

## Present Bodies. Emancipated Voices

Or, how to relocate bodies in thought



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## Abstract

This video essay is the result of a co-creation process carried out for six months with vulnerable teenagers who participated in a film workshop informed by a communitarian feminist epistemology in Toro, Colombia. Our aim, as co-creators of this process, is to collectivize the potencies of an emancipatory thought through images, sounds, and words in the face of gender-based violence that continues to take place in Latin America, particularly in the small city of Toro (a marginalized town witness to the violence resulting from drug trafficking). We also aim to affirm academic filmmaking as a propitious space for the consolidation of a material thought that relocates the body to the center of its motivations and movements. Our ambition has been to affirm academic filmmaking as a gesture of social justice, as well as a way of revitalizing and decolonizing the university.

*Keywords:* Counter-images, Body-territory, Menstruation, Gender, Violence

## Guiding statement

1

In this video essay, we wanted to gather everything that happened in a collective workshop of experimentation and filmmaking based on the gender-based violence experienced by the participants, who are also co-authors of this piece. It becomes necessary to address the problem of gender-based violence—in any of its modes of thought, including as it is expressed in filmmaking—in the university sphere. To do so, we invoke the thought of Rita Segato (2016) who argues that the way to end patriarchy is by dismantling the pedagogy of patriarchy, since it is this that makes war. This experience of war is what the workshop participants have lived, as their bodies have been damaged, abused, and in other cases disappeared. And following Segato, without gender peace, there is no true peace. To achieve this peace, there must be more academic research based on listening to the body (which filmmaking has allowed). In this sense, for this proposal we opted for the pedagogy of “radical tenderness” (d’Emilia and Chavez 2015) that contributed to deconstructing and resignifying the interaction with our body-territories and the way

of naming our body parts, distancing us from a whole colonial and patriarchal system. Therefore, not only was the vulva talked about by the workshop participants, but also images of the vulva were sewn, as well as images of the breasts and the uterus. From the elaboration at the collective workshop of these material creations, we discussed concepts that are brought here to the university in a lively way through academic filmmaking.

All this to say, that this way of making the participants part of a process of emancipatory creation, where they became co-directors of the short film, helped to make a statement of the crimes that they have had to witness and the gender-based violence they have lived. In addition, this way of bringing academic filmmaking to them established in the creators a loving and empowering self-perception of themselves. At the same time, they reflected on the romanticized violence that stems from the abuse of the feminized body and the annulment of the experience of menstruating bodies. This last idea was constantly worked on by bringing exercises with the meaning of menstrual blood and the violated and stigmatized parts of those who have a uterus.

## 2

“Present Bodies. Emancipated Voices” is a video essay that is the result not only of the affirmation of audiovisual research-creation as a research method but also the result of the affirmation of experimental film as a field of emancipatory and decolonial encounter between the arts, gender studies, and feminist direct political-aesthetic actions (Vasconcellos and Pimentel 2017). The video essay is a political and artistic gesture that seeks to reinvent ways of communicating and perceiving what is usually invisibilized and silenced as is the woman’s body and the fact of menstruation. This video essay is, in a way, the final link of a more complex counter-hegemonic ecology of community pedagogies of radical listening (Wiedemann 2021a) and tenderness (d’Emilia and Chavez 2015). A series of gestures in favor, on the one hand, of an epistemological turn in which the body is relocated in the center of thought and, on the other hand, in which the image becomes the embodied space of the experience of resisting gender-based violence suffered by the co-creators of this piece. These co-creators are nine teenage girls

and one adult woman, who participated in the workshop of audio-visual co-creation and emancipatory thought “Images and counter-images of the body-territory in menstruating corporealities,” carried out at Toro – Colombia (a marginalized town on the outskirts witness to the violence resulting from drug trafficking) in 2022 within the framework of the CineToro Experimental Film Festival.

This creative process was possible thanks to activities that were carried out for six months in which two film forums were held with the theme “Emancipation among vulvas” entitled: “Recognizing ourselves: between hormones and blood” and “The power of knowing each other.” In the screenings, we watched feminist short films of experimental animation and a documentary that served as a critical inspiration for the creation processes. Subsequently, the co-creation workshop took place for a total of forty hours, where textile and craft materials were made for the short film (vulvas, wombs, breasts, faces, hair, silhouettes, patchwork quilt as background), which in formal terms sought to be as simple and effective as possible, not demanding technical skills from the participants, but activating cinematic thinking beyond technical know-how. In this way, the video essay is composed of overhead sequence shots in which the workshop participants perform with their hands the montage of their own bodies on a small scale, while we listen in voice-over to testimonies that are the product of letters they wrote to their “I” of the future. The short film as an audiovisual surface becomes a performative space of the coexistence of anonymous experiences, since we always see three sequence shots featuring images of bodies under construction at the same time on the screen. These images are accompanied by a voice-over that inhabits them and that is not anchored to any of the sequence shots that compose the ensembled image, since the singularity of one fragment reverberates in the collectivity of all of them.

Other activities were also carried out, a performance and an artistic exhibition, which helped to reinforce the resistance that these women were demanding in the face of the situation of gender violence. The aim was to support the accusations that the teenage girls were making in their schools against their teachers for abuse and harassment, bearing in mind that the context in which they live is very religious and characterized by drug trafficking, so people are



afraid to speak or make accusations for fear of being judged or disappeared, as has been the case of many of their acquaintances and family members. In this sense, the video essay is a political gesture and mode of radical and collective thought in the act (Manning and Massumi 2014), where “Present Bodies” is the presentation or declaration of what we are and the resistance to what we were told we should be. And “Emancipated Voices” is the path of resistance to the events and traumas experienced.

### 3

One might wonder if we have formulated the problem correctly when speaking of academic filmmaking (the subject of this special issue), as if the problem were the defense of a particular typology anchored and adjectivized in “the academic” which circulates in the space of the university. However, since what ought to be circulating in the university does not always, in fact, circulate, we have tried to invoke the fecundity and fertility of new thoughts. Cinema has been called upon to integrate itself timidly and gradually into this “academic” ethos to revitalize what should have always been germinating. That is, the sparkling force of thought in action, the adventure of an ‘all-alive-thought,’ as a generative and creative potency and not as an argumentative and analytical exegesis that ultimately stops the movement of thought. An absence of movement—due to an absence of a body—is perhaps what has led filmmaking to be invited to appear at the university. Ultimately, we can understand this invitation as a gesture of care with thought, that leaves behind fused dichotomies and that starts from the affirmation that there would be no distinction between thinking and feeling and that thought is always in movement.

In other words, thinking is always a cinematic gesture. Thinking=movement=cinema. Thinking is the invention of relationships not given between heterogeneous elements as a gesture of montage in whose intervals a mobilizing force emerges in and from the living and matter. This cinema/filmmaking that takes care of thought by affirming itself in the presence of the body, makes explicit cinematic modes of experience (Wiedemann 2021b) that pass through the screen, but at the same time exceed it. That is to say, cinematic thought-movements pragmatically affirm lives,

since their primary place is not the screen but the bodies and the intervals that open up between them, making new perceptual fields emerge. This is what we have sought to do with the workshop of audiovisual co-creation and emancipatory thought “Images and counter-images of the body-territory in menstruating corporealities” that has given rise to this video essay “Present Bodies. Emancipated Voices,” where singular bodies have made present a careful thought in alliance and resonance with the cinematic intervals that resist gender-based violence. In other words, we can understand this video essay as an embodied cinematic thinking in which cinema is a means to relocate the body in thought, by re-sensorializing and making material the montage-relations that assemble ideas and bodies that mutually potentiate each other beyond abstract and patriarchal logics. Ultimately, what we have sought to do is restore “adventures of ideas” (Whitehead 1967) by embracing their imminently cinematic and embodied condition, which, for lack of better words and in the spirit of revitalizing the university, we could call “academic filmmaking.”

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