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The Rhythms of Rage: From Solitude to Solidarity

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Rage possesses a formidable ability to catalyze revolutions, spur transformative change, and magnify voices. Yet, its expression is not uniformly accessible to all. Rage can manifest as raw, rebellious, and empowering, or become ensnared by societal norms and expectations. Focusing on women represented in film and TV shows from around the world, this video essay traverses over 500 clips, unveiling the diverse cadences of rage—from silent and sterile echoes to resounding, potent crescendos, from solitude to solidarity.

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Creator's Statement

"Rhythm goes far beyond words.
A vision, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind,
long before words exist to define it." (Virginia Woolf)

The rhythms of rage: from solitude to solidarity

Rage moves through history in rhythms—at times erupting in upheaval, at others simmering beneath the surface, waiting for the moment to break through. Rage can be a force for justice, driving revolutions and collective resistance, but it can also serve personal interests, reinforce oppression, and consolidate power. Not everyone is permitted to move to its beat, as not all expressions of rage are granted the same legitimacy. While some people are allowed to channel their anger into power and influence, others are silenced, discredited, or punished for expressing it. The rhythms of rage are shaped not only by emotion but by the structures of power that determine who may express anger and who must repress it. Uneven and contested, these rhythms expose the racialized, gendered, and class-based regimes that regulate whose anger is legitimized as righteous dissent and whose is dismissed as dangerous, irrational, or transgressive.

The video essay "The Rhythms of Rage: From Solitude to Solidarity" assembles over 500 clips from films and TV series worldwide, mapping the rhythms of women's rage—from solitude to solidarity, from silence to an erupting chorus, from painful containment to powerful release. Originally produced for the SCMS 2024 roundtable "Visualizing Rage through the Video Essay: Intersectional Explorations of Women's Anger in Contemporary Media," this work builds upon a broader intellectual

conversation: a research initiative funded by an R+I grant from Spain's Ministry of Science and Innovation, "The Mediatization of Women's Rage." The project culminated in several publications, including a special issue of *Teknokultura* (21.1), *Con derecho a la rabia: Subjetividad y activismo*, which I co-edited with Diana Fernández Romero in 2024. This issue was made possible by the brilliant contributions of both written and videographic scholarship, as well as the invaluable and invisible labor of peer reviewers, to whom I extend my deepest gratitude.

Why rage? My research trajectory has long been concerned with representations of gender-based violence in film and media. Over time though, my focus shifted: from representations of violence inflicted upon women, I became increasingly more interested in their resistance, from female victimhood to survival and agency. Rage, I came to understand, is crucial—a vehicle for existence, a force that unsettles power structures. More than forty years ago, Audre Lorde, in *The Uses of Anger* (1983), argued that rage is transformative. And yet, not all anger is recognized or legitimized in the same way (Gesse 2020; Kay 2019). White men's rage is often framed as strength, assertiveness, even patriotism. Black men's rage is perceived as dangerous. A child's rage—especially that of a Black child—is swiftly punished and suppressed. And women's rage? It is ridiculed, pathologized, deemed irrational. As Soraya Chemaly (2019) observes, "Anger in women is still considered a sign of mental or hormonal imbalance, whereas in men it is perceived as "normal" and associated with masculine control, leadership, authority, and competence." Lorde concludes her essay by welcoming all women "beyond objectification and beyond guilt" to meet "with what we have, our power to envision and reconstruct, anger by painful anger, stone upon heavy stone, a future of pollinating difference and the earth to support our choices" (133). My video essay is inspired by this same spirit of female solidarity.

As women's anger becomes increasingly visible in contemporary visual culture (Boyce, 2019) videographic criticism provides a powerful means of engaging with its complexities. What media histories do images of rage invoke, challenge, or attempt to rewrite? How do race, gender, and age shape the visibility and reception of anger? Or, following Hamid Naficy (2012), can the video essay itself serve as a space for indignation—an embodied practice of rage? If, as Catherine Grant (2014) has famously argued, the video essay is "material thinking," can we conceive of videographic practice as "material raging?"

The meaning of the form: accumulation and gridding

My initial idea was to create a supercut of angry women—an approach I soon abandoned after recognizing the prevalence of YouTube compilations of "women

losing it," where anger is often stripped of context and rendered trivial. I did not want to reproduce the kind of fannish visual illustration that Allison de Fren critiques (2020), in which female rage is consumed as spectacle rather than acknowledged as a force. Instead, I wanted this video essay to do something different: to give form to the power of anger, shaping feeling through the rhythm of images and sound.

While developing the project, Ariel Avissar introduced me to Matt Payne's video essay *Who Ever Heard?* (2020) and Alan O'Leary's analysis of its underlying constraint—a concept that Avissar would later expand upon in his parametric summer series (2024). Payne's method hinges on accumulation and subtraction, layering clips in a loop and then systematically replacing and removing them. I was immediately drawn to the musicality and rhythm of this structure, but I ultimately sought a different approach—one that resisted subtraction. Rather than a form that builds only to dismantle, I wanted a logic of persistence and amplification. My form had to carry feminist meaning. Instead of a rhythm that culminates in erasure, I embraced a rhythm of intensification and progression: from whispers to screams, from stridency to chants, from solitude to solidarity. Subtraction had no place in this trajectory. At the same time, I sought to give form to Virginia Woolf's assertion, which serves as the epigraph for this statement: "Rhythm goes far beyond words. A vision, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before words exist to define it" (1926). The rhythms of this video essay do not merely accompany meaning; they generate it, crafting an embodied, affective experience that both precedes and exceeds verbal articulation. The visual dynamics shift from an inward spiral to an outward explosion, mirroring the expanding force of rage.

Following a visual, sonic, and emotional progression, the structure of "The Rhythms of Rage" unfolds across five interwoven layers. The multiscreen composition is organized along a grid, with shifting lines and color transitions—from white to red to purple—marking the movement from suppression to feminist solidarity. The grid, a recurring motif in my videographic work, operates as both structure and rupture, containment and release. Just as social constraints discipline women's rage, grids discipline images. Yet, grids can also fracture, loosen, or generate new connections, functioning simultaneously as restriction and as a network of possibilities—a tension that underpins this project. Each layer is structured around loops, with each articulating an expression of rage through a distinct theoretical lens. The first loop, "Silence and Solitude," follows Soraya Chemaly's assertion that "we learn to contain ourselves. Anger is usually about saying 'no' in a world where women are conditioned to say almost anything but 'no.' [...] Throwing plates is an example of a coping mechanism, but it is not an effective or healthy way to express anger" (2018). The second loop,

"Affective Injustice," is informed by Amia Srinivasan's concept of "affective injustice" (2018), whereby victims of oppression suffer a form of unrecognized harm by having to choose between expressing justified anger or acting prudently. The third loop, "Women Shouting," engages directly—through its very title—with Alan O'Leary's "Men Shouting" (2023), while also drawing from Sara Ahmed's notion of "Snap!" (2016, 2020). The fourth loop, "Revenge Narratives," explores role reversals. As Jack Halberstam argues, violence enacted by women "does not replicate the terms of an equation. Female violence transforms the symbolic function of the feminine" (1993). Finally, in the last movement of the video essay, the rhythm accelerates. The accumulation intensifies, but the loop is broken—images progress in a linear sequence. At this stage, feminist rage is no longer an individual act of defiance; it no longer needs to spiral. It has become collective power.

Rage is not merely an outburst: it is a language, a movement, a way of knowing and resisting. From suppressed whispers to defiant shouts, "The Rhythms of Rage" explores how cinema and television construct, constrain, and unleash women's anger. In doing so, it asks: can the video essay be more than an analysis of rage? Can it embody the very energy it seeks to understand?

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Biography

Barbara Zecchi (PhD, University of California Los Angeles) is Professor and Director of the Film Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. With a focus on feminist film theory, women filmmakers, adaptation theory, aging studies, and videographic criticism, Zecchi has lectured widely in North America, Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Her work has been published, in both print and video forms, in journals such as *[in]Transition*, *16:9*, *Film Quarterly*, *Utopía*, *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, *MLN*, *Feminist Media Histories*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies, NECSUS*, *Akademisk Kvarter*, *Tecmerin*, and *Investigaciones Feministas*, among others. She is the author of the monographic books *Desenfocadas* (*Women out of focus,* 2014; named one of the most influential books of the decade by the Spanish daily journal *El Diario*) and *La pantalla sexuada* (*The Gendered Screen*, 2015) and editor or coeditor of eight additional volumes, including *Tecnologías de la edad (Technologies of Age,* 2023*)*, *Envejecimientos y cines ibéricos* (*Aging and Iberian Cinemas*, 2021), and *Gender-Based Violence in Latin American and Iberian Cinemas* (2020). Zecchi serves as director of the *Gynocine Project*, an open access database on women in cinema she launched in 2011, and co-director of the *cinAGEnder* research network she cofounded in 2016. She served on the jury of international film festivals, such as MicGénero in Mexico, and Cine del Sur in Spain, she founded the UMass Catalan Film Festival and directs the Massachusetts Multicultural Film Festival. In 2017, she was elected Associate Member of The Film Academy of Spain (Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España). Zecchi was trained

in videographic criticism at the Middlebury College VideoCamp in 2019, and since then she has been a prolific producer of video essays displaying a particular interest in the form for her feminist interventions and the use of an accented voiceover. She currently holds an editorial position at *[in]Transition*, and her work has appeared in the *Sight and Sound* "Best Video Essay" lists since 2021. You can see her videographic works here: https://vimeo.com/barbarazecchi.

Review by Catherine Grant, Aarhus University

Barbara Zecchi's "The Rhythms of Rage: From Solitude to Solidarity" is a supremely powerful and comprehensive videographic exploration of women's anger in global screen media. From cinematic depictions of isolated, internalised and externalised rageful expression, through to documentary and broadcast news recordings of public and collective instances of feminist fury, by rhythmically and spatially ordering its audiovisual excerpts in a cumulative—ever unfolding-enfolding—sonic and visual array, "The Rhythms of Rage" also succeeds in evoking and enacting feminist solidarity through its form, offering a highly compelling example of how elaborate rhythm and multiscreen composition can be both medium and message.

The opening of Zecchi's magisterial video essay is framed by a brilliantly chosen epigraph consisting of two separate excerpts from "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," Audre Lorde's 1981 keynote address to a U.S. National Women's Studies Association Conference. The first quotation declares that "Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being." The next sentence in Lorde's keynote, while not cited by Zecchi, is equally consonant with the intention fuelling the video essayist's work (and especially with her stated strategy of *resisting subtraction* in her work of cumulative collage). It reads: "Focused with precision [anger] can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change."

Absolute precision is one of the most significant weapons in Zecchi's virtuosic videographic armoury. In this case, her supremely knowledgeable and apposite selection of representative and intrinsically eloquent sounds and images, their ingenious ordering, juxtaposition and repetition, their unerring visual and sonic rhythmic timing—every component and technique used is right on the (energy-serving) nail. With singular imagination, skill and ambition as an audiovisual editor, artist *and* academic, Zecchi has succeeded in designing and building a lastingly effective interface that frames and enables a compelling and concentrated scholarly as well as affective experience of global film and media depictions of women's enraged responses to gender-based violence.

I have watched this work numerous times with live audiences and truly love the feeling that takes hold of the room when silence and relative stillness return at the conclusion of Zecchi's ever mobile and enveloping haptic montage, the moment when we begin to see lists of the sources of the extracts we have been watching. Aside from the sheer amount and scope of quoted-from media objects, the credits disclose—indeed re-perform in words—some of the rigorous selection and ordering principles that have been at work, underscoring that "The Rhythms of Rage" is one of the most throughgoing works of research-creation that we have yet witnessed in the field of academic videographic criticism. The elegantly informative and insightful maker's statement that Zecchi has written to accompany her submission of the video to *[in]Transition* is equally a model of written exegesis. This video has already been most deservedly acclaimed in critics' polls and internationally recognised through numerous festival selections. I am delighted that publication at *[in]Transition* will also clearly acknowledge, indeed help, to activate its immense scholarly (as well as feminist) value for numerous viewers now and in the future.

Review by Jennifer Proctor, University of Michigan-Dearborn

This year, a student of mine produced a video essay comparing male and female rage in cinema. The piece began with depictions of enraged men shouting, destroying household objects, knocking over tables, and generally threatening those around them. So many instances of male anger cut together at a rapid pace with tall and often muscular men looming over the targets of their fury, was viscerally terrifying. Yet, as the project transitioned to examples of female rage, the impotence of women lashing out was undeniable. While the men were able to exert control through their outbursts, the women were simply at their wit's ends, with no means available to affect change other than a desperate, feral cry into the void.

Barbara Zecchi's "The Rhythms of Rage: From Solitude to Solidarity," on the other hand, examines women's rage as a form of agency and power. She explores anger in its many subtle forms: shouting and breaking things, yes, but also the quiet rage that manifests as weeping, as exasperation, as simply placing an item on the table with a little more force.

She opens the piece with the chapter "Silence and Solitude" which establishes both the dialectical trajectory of rage the piece will follow and the grid she assumes as her formal vehicle for exploring the juxtapositions—and unities—of the women depicted. Powerfully, the use of spatial montage indeed emphasizes the solitude and separation of these characters suffering quietly in their distinct squares, unable to break out of the confines of their little boxes.

But this opening also introduces a rhythm that will pulse throughout the piece as new patterns of sound emerge and recede in the soundtrack, each based on the repetition of a looped clip. Music, of course, requires the coordination and synchronization of many players—solidarity, if you will—and the kind of percussion amplified throughout the piece has a rousing, marching quality. These women will not be sitting alone in silence for long.

As the grid recursively increases in complexity, so does the intensity of the rage. In many clips, the women are now expressing themselves to someone, even if the objects of their wrath remain offscreen. As the essay enters its final chapter, we see the grid dissolve and the boundaries confining these women give way to a unified screen presenting groups of women raging together. As the frame becomes whole, the women become one: the power of the collective is on full display. We see examples of coordinated anger, both fictional and real-world, unleashed strategically at the oppressive forces that would seek to tie these women down. Appropriately, the soundtrack concludes with the sounds of feet stomping—the dance troupe that doubles as an army marching into battle.

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