclusions**

As a general conclusion, in our video art approach it suggests how the socialization of gender builds us and partially develops in both sexes. It discloses how the stereotyped masculine imaginary, unfortunately still in force, is based on self-affirmation, hyper development of the external self, orientation to dominance and control, competitiveness and attainment of

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<sup>36</sup> This part is not included in the publication, but only in the video, since it was an epilogue and did not carry out activities for the teaching guide.

achievements, inexpressiveness and emotional self-control. That is, it advocates an autonomous, strong and independent subject, based on myths about an assertive and dominant virility, which must be permanently affirmed through the demonstration of authority in the family, in relationships, in the spaces of interpersonal relationships in general and, in some cases, even through violence. In short, a masculinity that results from the internalization of sexism as an affirmation of power and as a denial or rejection of femininity, which is also expressed in the form of homophobia.

We can also conclude that, specifically, in the cultural imaginary, the ideal of femininity is represented by the concern for the well-being of others and a self-esteem linked to the group's harmony by an emotional and maternalized expressiveness with dependence on the person they are emotionally involved with (on which weighs the stigma of loneliness), in short, by an objectification where the body and the desire itself are at the mercy of the other's gaze. The female stereotype represents women as an emotional, sensitive and dependent subject, based on myths around the power of romantic love, which emphasizes a mysticism of self-denial and fosters an exchange of "protection by obedience" that reinforces positions of dependence and submission: to have value in relation to the other, to live for the others, to confront women on their own devaluation and on the lack or delay of their life project, from an interiorization of sexism expressed through emotional strategies that only confirm dependence on the protection and authority of the male. Despite the many advances in the awareness of equality, capacity and rights, it is observed that, in questions related to recognition in relationships between the sexes, mainly in the affective field, residues remain that favour positions of subordination that "demand" the approval of the couple or the boys in the group. Generalized socialization favours unequal positions that support an asymmetric balance of power between the sexes and are the germ of gender violence.

In summary, and as an open conclusion based on how our project supports our theoretical framework, our video creation invites everyone to continue the debate about the possibility of constructing a real equality, based on overcoming discrimination that is sustained in myths and educational models. The shared belief of gender equality is questioned and deconstructed, from the need to make discrimination visible and to propose new models of action and relationships. It is necessary for boys and girls to know their own abilities, expectations, values, desires, and demand recognition and respect for one's own person as a basis for the development of one's own subjectivity. The final testimonies are intended to stimulate a critical debate, based on mutual respect, in which they ask about their daily practices to unveil the elements that contribute to the perpetuation of sexism

in our culture. Satisfying one's own needs and ideas and being able to make decisions, freely interacting with one's own body, knowing oneself as a subject of rights, requires a considerable effort, but it is worth it because if one does not know what one wants, one can easily succumb to the desire of the rest.

The interviews conducted have allowed us to reveal the stereotyped beliefs that continue to be maintained in adolescence around the subjective position of girls and boys, and to denounce the effects of a lack of education on equality. Our intention has always been based on the protagonism and the active participation of these teenagers. We can conclude that the audio-visual material that has served as a support for the registration and subsequent qualitative analysis of the discourse has, in turn, facilitated the design of an educational experience of sensitization and prevention of violence, which seeks to promote the creative and conscious use of new media.

With this project we have achieved an educational proposal within the framework of specific subjects in Spanish curricula such as “Education for Citizenship”, that has allowed teachers to promote equality between the sexes in adolescence. In this context, video art has been useful as a pedagogical tool that can promote raising awareness and engage people actively in the discourse. Regarding the pedagogical application of our publication, we can conclude that teachers and students have recognized the value of these materials to implement concepts of equality between the sexes, where material is scarce or non-existent.

Finally, we can conclude from this audio-visual experience —based on video activism, gender studies, psychology, sociology, pedagogy and art— that transdisciplinarity is the fundamental basis for success in an alternative and supportive approach to the deconstruction of the dominant “macho” ideology, since they promote a pedagogy of the image capable of overcoming the structural and symbolic gender violence that underlies our society. In addition, it is urgent to seek the insertion of these alternative contents, since they involve acts of resistance and necessary actions in the task of dissemination, education and training in egalitarianism against gender inequality reflected in the mass media and in our own social reality. Lastly, this demand for the presence of women is needed not only as a user of technology but, particularly, as an active participant in the policies of production and distribution of audio-visual material and in the social and educational policies linked to technology, since the mass media in general are dominated by the main culture of patriarchy.

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