The Noughties in the Hispanic and Lusophone World
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Edited by

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This book was born of many conversations before, during and after a Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies (WiSPS) conference in Dublin City University in 2008. Aware of the impending ten year anniversary of WiSPS and keen to celebrate it we threw around many ideas which would fit the decade. Claire Williams, the then president of the organisation, suggested the noughties. It seemed very apropos and we went with it. In a chat on a bus on the way into Dublin city after the conference we agreed to edit the volume as a worthwhile tribute to the range and strength of research that WiSPS members have engaged in over the last ten years. The subsequent call resulted in the current volume. So, first of all we must thank Claire for her idea. Next, we would like to thank the contributors, whose eagerness to embrace the topic resulted in the fascinating array of essays in this volume. This book is dedicated to the founding members of WiSPS, who saw a need to create an organisation that would support and mentor female colleagues as well as to provide a forum for feminist studies, and address the role of women in British and Irish Luso-Hispanism. We would also like to pay tribute to members new and old and to the contribution the organisation has made through its annual conference, study days, research fellowship and the supportive, engaging and lively exchanges that have taken place as a result of all these.

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INTRODUCTION

THE NOUGHTIES: FRESH START OR FALSE DAWN?

KATHY BACON AND NIAMH THORNTON

This volume is both inspired by and is a tribute to Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies (WiSPS). Since its establishment in the academic year 1999-2000 (see Severin 2008, ix-xi), WiSPS has witnessed the twenty-first-century noughties, completing its first decade and growing to become an established presence in Hispanic and Lusophone studies. All contributions in this volume are by members of WiSPS; some are papers given at WiSPS conferences, whilst others were written in direct response to our call for papers. The subject of the noughties was inspired by a suggestion from a former president of the association, Claire Williams, and we have been delighted by the range and scope of the chapters, which have provided a new perspective on their objects of study.

We are seizing the opportunity to study a time period that is both over and still happening as we write. The contributors have examined the noughties from a range of centuries. Some have had the advantage of distance, whilst others look at a time that is so recent it is still the present at the time of writing. It is this fascinating range of the historic and immediate that we have been eager to capture in this volume. It is not the same noughties that is being examined in each piece, yet there is significant resonance in the study of a particular, named decade. Whether in the distant past or the present, the advent of the noughties signals that the old century is over and the new has begun. While the notion of the fin de siècle has been well studied (see, for example, Showalter (1990), Teich and Porter (1990), Poyato (1997), and Richardson and Willis (2001)), the specificity of the noughties as a discrete period merits attention, which it has not always been paid.

As has been well catalogued by theorists (such as Toulmin and Goodfield (1965) and Whitrow (1989)) markers of time are arbitrary. Time is nonetheless rendered meaningful by calendars and clocks:
timekeeping is an invention that helps us organise society and is a tool to ensure the smooth running of both the public (workplace, industry, services) and of the private (home, friends, teams). It binds us to shared historical markers. Writing about century’s end, Hillel Schwartz states that “nothing would be so foolish as to claim that all events of import occur at century’s end” (1996, 10). Yet we ascribe to those events that do fall on particular dates a meaning that is all their own. Nature may not dictate what happens on a certain date, but it can be rendered significant by happenstance. Similarly, men and women can imbue a moment with a charged significance. As social, cultural and historical actors, individuals or groups aware of the mood of a time, and eager to make a date carry the weight of an event can make things happen because time has meaning beyond a simple arithmetical calculation.

The end of a century and—in the case of the twentieth century—of a millennium has its own mythos of the end of things. Some views of this ending are apocalyptic, in that they envisage a dramatic end of time, and others project forward whilst reflecting on what has gone before (see Showalter (1990, 1-18)). The beginning of a new millennium, century, and decade carries the weight of this end, on the one hand, and of the shining hopes of the coming of a new era, on the other. Schwartz sums up this tension between the time gone past of the old century and that which is yet to come, “[a]t century’s end we are inevitably host to an oxymoronic time: the most desperate and the most exultant; the most constrained and the most chaotic” (1996, 6). When that century ends, whether on a note of fin de siècle ennui or glorious optimism, time continues apace and the turn of a century brings us onward into the future.

Some analysts of the noughties are optimistic, others pessimists. There may be disappointment in what has not come to pass or hope at what yet can be. Implicit in the metaphor of the forward march of time there can be a concomitant expectation of progress, which is not always delivered by lived reality. It is this Janus-faced dualism that many of our contributors are grappling with in this volume: traces and shadows of the past loom over the new decade that it is hoped will be put to rest, tackled or otherwise resolved, on the one hand; on the other, we find the taste of fresh, new beginnings, which, it is hoped, will bring a bright future. These dualisms are not always contradictory nor incompatible, but there can be tensions and difficulties which nuance our understanding of a specific context or narrative.

Decades can be framed by the events that take place. For example, the twentieth century did end with tales of impending disaster: newspapers were filled with fears about Y2K bugs that had the potential to bring
electronic systems to collapse. It was predicted that planes would fall out of the sky and vital hospital equipment would stop. It didn’t happen. Despite these fears, the decade began on a note of optimism. Subsequently, in the West the decade has been book-ended by two disasters: the attacks on the Twin Towers on 11th September 2001, an event which has had direct consequences on many non-Western states, and the 2007 banking crisis, which is still spinning its way through the financial sectors and has had detrimental effects on many international economies. It is easy to assume from a US and European perspective that these are global problems and that all countries are experiencing the reverberations from these events similarly. However, the picture is more complicated.

In order to grasp the nuances and divergences, consider a sampling of other stories that have predominated for Hispanic and Lusophone countries in the past decade. Brazil’s positive outlook at the end of the decade is buoyed up by economic growth and their successful bids to host both the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro and the soccer World Cup in 2014. Spain has had its own terrorist attack on 11th March 2004, has experienced financial collapse, but also has been concerned with a tense debate over memory and the physical and metaphorical digging up of the past, as examined by Abigail Loxham and Lorraine Ryan in this volume. Mexico began the decade on an optimistic note when the Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party] lost their 70 plus years of political dominance to the Partido Acción Nacional [National Action Party]. There was hope that the change would be positive. Change may have been needed, but Mexico is ending the decade deeply wounded by its dependence on the US economy, and with a near civil war between drug cartels resulting in thousands dead in the Northern States. This is a mixed picture. We cannot say that this has either been a wholly positive or negative decade. It is our aim that the reader comes away from reading this collection, not with a sense that there is a single noughties sensibility or mood, but that among the variety the similarities and contrasts may be illuminating.

The perceived newness of the noughties may be associated with a hope of progress, however that is defined. Feminist hopes of progress for women are variously addressed in this volume, in particular in the first section “Feminist Noughties?”. It is clear from many of our chapters that feminism’s job is not yet done. Some contributors have looked at the twenty-first century and considered the broken promises of the previous century in different Spanish-speaking and Lusophone countries. This has necessitated a look back to the twentieth century where a given cultural
change has its origins. In chapter one María Donapetry looks at recent representations of women on screen. Providing a brief introduction to the long history of the nude in figurative art, Donapetry traces the trajectory of the destape era of the 1970s in Spain, and its persistent legacy of the objectification of women veiled in a discourse of liberation. She then examines films by Icíar Bollaín and Isabel Coixet in which women’s nudity is represented on screen in ways that give them agency and do not compromise their subjectivity. There is a pessimism in the persistence of one form and its seemingly outdated representation of women, and an optimism in that there are those who are challenging the status quo.

The representation of female subjectivity is again addressed, this time in the context of theatre, by Susana Lorenzo-Zamorano in chapter two. She examines the ways in which female playwrights in Spain have negotiated their relationship with feminism since the transition to democracy. While she argues that in the 1980s most failed to present women in a subject position, she explores plays by Paloma Pedrero and Carmen Resino which deconstruct gender identities and question the roles traditionally assigned to women. Moving on to the the nineties and the noughties, Lorenzo-Zamorano examines the apparently contradictory situation in which there has been a rise in the number of women playwrights and plays in which a female perspective predominates, and yet such authors are still reluctant to admit the presence of a feminist (or any other activist) agenda within their works. Like Donapetry, however, Lorenzo-Zamorano posits that the twenty-first-century noughties may be witnessing productive challenges to the status quo, in the shape of radical feminist productions by all-female theatre companies such as Metadones, Margarita Borja’s Sorambulas and the Vacas Collective, and by the actress and playwright Angelica Liddell Zoo.

Just as the question mark in the title of this section is implicit in both Donapetry and Lorenzo-Zamorano’s interrogations of feminism’s successes and failures in Spain, in chapter three Paula Jordão’s examination of Nélida Piñon’s Vozes do deserto [Voices of the Desert] (2004) suggests that this novel represents a challenge to the status quo, this time in the Brazilian cultural context. Piñon’s novel gives the ninth-century story, The Thousand and One Nights, a different interpretation by re-writing it. Her inclusion of different characters (Scherezade’s sister), the attribution of new inspirations and settings for the story, and the foregrounding of the female voice, all reveal its twenty-first-century origins. Re-creations and new imaginings of long-established stories are common in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century women’s writing. Jordão traces the distinctiveness of Piñon’s novel, and how she has been influenced by
contemporary feminist debates about women’s place in both narrative and history in Brazil and beyond.

This sense of the noughties as a decade of progress for women in particular localities is explored by Laura Soler González, who argues in chapter four that the twentieth-century noughties “provided a specific historical framework for the emergence and development of feminism in Catalonia” (p. 59). She examines the importance of the writer Dolors Monserdà for this development, arguing that Monserdà’s decision to write as a woman under her own name reflects her desire to open new pathways for women in writing and in society. The chapter considers Monserdà’s involvement in social action, and her journalism and writings about women’s condition. Soler González then discusses in more detail Monserdà’s novel *La fabricanta*, showing how the novel addresses questions around modernity, public and private space, and the nineteenth-century “angel” archetype for women. While some have questioned whether this conservative Catholic writer can be considered “feminist” at all, Soler González strongly argues that Monserdà’s fundamental contribution to feminism in Catalonia cannot be ignored.

By contrast, in chapter five, Susanne Meachem explores concrete economic conditions impacting negatively upon women in the noughties. For Argentina, the decade has meant financial troubles since December 2001 when it defaulted on its debts leading to a massive economic collapse that the country is still trying to fully resolve. The fallout from this collapse is explored by Meachem. She examines how the Argentine government is attempting to help the so-called “new poor” move out of poverty by using programmes that either deliberately or necessarily place women into a traditionally delimited role, and encourage them to stay out of the workplace in favour of facilitating male employment. Where time is associated with a notion of perpetual, forward moving progress this is a reminder that things have not necessarily improved for all women, in particular the poor, and that the rhetoric of womanhood is still bound up with a very particular role that makes parenting and the domestic sphere her responsibility. While the mythos of the inevitable modernisation brought about by time is consistently interrogated in this section, so too the hope for a better, more equal, future is heralded.

The noughties often has this dual pull: of being future-oriented and still bound to the past century. The legacy of the past is a recurrent theme in many of our chapters, and the second section, “Cultural Memory in the Noughties”, focuses on such issues within Spain. In chapter six Lorraine Ryan characterises the twenty-first-century noughties as “the decade of memory in contemporary Spain” (p. 106), tracing how a new memory
culture has arisen to challenge the hegemonic forgetting which presided after the Franco era. In the noughties, she argues, *la generación de los nietos* [the grandchildren’s generation] have involved themselves in memory politics for reasons which are deeply personal, demanding that the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath be remembered, and challenging the official versions propagated under Franco. Ryan explores the importance and impact of the Law of Historical Memory which was passed in 2007, arguing both that it has been successful in raising consciousness about the experience of Republicans during the Civil War and the Franco era, and yet that much remains to be done for the fulfillment of its promises.

Continuing with the theme of memory, in chapter seven, Abigail Loxham examines a particular instance of this noughties remembering, looking at the traces of history in the present and how the ghosts of the past are represented in noughties Catalan documentary. The films by Carla Subirana and Albert Solé explore the effects of the collective amnesia or *ley-del-olvido* [law of forgetting] of the Spanish Transition through their own and their families’ personal stories. It is a legacy of the late twentieth century that has been resurrected in the noughties by the children of those damaged by forgetting. In Spain, just as with many Latin American countries, such as Argentina, the new millennium has been a time for reflection on the past and a recovery of a new reading of its traces on the present.

Continuing this intersection of the private and public act of remembering, and spanning the twentieth- and twenty-first-century noughties, Alison Sinclair focuses our attention on the story of one child prodigy, and what we can learn from the ways in which he is represented and re-represented by different people and in different times. Pepito Arriola, as Sinclair argues in chapter eight, was in some sense a “trial run” at parenting a prodigy for his aunt Aurora Rodríguez, who was to become the mother and murderess of the prodigy and sexual reformer Hildegarde. Competing versions of Pepito’s childhood reflect the twentieth-century noughties’ fascination with extreme phenomena such as prodigies and even the paranormal, perhaps in response to fears of decadence still lingering from the nineteenth century. A century later, at the anniversary of his birth, new stories about Pepito as a serious musician and composer reclaim him for Galicia and, in so doing, reflect the importance of cultural memory—in this case, what Sinclair calls “appropriations of excellence” (p. 157)—for the construction of national identities. We see in this section that significant relationships emerge between the noughties and previous
time periods: the decade becomes an opportunity to look back in order to look forward, as all three chapters explore.

There is a return to the future in our final section, where it is both an opportunity for change and can work as a site for present-day anxieties. Our third section foregrounds “New—and not so New—Beginnings”, reflecting again the contrast between hopes for progress and wearisome repetitions. In chapter nine, Lesley Twomey argues that the eschatological perspective of a remade world casts a new light on misogynist discourse in Jaume Roig’s fifteenth-century Espill. This chapter firstly traces the misogynistic perspective undoubtedly present in the text, and the traditional good-evil dualism between the Virgin Mary and bad mothers (that is, all other mothers). But Twomey goes on to argue that there is a shift in perspective in Roig’s re-telling of Biblical parables towards the end of the text, focusing the narrator’s and our attention on the possibility of salvation at the final judgement. Women can indeed be saved in the new eternal order, and it is the narrator’s quest for a wife, not the wives themselves, which is leading him away from God. As Roig looks towards apparent apocalypse at a plague-ridden end of century, he focuses the reader on the new dawn of eternal redemption.

In chapter ten, Maria Manuel Lisboa also explores the new shape of the world following apocalypse, this time in twentieth-century incarnations. José Saramago’s Ensaio sobre a Cegueira [Blindness] (1995) is compared with works by John Wyndham and H.G. Wells, highlighting the way in which an apparent new order may in fact reflect the bad old days. Placing these chronologically separated texts in the context of recent millenarian preoccupations, this chapter explores the ways in which literal blindness and/or disease also function symbolically to lay bare disturbing patterns of power and violence. Hope for a utopian future turns out to share unsettling patterns with post-apocalyptic dystopias.

Finally, in chapter eleven, Margaret Clarke ends on a more optimistic note as she considers the search for new beginnings in Brazil in the context of the growth of the internet. Brazil is a nation that has experienced recent economic growth all the while having a large population living in poverty. As an entirely new phenomenon whose use and access is still being worked through, the internet was introduced in Brazil as recently as 1996. Conscious of the importance of access to technologies which have become indispensible in international business, creativity and communication, digital inclusion has been prioritised by the government. One of the ways those involved are attempting to cross the digital divide is through recycling, knowledge sharing and Open Source Software. Clarke explores how this is being carried out through
governmental schemes, non-governmental organisations and the involvement of other social actors. The twenty-first century has been the dawn of a new era with the adoption of new technology going global. Clarke looks behind the often utopian discourse surrounding this new form of communication to see the practicalities of its dissemination amongst impoverished members of society. Twomey, Lisboa and Clarke are thus all considering both real and imagined futures from a noughties perspective.

**Conclusion**

The noughties is not a decade that has been weighed down with a qualified nomenclature. Therefore, we could encourage our contributors to analyse it with fresh eyes and without critical, cultural or historical frameworks that would limit their readings. Consider other decades whose adjectival complements determine meaning, such as the “swinging” or “radical” sixties, the “roaring” twenties, or the “greedy” eighties. All of these labels can be limiting and over-simplify, as well as ignore geographical (and other) differences. Not yet re-packaged and commoditised, the noughties can still be considered as a coincidence of events, moods, ideas, and creativity by the authors from a multiplicity of perspectives.

In addition, the very name noughties suggests an absence, a lack of any numbering system to fully classify it. A nought literally means nothing, yet its significance is truly redolent, as our contributors have explored. It is the gap that has been ignored, which further underscores its liminality. The noughties are a chronological border territory, similar to Mary Louise Pratt’s cultural and linguistic “contact zone”, which is “an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 1993, 7). In this volume, we are interested in the temporal copresences, across different geographical terrains with linguistic and historical commonalities, and what we are confronted with by this inbetween-ness. Between the end of the nineties and the nascent century there are ten years of a temporal no-(wo)man’s-land, which we are keen to map and explore.

The study of periods is more often the stuff of canonical and disciplinary evolution. For example, due to the extraordinary flourishing of creativity in Spain in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, it has been ascribed the moniker of Golden Age which has its attendant academic field. The Golden Age, like many other periods examined, is born of a coincidence of excellence which is then rendered meaningful retrospectively. Without contesting the validity of this approach, we
instead aim to pick out a decade and consider its significance across a range of geographic and disciplinary areas. We have picked a defined period and its repetition over the centuries and sought to examine what is of particular interest during this time. This is not entirely at random. Aside from coinciding with the decade in which WiSPS was born, it is also one which deserves attention. It is variously overshadowed by *fin de siècle* ennui, squabbles over actual fixed beginning or end dates (is 2000 the end of an old century or the start of a new one?), and the absence of a well-established moniker. This lacuna is a gap which has proven worthy of study. The resultant volume has brought together apparently disparate authors, topics and geographical locations and revealed fascinating coincidences and divergences.

**Works Cited**


PART I

FEMINIST NOUGHTIES?
CHAPTER ONE

THE “NOUGHTY” NUDE: NAKED WOMEN IN SPANISH CINEMA OF THE NOUGHTIES

MARÍA DONAPETRY

The female nude has been employed in Spanish film of the noughties as an unproblematic symbol of liberalism in Spanish film, which is a symptom of how little has changed in contemporary Spanish cinema since the Transition (1973-1982). This chapter considers four films from the noughties which raise issues regarding the representation of the female nude. *Los años desnudos* [The Naked Years] (Dunia Ayaso y Félix Sabroso, 2008) provides a contemporary starting point for reconsidering the aesthetics of the *destape* era (1970s) that persists insidiously in Vicente Aranda’s *Juana la Loca* [Joan the Mad] (2001). By contrast, *Te doy mis ojos* [I Give You My Eyes] (Icíar Bollaín, 2003) and *Elegy* (Isabel Coixet, 2008) offer more enlightened alternatives to the prurient treatment of the female nude carried over into the noughties by such directors as Aranda. Bollaín and Coixet contest the kind of titillation associated with the *destape* aesthetics by, in one case, stigmatising the male who degrades the female body; and, in the other, by advocating a woman’s choice over her nudity. The aim of my analysis is to explore the area where aesthetics and ethics overlap with regard to the representation of women’s bodies on film.

In order to evaluate what is good and/or just, Paul Ricoeur suggests, we have no choice but to identify and distinguish ourselves and others as individuals, and to go from the moment “where the thinking subject claims to master meaning, to mutual recognition, where the subject places him or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity” (2005, 25). This idea is linked to those of philosophers who write about the consciousness
of the individual, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s reflection on the individual’s identity (Cavallaro 1998, 116), and Fernando Savater’s consideration of the humanity of the subject (1995, 27). Here, I want to explore the representation of female nudes in films made in the noughties in Spain, and determine from a feminist perspective how we can identify, acknowledge and distinguish the individuals we see on screen and the ethical meaning those images may encapsulate. I examine how these women become individuated subjects and not mere repetitions of a type.

What compels me to make an incursion into such a wide and complex field, in which ethics and aesthetics meet (and sometimes miss each other completely) is my will to recognise, identify, or identify with the representations of naked women on screen, and look for a meaning, if at all possible, that I may relate to as a woman, not only in the sense of understanding what I see on screen but also in the sense of exploring what I see as acceptable or degrading. In other words: I would like to discern the politics of the discourse and the images of female nudity in noughties cinema in Spain.

The female nude has been a consistent subject in art of all periods, most often as a spectacle which produces aesthetic pleasure in the observer. Both the technical abilities and the sensitivity of the artist as well as the capacity for judgement of the observer legitimise these representations. Nudity in figurative art is controlled and contained by the artist, the medium and the observers. Theoretically at least, painting a naked woman and observing the painting are not furtive acts. However, as John Berger has explained in *Ways of Seeing*, the legitimacy of this practice involves the objectification of the naked body: “The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object” (2008, 48). Cinema partakes of this kind of control and legitimacy. And yet, the realism conveyed by the movement of images, the sound and the actresses (live bodies) in cinema transforms the female nude into something different from that of a painting, a sculpture or a photograph. The relationship between spectators and a female nude on screen is socially and culturally contextualised in a different way to that of the still image, among other things because the film theatre (although it is a public space) fosters an illusion of intimacy impossible to replicate in a museum or in any open and illuminated space.

When the nude that appears on screen is or is supposed to be erotic, we enter into the murky area of unclear borders between what is artistic and what is pornographic (or pseudo-pornographic) or, as Lynda Nead puts it, “[between] pure and impure desire” (Nead 1992, 104). Morality comes into play as one of the key determinants as to whether a specific work is art or not. The fact that the intention of certain images is simply to
sexually arouse the observer—to awaken “impure” desires in him or her, Nead seems to be saying—automatically disqualifies those images as art.

I do not completely agree with this binary as a method of distinguishing and recognising a work as art; even less so with regard to the sexual arousal of the observer/spectator, be it a woman or a man. The spectator’s reaction, no matter how pure or impure his or her desires may be, does not determine the artistic quality of a work. No artist can predict or control the reaction of the observer. In fact, within Catholic tradition, there are several cases of paintings depicting “sinful” scenes intended to elicit rejection on the part of the observer, or depictions of celestial ecstasy intended to inspire the purest of thoughts, and in both cases the resultant reaction can be the opposite to the one intended. Bernini’s sculpture of St Teresa in ecstasy, Hieronymus Bosch’s The Garden of Earthly Delights or many of the representations of Saint Sebastian’s martyrdom are cases in point.

An interesting phenomenon regarding female nudes in Spanish film was the barely disguised pornographic production of the mid to late 70s called the cinema of the destape. These films had a transparent politics which responded to the recent disappearance of censorship (till then in the hands of the Francoist government and the Catholic Church), and, in addition, pandered to the perceived avid appetite of a male audience for “sinful” images. The fact that these films were sanctioned by a democratic government gave both filmmakers and audiences a sense of legitimacy. A cursory look at any film (and the promotional materials) of that period featuring such actresses as Nadiuska, Agatha Lys, María José Cantudo or the Estrada sisters, for instance, makes crystal clear the discursive intentions of this subgenre.

Twenty years after the destape boom, Dunia Ayaso and Félix Sabroso in their joint venture Los años desnudos (2008), reflect critically and in depth on the implications of the legacy of the cinema of the destape. Since this film was made barely two years ago, I believe the directors intend to make clear that even now the destape mentality is still alive and well, and that there is a pressing need to “uncover” and critique it. The first scene of Los años desnudos shows starkly the dehumanising experience of being naked in a casting session for an actress: Sandra, played by Candela Peña (and by extension any actress in those circumstances) struggles to be recognised and acknowledged as a person. While completely naked and obviously uncomfortable, she asks the casting crew if they would like to hear her deliver part of a monologue from García Lorca’s Doña Rosita la soltera [Doña Rosita the Spinster]. Her objectification is challenged by her demand to be seen beyond her physicality; she wants to show them she is
Naked Women in Spanish Cinema of the Noughties

capable of acting and not just of showing her body. The members of the crew, whom we hardly see, although obviously not interested, accept the offer and she starts reciting her monologue:

¿Y qué os voy a decir? Hay cosas que no se pueden decir porque no hay palabras para decirlas; y si las hubiera, nadie entendería su significado. Me entendéis si pido pan y agua y hasta un beso, pero nunca me podríais ni entender ni quitar esta mano oscura que no sé si me hiela o me abrasa el corazón cada vez que me quedo sola. (...) Sería el cuento de nunca acabar. Yo sé que los ojos los tendré siempre jóvenes, y sé que la espalda se me irá curvando cada día. Después de todo, lo que me ha pasado le ha pasado a mil mujeres. (...) No me agrada que me miréis así. Me molestan esas miradas de perros fieles. Esas miradas de lástima que me perturban y me indignan. (García Lorca 1935, Act 3)

[And what can I tell you? There are things that can’t be said because there are no words to say them; and if there were, nobody would get their meaning. You understand me when I ask for bread or water, even for a kiss, but you could never understand or take away this dark hand that freezes or burns my heart, I don’t know which, every time I am alone. (...) It would be the neverending story. I know that I will always have young eyes, and I know that my back will become arched more each day. After all, what has happened to me has happened to a thousand women. (...) I don’t like the way you look at me. Those faithful dogs’ looks bother me. Those looks of pity that disturb and outrage me.]

The monologue has obvious resonances in this scene with the awareness of being looked at and judged. As she speaks, the camera goes from a wide shot where we see the crew’s point of view to a close-up of Sandra’s face. When she finishes, the camera zooms out to take in the crew’s point of view. The delivery of the soliloquy in such an adverse setting, with the group of men as diegetic spectators, could easily stand as a manifesto for the actresses who have been undressed in film for no other purpose but the erotic titillation of male spectators. Since this titillation depends on the imaginary availability of the naked female body and the imaginary control by the spectator and his power to degrade her, Donã Rosita’s complaint “I don’t like the way you look at me” expresses the anger and the strength of the subject who has been literally divested of her humanity, of her individuality, but who states that the relationship between her and the crew is that of equals. If any kind of identification could take place between the extra-diegetic audience and the crew as a result of visual alignment, the statement would become an indictment difficult to ignore. The last words in the scene are Sandra’s. While she picks up her clothes, she asks the crew who is going to pay for her taxi fare since “esto está a tomar po’
culo” [this (place) is in bumfuck]. We understand she means that the studio, or wherever they are doing the audition, is really far from the city centre; we also understand, though, the whole situation for her lacks any personal or vital reference. The location and the experience have little to do with the “factory of dreams” cinema is supposed to be for her.

The timeliness of Los años desnudos becomes particularly apparent against the backdrop of a proliferation of titillating female nudes in films made in the early noughties which sought to use them as the materialisation of all kinds of liberation for Spanish society and, in particular, for women. If during the Transition (1975-1982) women’s representation on film went from subjugation to availability well within the most inflexible patterns of patriarchal thought, in the noughties there are film directors who conflate the female nude with women’s freedom while objectifying the female characters. Just when we thought we were well beyond the knee-jerk reactions of the immediate post-Francoist period we find that a certain cinema d’auteur, instead of breaking the moulds in an avant-garde fashion, rehashes an insidious filmic discourse that reverts back both to popular predecessors of the destape and to the traditions of an already consolidated and canonised art. Susan Hayward explains the distinction between avant-garde and popular art thus:

Mainstream art recodifies the dominant praxis—makes anew what is already there. In this respect it is heavily dependent on its immediate predecessor or else it harks back to earlier art forms…It serves to preserve the dominant ideology… Conversely, avant-garde, as its name suggests, is art before its time—art looking forward not backwards… attempting to break terrain with its implicit subversion of the old codes and conventions. (2005, 203)

There are many directors associated with the former discourse: Bigas Luna, Julio Medem and Vicente Aranda, amongst others, and all of them considered auteurs within the Spanish film industry and who have persistently represented women as objects to be looked at for the exclusive pleasure of the male gaze. For my purposes here, though, I will examine Aranda’s film Juana la Loca [Joan the Mad] (2001) because it exemplifies in more obvious ways than others the insidiousness I am talking about.

When Juana la Loca was released, many critics described the film in terms of its authenticity and Aranda’s ability to portray passion. Mateo Sancho Cardiel, for instance, summarises the essence of the film and its main protagonist thus:
¿Passión? ¿Locura? ¿Obsesión? There is no doubt that Juana, as described by the film, was a person who was committed to authenticity; in an era when feelings were drowned under heavy velvet gowns, she was eager to give herself completely, to humiliate herself, to forgive everything for love. Tenacious, visceral, she bears the burden of a kingdom without any preparation or interest, and lives to give her husband Felipe el Hermoso pleasure. A marriage that begins as a clash of primary impulses, animal sex, soon will become a searing passion, emotional and thrilling. It may be madness, but there is no doubt that it carries the spectator along, submerging him in a continuous emotional catharsis until it leaves him breathless, with an overwhelming feeling released only through furious applause at the end of the showing.

In Juana la Loca, Aranda’s version of Manuel Tamayo y Baus’s theatre play (1885), Juana’s madness is explained in terms of a particularly feminine, relentless and uncontrollable sexual desire. That lack of control, according to Aranda, is what the court cannot understand and the reason why they declare her unfit to rule. Juana’s character suggests a return to nineteenth-century theories about hysteria (i.e. the lack of control of the female sexual organs as the principal cause for madness in women) (see, for example, Showalter 1987). If what Aranda wanted to portray was a sexually “liberated” woman, misunderstood by her peers and ahead of her time, his film not only falls short in relation to giving Juana a modicum of subjectivity, but it also locks her tightly within a patriarchal straight-jacket. Aranda, though, is not satisfied with rehashing this particular character from Tamayo y Baus’s play, and delights his audience with another sui generis recreation of a second female character, the Moor Aixa, who excites, beyond endurance, the libido of Juana’s husband Prince Felipe el Hermoso (Phillip the Handsome), draws the jealousy of the queen and the voyeurism of male spectators. Once again, we are witness
to the “liberation” of a female character through her conversion into a tempting, seductive and dark body. The racialisation of her character is a matter that I do not have space to fully explore here, but that places Aixa in the role of other. This female body is not limited to insinuating an unrestricted sexuality, it also leads the unwary Prince to an abyss of sinful liaisons brought about by the exotic Satanism the beautiful Moorish woman practises. The ultra-fetishised Aixa embodies the image of woman defined by Freud as a dark continent.

In the cases of both Juana and Aíxa, what we understand is that Aranda identifies the independent woman with erotic excess. One of the problems with these erotic representations is that they are all visualised from an exclusively masculine point of view and for the voyeuristic satisfaction of the spectators. In spite of it all, I do not think these are motives to censor this or any other film by Aranda. I do think, though, that his representations of the female nude undermine in a fundamental way the possible intentions he might have had of making the historical episodes in the film more “modern” and more “authentic”. If Aranda’s idea of updating Tamayo y Baus’s play is to include more naked bodies and more eroticism, it appears that Aranda has merely internalised the destape mode of thinking. That is, that showing more female nudes somehow guarantees freedom for both him as a director and for the female characters because they come across as uninhibited, and, in turn, for the audience, who can legitimately enjoy what is shown as expressions of that freedom. One could object at my excessive moral qualms. Aranda himself, though, insists on the moral aspects of the story he is telling: it is clear throughout the film that the declaration of unfitness of the Queen is subject to all sorts of immoral manipulations by King Ferdinand and Prince Felipe, who appear as men without scruples ready to victimise their daughter and wife, respectively, in order to establish or expand their power. If I kept a distance or just overlooked these moral concerns and focused exclusively on the formal aspects of the film, I would be unable to properly critique the film, I would overlook the film itself.7

Not all directors treat the female nude in such a problematic manner, nor are all incapable of ridding themselves of the ethics and aesthetics of the destape. Although not exclusively, women directors seem to take issue precisely with the treatment of the naked female body and have implicitly challenged the destape legacy.8 Icíar Bollaín in Te doy mis ojos (2003) and Isabel Coixet in Elegy (2008) are but two examples of the kind of awareness film directors can have of what showing a female nude on screen may mean aesthetically and ethically. Bollaín’s film especially, because of its direct concern with domestic violence (“gender violence” or
“violence against women” tout court, offers a scene which can be extrapolated to the general scope of this essay. At the beginning of the scene, Pilar, the battered wife and protagonist, is getting ready to go to Madrid for a job interview. When her friends come to pick her up, her husband—Antonio—gets upset because she is occupying her time in something unrelated to him, and starts tearing her art books apart. As his anger grows, he directs all sorts of abuse at her and proceeds to tear off her clothes until she is practically naked. While she tries to defend herself and keep her clothes on, Antonio pushes her to the balcony of the house so anybody in the street can see her naked. He eventually brings her back to the room and Pilar, paralysed by the horror of the ordeal and fear of him, wets herself. This physical loss of control reduces her to an infantile state of disempowerment. In this episode, Antonio does not undress Pilar in order to get sexual satisfaction but in order to degrade her even further. He undresses her as an act of personal violence and magnifies this act by dragging her to the balcony and exposing her nakedness in public. As spectators we understand that Antonio’s intention to humiliate and dehumanise Pilar dehumanises him. While Aranda films women’s bodies as objects for the consumption of an intra and extra-diegetic voyeur, the obviously violent and forced undressing of Pilar, her terror, and the dehumanisation of the perpetrator (Antonio) leave little or no room at all for any kind of erotic thrill.

In this scene Bollaín confronts how the female nude has been represented on film and in figurative art from a feminine and a feminist perspective. Pilar works in a museum and her job, among other things, involves explaining well-known paintings with female nudes: Titian’s Danae, Ruben’s Orpheus and Eurydice and The Three Graces. Pilar’s understanding of these nudes is definitely different from that of her husband’s. For Antonio the female nude is degrading and susceptible to degradation. Pilar, on the other hand, sees them as an acknowledgement of women’s beauty, the kind of acknowledgement she would like to receive. Bollaín, through the dramatisation of Pilar’s descriptions of the nudes, enacts the theme we are interested in here—the female nude—also in a dramatic way, i.e. in a double ekphrasis, and opts for a woman’s position before that nude: a position which takes into account a woman’s perspective when she knows she is being observed naked. This position, therefore, qualifies the politics of her filmic discourse as something in which the subject is interested and has an investment. As Arthur Danto puts it, “as far as showing the subject naked, the morality of that is altogether how the subject feels about [her]self as seen that way”
(Levinson 1998, 22). In *Te doy mis ojos* Bollaín is shedding the *destape* and exploring the female nude in a new and challenging way.

There is a single scene in *Elegy*, directed by Isabel Coixet, in which the protagonist bares her breasts to the camera. Consuela Castillo (Penélope Cruz) has had an intense affair with David Kepesh (Ben Kingsley) but, after he has shown his inability to integrate into her social sphere, she disappears for a while. One day she goes to see him. She explains that her estrangement had also to do with the fact that she has breast cancer and that she will soon have a mastectomy. Consuela wants David to photograph her with her breasts bare, that part of her body that stands for all the sexual pleasure and the emotional bond they had while they were lovers. In this sequence Coixet’s camera focuses on Consuela’s expression, and then on David’s reaction at the news. Although her body has not been mutilated yet, the sense of loss and threat for both is what dominates the scene. In an essay about Coixet’s film *La vida secreta de las palabras* [The Secret Life of Words] (2005), John Berger explains the kind of feeling I am referring to when talking about a scene in which the female protagonist also bares her breasts: “Tampoco se rinde en ella (*La vida secreta de las palabras*) culto alguno al dolor. Sencillamente se ofrece una visión de cómo a veces el sufrimiento conduce a una salvación compartida, que nunca es simple, que nunca es mera palabrería. Antigua. Algo que suelen descubrir quienes no tienen poder” (Andreu 2008, 95-6). [This film (*The Secret Life of Words*) does not pay homage to pain. The film simply offers a vision of how sometimes suffering is the means to a shared redemption, which is never simple, which is never just empty words. Timeless. Something that is usually discovered by the powerless].

After Consuela explains her motivations, David gets a camera and she poses for him, removing her top very slowly until her breasts are bare; then she looks at David looking at her. The film camera follows both characters’ gaze forcing the spectator to align him or herself alternately with David and with Consuela, and eventually with both. They are sharing the pain as they shared the pleasure because in that sharing the humanity of both characters is at stake. This particular scene diverges crucially from the text on which it is based, Philip Roth’s novel *The Dying Animal*. In the latter, David cannot help being aroused at the sight of Consuela’s breasts. Coixet makes a strong point regarding this female nude: the naked body of a woman on screen is not there simply to give voyeuristic pleasure either to a diegetic male character or to the audience: there are other interpretative possibilities. Ignacio Vidal-Foch declares:

> Coixet es director de cine, no juez sentado en el trono de la moral; y en vez de dictar sentencias condenatorias o absolutorias, lo que hace es
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representar con elocuencia magistral la pavorosa carnalidad de Kingsley: esa calva con sus arrugas y ese labio superior fino como hoja de afeitar, por debajo de la cual salen las palabras “Estoy aquí…” o “Ecce Homo”. (Andreu 2008, 12)

[Coixet is a film director, not a judge sitting on the moral throne; instead of pronouncing sentences of approval or condemnation, what she does is to represent with magnificent eloquence Kingsley’s terrifying carnality: that bald head with wrinkles and that upper lip as thin as a razor blade, beneath which the words “I am here…” or “Ecce homo” come out.]

I would add that David’s carnality/vulnerability is paralleled by Consuela’s. David’s vulnerability has to do with old age; Consuela’s with the threat of cancer, and both face the proximity of death. In general, I agree with Vidal-Foch: Coixet is definitely not a moral judge; but she is interested in the moral plight of her characters and lets the audience observe, understand, recognise and find (or not) the ethical value of the story she is telling and how she is telling it. David’s holding a camera and taking a picture of Consuela at her behest reminds us that the decision to undress and to be looked at is all hers, and that she expects recognition, not objectification. Of course, there may be spectators whose reaction to this scene would not be very different from the one they would have watching an erotic or pornographic film. That, as I pointed out before, is not controllable by the director, no matter how clear and careful his or her intentions are.

In his Invitación a la ética, Fernando Savater explains that

para la voluntad moral, no todo vale. En la vida—como en cualquier juego o en cualquier arte—hay cosas que no vale hacer, mientras que otras jugadas son excepcionalmente valiosas. Lo que no vale es lo que no nos vale; aquello que nos hace perder, lo que debilita nuestro juego o nos excluye de él. (1995, 63)

[For the moral will, not everything goes. In life—as in any game or any art—there are things that are not acceptable, while other ways of playing are exceptionally valuable. What is not acceptable is what is not good for us; what makes us lose, what weakens our game or excludes us.]

As we have seen, there are many female nudes in cinema that cheat us, that are on screen with the sole purpose of corroborating that a woman’s image exists as the object of pleasure for men. Those who make films of this kind count on the complicity of an audience which is either fully satisfied with what they see and consider it good, and/or perceives the images as “natural” and, therefore, consider them absolutely legitimate. Of
course, such audiences do not question either the process by which the images are considered natural nor the implications of this naturalisation. On the other hand, as is the case in Te doy mis ojos, there are films which treat the female nude with the kind of realism in characters and situations that, as Gregory Currie suggests, “enabl[es] the sort of imaginative exercise that broadens rather than constricts our understanding of human possibilities of thought, feeling, and action” (Levinson 1998, 13).

The most basic principle of humanity according to Savater is that “el yo necesita, para ser plenamente yo, verse confirmado—esto es, reconocido—por otro yo” (1995, 27). [The I needs, in order to be I fully, to see itself confirmed—that is, recognised—by another I]. Feminism in its broadest sense works so that this principle is considered as valid for men as for women. The treatment of the female nude in cinema is one of many fields in which aesthetic reasons can function as “artistic” alibis for denying women that recognition. Ethics and aesthetics do not necessarily have to go hand in hand, no matter how much Ludwig Wittgenstein insists on identifying one with the other (1961, 6421). The conjunction of formal beauty with moral degradation is a possibility in art, but not at its best. In any case, we should be aware of that conjunction when it happens. There is arguably no point in even considering the possibility of imposing a certain “moral” code on the artist or the work of art since ethics has to do with what we want to be, what we aspire to be in order to become more human. “Art”, says Elisabeth Schellekens, “is a means of expression—be it of emotions, political ideas or moral belief systems—and not a means of coercion” (2007, 90). However, every work of art, every film, has rules of engagement with its subject and with the audience. In the case of the female nude, because it affects women in the way we are recognised and identified as subjects through our naked bodies, those rules establish certain “condiciones de humanidad sin las cuales no sere[mos] admitid[as] como objeto[s] infinito[s] o se [nos] otorgará sólo el reconocimiento cruel de la violencia” (Savater 1995, 31) [conditions of humanity without which [we] will not be accepted as infinite object[s] or we will be given only the cruel recognition of violence].

Works Cited