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**Tangents of Pain, cuerpos en carne viva: Disability, Disorder, and Reflection in **
**Insensibles, and La herida**

*No hay dolor, no hay dolor / ten a mano el rosario /
porque ya cayó el dictador / o eso dice la radio.*

*Vetusta Morla, El hombre del saco*

Abstract: My chapter focuses on two Spanish films that depict pain experiences alongside representations of disability: *Insensibles* (2012) directed by Juan Carlos Medina, and *La herida* (2013), directed by Fernando Franco. Examining the films' depictions of Borderline Personality Disorder and congenital analgesia, the chapter queries the psychosomatic and the Cartesian dualism that informs definitions of disability.

**Keywords:**

1 Introduction

In this chapter, where I examine two films, *Insensibles* (2012) and *La herida* (2013), my focus is on the representations and meanings of pain. I adopt this focus because pain articulates and queries the boundaries between the mind and the body, between mental and physical disability, between illness and disability, and between sensation and perception. Thinking about pain as an experience that traverses illness and disability involves dialogue with the question that Susanne Hartwig poses in the introduction to this volume: “¿Dónde termina una enfermedad (que hay que curar) y empieza una discapacidad (que hay que asumir como identidad)?” (this volume). These questions are also of an ontological and epistemological nature since, as David Morris notes, “[T]here is no authority today who can tell us exactly what pain is and how it works, [and] pain thus plunges us instantly into the midst of controversy and the unknown” (1991: 21). There is in pain a profound uncertainty, a quality that activates an interrogative approach to Spanish film narratives from the 2010s that have in common suffering—physical and psychic—as a principal thematic component.

Morris proposes that, given the passage of sufficient time, the segregation of pain experiences into the strictly physical and the strictly psychological will come to be seen as one of the greatest cultural errors ever made, but for the time
being, the dualism remains steadfastly in place. The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), retains a definition that, while carefully wording a qualification that creates an opening for pain that is not physical in origin, insists nonetheless on bodily injury as being at the root of pain. In its taxonomy it gives the working definition of pain as "An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage." In spite of this apparently decisive definition, Morris suggests that "medical experts know far less about pain than most people assume" (1991: 174). The Gate Control Theory posited by Melzack and Wall in the 1960s remains at the heart of biomedical conceptualisations of pain. This theory foresees a physiological switching mechanism that processes physical sensation to activate neurological pain receptors, thus producing perception: "the action system responsible for pain perception is triggered after the cutaneous sensory input has been modulated by [...] sensory feedback mechanisms and the influences of the central nervous system" (1965: 978). Clearly, then, while our understanding of pain (like disability, until recently) has been almost entirely situated within the sphere of medicine, biomedical science leaves psychological pain largely unaccounted for. Like disability, pain therefore sits across medical and social models of experience and intersects with the already undefined boundaries between illness and disability. While disability does not always exist in conjunction with pain, it seems fair to say that pain is always to some extent disabling. As Morris puts it:

Pain may keep us from working, push us into the role of the invalid, drive away friends, and wall us up in a personal prison of isolation [...] Pain takes us out of normal modes of dealing with the world. It introduces us to a landscape where nothing looks entirely familiar and where even the familiar takes on an uncanny strangeness. (Morris 1991: 14, 25)

Pain therefore knocks anyone who experiences it onto a different position somewhere along the spectrum of functional diversity. Furthermore, considering pain alongside functional diversity queries the biological emphasis of this otherwise innovative addition to the terminology of disability studies. Romańach and Lobato's 2005 manifesto, in which they advocate the take up of functional diversity within the lexicon of disability studies and disability identity politics, looks towards a concept that sits above medical and social models of disability and instead conceives of the range of abilities and disabilities that we have as constructing a spectrum of functionality. However, Romańach and Lobato define the collective members of the group that they wish to empower in their appeal for rights as those with "bodies in which organs, parts or the whole body function differently" (2005, emphasis added). What happens within this definition when it is the mind that functions differently? Or when the body becomes the site of willed
manifestation of psychological disorder? Or when the different functionality of the body produces cerebral or mental alterity? These are the kinds of questions that I believe are brought into focus by my alignment of pain and disability in this chapter. In *La herida*, for example, is Ana Ortega’s Borderline Personality Disorder to be read as a functional adaptation to her world? The film invites us to ask if “functional” presumes within its meaning “satisfactory” and “deserving of empathy.”

In the introduction to this volume, Hartwig invites us to reflect on “las anomalías como trastorno o sufrimiento”: are these within, or without, the parameters of a notion of functional diversity? *La herida*, as I go on to argue, eschews the urge to engage with the viewer by seeking a compassionate or admiring response from him. In this respect, it is consistent with this volume’s focus on texts that deviate from those in which the dominant register is either one of compassion or one that promises that disability can and will be overcome by a force of will on the part of the protagonist. *La herida* is, paradoxically, compassionate precisely by being dispassionately transparent in its presentation of a disorder usually wrapped around by taboo. The neutral tone of *La herida’s* representation of its subject matter—and the nature of the subject matter itself—sidesteps the more typical recourse of films that depict disability either to enlist compassion or admiration from the viewer. My reading of the film is in part a response to the invitation to bring into the ambit of disability studies a text that challenges us to think about how the taxonomies of disability studies are appropriately determined.

Similarly, *Insensibles*, which belongs to the genre of horror film, makes functional diversity manifest on screen without pity or superhuman heroics being involved. It resonates with another, older, current of disability representations, one which may have found its purest expression in *Freaks*. My focus on *Insensibles* speaks to this volume’s engagement with texts that disrupt or expose the use of disability to organise and implement the structures that provide the scaffolding for the dichotomy between normality and aberration. I also use the film’s unusual integration of themes of torture, pain, and congenital disorder to speak back to work in the medical humanities by asking where disability intersects with narratives of political suffering. The director of *Insensibles* is unusually articulate and transparent about his intention of using pain for its metaphorical value. In my analysis, this allows me to show how pain, and the disability that both occasions it and which is attendant upon it, is imbricated in the politics of historical memory in Spain. By itself, is the conscious and knowing use of a disability metaphor less injurious or sustaining of prejudice than the unconscious ableist bias that informs so many texts that represent the functionally diverse? Does knowing engagement with disability make the director of *Insensibles* more
attentive to the history of disability in Spain, or does historical memory squeeze historical disability out of the picture? I am less interested in viewing the film as further contribution to horror's recovery of repressed memory than in positing it as a narrative that subordinates historical disability to the recovery of memory of an ideological conflict.

Pain both invites and resists totalising theoretical models. On the one hand, the universality of pain experience lends itself to the “always” and “everywhere” formulations of which theorists are fond; on the other hand, the essential incommunicability of pain, and unknowability of another’s pain, resist efforts to speak about pain in a way that encompasses a metanarrative of history and geography. To quote Morris again, pain is “saturated with the visible or invisible imprint of specific human culture” (1991: 14, emphasis added). The theoretically challenging nature of pain, as well as its quality as an experience that exceeds biomedical explanatory containment, may account for the wide range of interventions in the literature on the subject. I briefly review some of these here, to give an idea of the diversity of opinions about what pain is, and how disabling it is, or is not, and to preface my later use of contributions to this literature in the close analysis that follows of the texts from Spain.

Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* (1985) is frequently referenced in the pain literature of the medical humanities. It is timely to include it as a source here given recent reappraisals of the book—Michael McIntyre’s “Rethinking *The Body in Pain*” (2016), for example—and the resurgence of interest in Scarry’s work. The attention in *The Body in Pain* to torture lends itself particularly well to my reading of *Insensibles*, a film that I will go on to suggest can be seen to belong to an emerging genre of carnography or torture porn. Scarry deconstructs the scene of torture around a transaction that takes language from the victim and recycles it as illegitimate power for the state or institutions represented by the torturer. An operational constant inside this scenario is the mutual exclusiveness of language and pain: in Scarry’s conception, pain destroys language, and destroys beingness in the world for the person who experiences pain. By reading *Insensibles* next to Scarry’s work, my section on this film is not only informed by the transactional model of torture and pain but also queries the disavowed, or unrecognised, ableist premises of the linguistic deprivation paradigm of torture and pain analysis.

In contradistinction with Scarry, Martha Stoddard Holmes and Tod Chambers propose that pain is “[A] site not of language erosion but [of] language generation” (131). Stoddard Holmes and Chambers’ article, “Thinking Through Pain”, reminds us that there are many occasions when, despite pain, we continue to pursue our usual activities and that even when these may be curtailed to some
extent by pain, individuals go on interacting with the world around them, which is not destroyed, as it is in Scarry’s model of torture and pain. Making the sufferer of pain inarticulate is altogether too convenient for the theorist, Stoddard Holmes and Chambers suggest; rendered non-linguistic, the subject in pain is for the theorist as malleable a subjective body as the anaesthetised patient is for the surgeon. The notion of pain as an aspect of language, or as a form of communication, informs my reading of La herida and its exposition of a protagonist who uses injuries to her own body, and the pain that this occasions, as a mechanism for living and functioning while bearing a traumatic psychological injury.

I refer to the work of Dolores Mosquera to outline the role that self-harm plays in communication of pain and also engage with Angela Fauller’s work on issues associated with bearing witness to representations of self-harm. How does La herida position the spectator, and what is the film trying to evoke from us: empathy, transferred pain, or non-judgmental observation of a taboo subject that usually forecloses comprehension? My dialogue with the literature opens up in my reading of the film some of the questions I have raised above, about the porous borderlines between illness and disability, and between psychological and physical experiences of pain.

2 Insensibles: Generations of Pain

Juan Carlos Medina’s gothic horror of noxiousness, insensitivity, and historical memory was released in 2012 after a lengthy gestation period. The director says that the script, co-written with Luiso Berdejo, was attractive to producers and that they were also reticent about financing a film that would belong to a very specific niche and that would also be costly to make.

Some of the expense would accrue from the designers’ efforts to recreate costumes and sets that accurately reflect the rural Spain of the 1930s where half of the film’s plot unfolds. Other expense would come from special effects and location shooting. A further complication is that the film interweaves two time periods. The narrative shuttles between Spain in the 2010s and episodes unfolding in the past, beginning in the 1930s and working forwards into the 1960s. A family mystery connects the narrative threads. David Martel, a medical specialist who inhabits the present, is involved in a freak car accident that leaves his partner dead, the child she was carrying in an incubator, and the doctor himself in intensive care. His colleagues at the same hospital where he works discover in treating his injuries that he is suffering from a form of leukaemia for which the only treatment involves bone marrow donation from a parent. His rapprochement with his parents opens up their past and leads back to the 1930s.
The strand of the film set in the past opens with two children playing with fire: both are injured but one seems to feel no pain. Further scenes of other children causing damage to their bodies, but feeling pleasure rather than pain, leads to a dramatic declaration made by a doctor whose words are expectantly waited upon by an anxious crowd from the community of those affected by these events. He says that there is a group of children in the area who have in common that they seem to feel no pain from injuries or self-harm and that they will be placed in confinement, as a protective measure made with the safety of others, and the children themselves, in mind. In the medical parlance of the twenty-first century, individuals with the condition represented in Insensibles would be described as having congenital analgesia. Nishida syndrome is also sometimes used to refer to the pathophysiological presentation of congenital analgesia.

The children have a disability that disconnects their processing of pain sensation from experience of pain perception and although Insensibles does not set out to be a history of disability, the brutal treatment of children with a condition that confounds the separation of mind and body is reason to reflect not only on historical memory in Spain, but also on the history of disabilities. As David Morris writes in The Culture of Pain "A person who cannot feel pain seems a kind of freak or outsider: a sideshow wonder" (1991: 13). The sequences of Insensibles set in the 1930s, then, are in one sense a throwback to Tod Browning’s Freaks (1932), although here the spectacle of the curious body is one made from a position of knowing critique. Furthermore, the children insensitive to pain in Insensibles are not displayed but rather shut up in an asylum (though they become involved later in a theatre of pain and torture to which I return presently).

The question of institutionalisation, and the reverberations this has within the history of disability, is introduced from the moment the congenital analgesics are locked up. They are muzzled, placed in strait jackets, and isolated in padded cells. Confinement and enclosure of those considered dangerously different because of their non-normative experience of the world is present throughout the film, as is the painful reminder of the appalling mistreatment of those with mental disabilities. However, Insensibles only treats these themes tangentially, something that is reflected in the director’s exposition of the interests and concerns that motivated him to write the script and shoot the film in the way that he did.

In supplementary materials included on the film’s Spanish DVD release, Medina says:

La idea de usar, digamos, esta enfermedad del síndrome [de la] insensibilidad congénita del dolor fue en poco para dar con una metáfora física, corporal... lo que nos interesa realmente es más la experiencia del dolor psicológico, la enfermedad es solo una metáfora de eso. (Medina 2013b)
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In writing, Medina has echoed and refined this sentiment, saying:

Siempre había querido desarrollar un guion en torno a este tema: sobre cómo el dolor puede influir en la existencia y las condiciones del ser humano [...] la vida de los niños insensibles en el contexto trágico de la historia reciente de España [y su] falta de humanidad se convirtió en una metáfora del destino colectivo de una nación muy antigua y, al mismo tiempo, muy joven que ha sido desgarrada por el odio y la intolerancia entre hermanos y hermanas. (Medina 2013b)

A disability that can be recognised as real and given various names in the modern lexicon of disorder and diversity is called into service as part of the foundational structure that underpins a metaphorical exploration of the pain experienced by a country still coming to terms with its history of violence. While the use of congenital analgesia may be a novel twist in Insensibles, its recourse to disability as metaphor is less original.

Medina's interventions in interviews further illustrate his conceptualisation of Spain's difficult past with disabled bodies. To conceive the half century of incivility that Spain subjected itself to, the director instructs his reader: "Imagina a una persona, como España, con la riqueza intelectual de la Segunda República, le cortan brazos y piernas y luego se le pide que regenere" (Belinchón 2013, emphasis added). Elsewhere he refers again to amputation and says that the story of the analgesic children is "Una metáfora del pueblo español, un pueblo que en un momento determinado se le cortó las alas y se le intentó meter en una jaula. Se le intentó cegar, ensordecer y quitarle sus sentidos" (Ramón 2014). If physical pain in the film is a proxy for psychological pain, the body that does not feel pain and which is therefore easily damaged becomes a proxy for other bodies disabled by amputation or incompleteness. The filmmakers' lighting upon congenital analgesia as a metaphorical kernel, whether by design or not, means that its narrative cuts across the distinction between mental and physical disabilities. Emblematic of disabilities of sensory or physical loss, the insensitive children also evoke autism, and the film's treatment of an impaired capacity to feel or to empathise could also be read as a response to anxieties about the perceived epidemic of conditions on the autism spectrum. The opening scene, of a child unconcerned by the danger of a naked flame, for instance, brings to mind the reduced awareness of danger and risk that is often linked to individuals with autism.¹

¹ To take just one example from many other possible sources, Naoki Higashida writes in his second autobiographical volume of experiences of autism, Fall Down Seven Times, Get Up Eight, about how he enjoys sitting for long periods in a cold bath, untroubled by discomfort: "My hope is that by being told over and over that chilly baths are not that great for my body it will gradually sink in" (2017: 37). The neuro-diverse response to
*Insensibles* deploys the concept of a lack of feeling not only to describe the children's relationship with their own bodies but also to convey the notion of a generation devoid of feeling for others, one marked by an almost sociopathic inability to empathise. This second function of the central metaphor becomes more in evidence as the strand of the narrative unfolds in the past progresses. The asylum, somewhere near Canfranc, in the Spanish Pyrenees, registers in microcosm the convulsions of the Civil War. Firstly under the sway of the Nationalists it is then overtaken by anarchists before becoming a detention and interrogation centre in the 50s and 60s. Whichever administration is in power, the conditions of the detainee patients changed little: the reds brutalise them just as much as the Nationalists and are only persuaded not to turn them out of the asylum altogether when they are told that the children are gravely ill with an infectious disease. As well as the children, the asylum has also taken in a fugitive Jewish German doctor who promises, if not to cure them, then to rehabilitate them by teaching them anatomy and to understand pain, if not to feel it. Benigno, a red-headed boy who never speaks, shows a particular aptitude for these lessons and is able deftly to extirpate a diseased kidney from one of the dogs Dr Holzmann uses to help the children understand the relationship between the inside and the outside of a living body.

This scene prefigures a later one, set in the 1960s. By this time, Benigno is the only one of the analgesic children to have survived. At the end of the Civil War he was renamed Berkano by German soldiers who recognised in a letter B tattooed on his chest the rune with this same name. Berkano's lack of empathy and ability to inflict limitless pain is put to use by an imaginary unit of Francoist torturers who seek information and submission from political prisoners. As he applies a scalpel to a man being tortured, a uniformed official tells the victim:

> El comunismo es una enfermedad mental, una degeneración biológica que tenemos que extirpar quirúrgicamente del cuerpo de la nación y por tanto en la carne viva.2

In the section of the narrative that deals with the present, David Martel, working against the clock to treat his leukaemia, discovers that the uniformed official was the man he thought was his father and who has kept silent about his part in oppression of dissidents during the regime. Martel's biological father is Berkano: he is the progeny of the torturer's human instrument and of a female

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1. All dialogue, and director comments, from *Insensibles* and *La herida* quoted in the chapter are transcribed by the author from the soundtracks.
prisoner. When the wife of the man who turns out to be only his adoptive father had a miscarriage, Berkano's baby was substituted for the lost child. Trying to find his biological heritage pushes Martel into a history of violence, against his parents' wishes. His father tells him "A nadie le importa saber la verdad. Lo importante es olvidar. Olvidar para sobrevivir". In this twist of the plot Insensibles links the recovery of historical memory with another very contemporary Spanish narrative, one centred on the scandal of the "niños robados", the forcibly adopted children brought up by childless conservative families and deprived of biological knowledge of their politically dissent parents. Martel's efforts to recover the missing pieces of his stolen history reveal that Berkano functioned as an accessory to torture for years and that Martel's own biological mother was one of only two of Berkano's victims to survive the ordeal.

In Elaine Scarry’s conceptualisation of torture, Berkano is equivalent to an instrument of torture and he is part of the transaction between language and pain that is effected by the wilful infliction of injury on another. Reviewing the film for El País, Jordi Costa observes that Benigno, by becoming Berkano "pasará de la autolesión sanguinaria a [ser] instrumento de tortura al servicio de un poder atroz" (2013). In one of the off quoted sections of her chapter on torture Scarry remarks that "intense pain is language destroying" (Scarry 1985: 35). In Insensibles, language is destroyed not only by intense pain, but also by the inability to feel pain, and the language that is destroyed is not only the individual idiom of the victim, but the shared language of the class of people whose painful experiences have been silenced for generations. The notion that "torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama" (Scarry 1985: 21) is also an effective description of the scenes where Berkano, in the service of the Confessor (David’s adoptive father), inflicts unimaginable pain on prisoners of political

3 Some of the dialogue in Insensibles is in Spanish; some of it is in Catalan. Martel speaks with his adoptive parents exclusively in Spanish, suggesting that they are not Catalan speakers. The correspondence between language use, chronicity, and types of relationship in the film would open it to an interpretation seen through the lens of the tensions between centrist Spanish identity and regional linguistic neo-nationalisms, but that is not the focus in this chapter. When the author saw the film in a cinema in Copenhagen, in 2014, the version shown was the one that alternates between, and mixes, Catalan and Spanish. The cinema’s programme information, however, indicated that the original dialogue in the film was entirely in Spanish, a detail that illustrates how the domestic sensitivity to the pluralism of Spain’s languages does not always translate well to contexts abroad.

4 There is a growing body of literature in Spain on this topic. See, for example, Enrique J. Vila Torres' Historias Robadas (2011).
conscience. The same notion could also be said to inform not only the representation of torture in the film, but the film’s recourse to a current that David Edelstein has labelled “torture porn” (2006) and which Beth Kattelman has called “carnography” (2010).⁵

By using torture, Medina is arguably trying to wring from the past the secrets and historical memories withheld until now. Inasmuch as this makes the film complicit in the same kind of transaction that its torture scenes describe, this could be regarded as problematic. It is also problematic, I would argue, that the instrument of torture, the human device who facilitates the state’s usurpation of the torture victim’s voice (in Scarry’s terms), is an individual who has previously been marked out as disabled. Whereas, as Lydia Brown (2014) has pointed out, disabled subjects are more likely to be tortured than non-disabled subjects, here Medina gives us a disabled man not as someone vulnerable to the infliction of pain, but as an agent of pain. On the other hand, the insertion of disability and of disabled subjects into the space of the torture transaction, does, albeit inadvertently, read disability back into Scarry’s discourse to reveal that the victim’s body and mind are figured there in a latently ableist manner.⁶

In Scarry’s conceptualisation of torture, the harm done by physical mistreatment to the victim may lead to disability (which will always be disability resulting from damage) but disability is never presumed as a factor in the exchange of power and language between the victim and the torturer, although she does describe the torturer’s power as stemming from “his blindness, his willed amorality” (1985: 57). This much is emphasised by her description of the body available for harm in her chapter on torture. It is one that would interact with the bare accoutrements of a protective domestic space: a mat, a stool, and a table.

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⁵ Steve Jones develops ideas that complicate the bracketing together of post 9/11 European and American films that involve torture (see his chapter on “The Lexicon of Offense”). I link Insensibles to the trend towards carnography because it has in common with the films discussed by Edelstein and Kattelman an aestheticisation of scenes of torture.

⁶ In The Story of Pain, a recent addition to the medical humanities literature on the subject, Joanna Bourke writes of Scarry’s approach to pain that it “[falls] into the trap of treating metaphorical ways of conceiving of suffering […] as descriptions of an actual entity. ‘Pain’ rather than a person-in-pain is given agency. This is an ontological fallacy” (2014: 5). My critique comes from a different angle and rests on the role of the excluded disabled subject as the constitutive other that is called into service in defining the circumscription of pain, and in identifying who dispenses pain, and who feels it. The contemporary epistemological flap around the chronic pain sufferer could also be seen in this light: is his or her pain real, and is his or her pain really a disability?
There is no sense that these dimensions or conditions might not be adapted to a disabled body or a disabled mind. And, furthermore, the un-tortured body that is allowed freely to create in the world “become[s] wholly forgetful of its weight, to move weightlessly into a larger mindfulness” (1985: 39). There is little sense of how bodies and minds that do not meet the conditions presumed here may or may not accede to the same weightless mindfulness without impediment or impairment, a deficit that is consistent with Scarry’s positing of civilisation as “overcoming the limitation of the human body” (1985: 57). How would atypical bodies, and minds, that do not match the normative abstraction inherent in “the human body”, approach different or further limitations in their achievement of civilisation?

Reading Medina’s film alongside The Body in Pain, then, uncovers the ableist premises built in to Scarry’s description of the robbery of language and beingness by state torture. The introduction by Insensibles of disability in the torture space opens up questions about the role of torture in privileging able-bodied-ness even as it sets out to force impairment upon an individual. If one of the prescriptions of torture is that the victim starts out as an unimpaired tabula rasa, how might ableist normativity be complicit with the premises of a space in which torture is feasible? By asking what a disabled torturer looks like and questioning how the disabled might be tortured, Insensibles begins to deconstruct the normative values of body and mind that underpin the Scarry torture space.

Insensibles allows us to see, when read alongside The Body in Pain, that torture, real or imagined, and analysis of its transactionality in the competition for language and power, is implicated in establishing the confines of ableism. This semantic junction is underscored at one of the film’s pivotal moments. Besides the person Martel is yet to know was his biological mother, Berkano spared one other victim and this man has survived to the narrative present. For Martel, finding him is tantamount to piecing together the fragments of his past. It is significant, therefore, that this individual is disabled and confined to a room he never leaves, hidden behind an opaque plastic screen. He struggles to speak but manages to communicate in a raspy voice that “Berkano no interrogaba nunca a nadie. No hablabas, Era el dolor”.

Martel pushes his way through the protective curtain and shows the man a picture of the person he had until not long before believed to be his father. The victim identifies the man in the photograph as the confessor, the uniformed official whose instruction Berkano, as an instrument of torture, followed to the letter. Hidden from view, and hard to find, this disabled man becomes coterminous with the disavowed kernel of Spanish twentieth century historical memory. Disabled by lifelong injuries, the only living witness to Berkano’s actions literally
and metaphorically embodies the state’s misdemeanours. Martel returns to the family home in a rage crying out that it “apesta a mentira”, pathologising the denial of his personal history and of Spain’s historical memory. His adoptive parents take their own lives: his mother drowns herself in the bath and his father shoots himself in the throat.

Martel, the family name Medina has given the protagonist of the contemporary part of the story, means hammer in Catalan. It seems likely this is by design as the director describes the denouement of the film as being inspired in part by documentary scenes of Germans taking hammers to the Berlin wall, and knocking away with the structure all the historical expediencies that it had supported:

España es un país que ha vivido un siglo XX muy negro, realmente tocando al abismo absoluto y luego ha habido una especie de movimiento colectivo, creo, de meter todo esto detrás de un muro y taparlo y es un poco lo que pasa en esta película cuando David encuentra todo esto y al final va con un pico y derrumba este muro y encuentra sus orígenes reales. (Medina 2013a)

Being witness to the disability and disfigurement of Berkano’s surviving victim drives Martel to find Berkano’s lair and to break down its fortifications, just as he broke through the curtain concealing the tortured body of his biological father’s only surviving victim.

Iñigo Navarro, the film’s designer, emphasizes the symbolic value of Berkano’s redoubt:

La casa de Berkano es un decorado bastante importante en la película porque es donde va a finalizar la película de toda esta tensión soterrada que hemos tenido. Esta hambrecita ha ido recopilando un poco todo su arte y todo su conflicto interior y lo ha expresado con huesos, con pieles, con elementos animales que le han encontrado en estos veinte años. Y esto ha ido creando la capilla Sixtina de Berkano. (Medina 2013a)

When Martel breaks through the wall, biological father and son meet for the first time. Curiously, given that within the film’s metaphorical structure this encounter represents Spain’s reunification with its repressed past, neither of the two roles is performed by an actor who could be described as simply Spanish. Alex Brendemühl, in the role of Martel, is of German as well as Spanish heritage, and Tómas Lambarquis, in the role of Berkano, is of French and Icelandic descent. When we finally see Berkano up close, we discover that he is completely bald; the actor’s alopecia is not disguised at all in these scenes. Rather, it is as if this physiological variable were a proxy for the fictional character’s difference, and for the unseen congenital analgesia which underpins the film’s plot and its metaphorical structure.
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The aesthetics of Berkano's Sistine chapel of torture reflect those of the film: the embodiment to which horror leans makes the choice of the genre for this narrative far from fortuitous. The conventions of horror naturalise the metaphorical functions that Medina sought in the visualisation and somatisation of psychological pain. Something in the film hits a nerve with reviewers. For example, Oti Rodríguez Marchante, writing for ABC, says of Medina's work "podría ser una metáfora perdigüera de esa arrancada de costura llamada memoria histórica" (2013). The same reviewer says of the dual narratives in Insensibles: "El peso de ambas historias es por completo dispar, aunque la película se empeñe en equilibrarlos", and in this regard his viewpoint seems reasonable since the two strands of the story do not come together in a way that makes very much sense in the denouement. Rather than propose how the narrative could be resolved inside of the metaphorical structure that the body of the film is built around, what we find instead is a conflagration. Berkano and Martel are both to go up in flames, it seems. The last piece of dialogue is read with gravity by Brendemühl and aims for a register of profundity. But when the words are looked at closely, they are almost unfathomable, all the more so since it is not made entirely clear whose words they are nor to whom they are directed: "No te conoceré nunca, ni sabré nunca tu nombre. Pero he mirado en tus ojos como mi padre me miró en los míos. Ahora te pertenece. Así serás libre. Así serás un hombre, hijo mío." With Berkano consigned to the flames, Martel's last hope of a bone-marrow match goes too. How can he be free if he is imminently going to die and when his death, furthermore, marks the break in a genetic chain that, inside the film's equivalences of bodies and politics, signals the end of a troubled history? Perhaps Martel's words could be addressed to his own child, the premature baby in an incubator that the film strands at the beginning of the story? This seems unlikely given the absence of screen time for this character. The disappearing foetus, rather, speaks to the film's difficulty in projecting its resolution forwards, as well as backwards, as if the only way to tie up the story were to kill off everyone who appears in it. Martel will die and with him, the historical DNA for which there is no living match besides an accomplice to torture who must also expire in this bonfire.

These shortcomings aside, I would argue that Insensibles makes for an interesting intervention in the dialogue between torture, pain, disability, and functional diversity. By personifying a disabled person as an instrument of the torturer's repertoire Insensibles entrenches prejudice but also brings to the surface the limits of empathy, and the ableist paradigm, that inform influential interpretations of the transactions between language and power in the space of torture.
Insensibles also allows us to see that, decades after Franco died, and many years later than the Francoist cinema that paralysed people as embodiments of a paralysed polity, the legacy of Franco continues to have an impact on the representation of disability in Spanish film. I mean this in the following sense: the rush to seize upon the confinement of disabled people and on their feelings (or lack of them) as a vehicle for the injuries still to be worked out in historical memory means that there is another story untold, or only partially told, in Insensibles—that of the history of the institutionalisation of people with physical and mental disabilities in Spain. While it would be perverse to criticise Martel on account of a film he did not make rather than the one he did make, Insensibles does touch just enough on the continuities of institutionalisation across the political landscape to reveal that the stories of confined disabled people in Spain are other narratives that have yet to be told, and that cannot be simplistically accounted for by the binary discourse of fascists and reds that drives so much of the cinema of historical memory. That is, disability complicates the paradigm of vencídos and vencedores.

3 La herida: The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side

In this section of the chapter I deal with La herida, a film directed and co-written by Fernando Franco. It was released in 2013 and the plot, such as it is, unfolds in a Spain contemporary with the film's production. The protagonist, Ana Ortega, is a woman in her late twenties or early thirties. She lives with her mother in a comfortable flat in a Madrid suburb and works as an ambulance driver, responsible for transferring patients from their homes to hospitals and care centres. The wound referred to in the title conjures an abstraction and also refers to Ana herself, the wounded person gendered as female by La herida. She lives with Borderline Personality Disorder and self-harms: her woundedness refers to a body scarred by physically self-inflicted cuts and burns, although, as we shall see, this superficial scarring is meant to be read as a register of a more profound psychical scarring.

Whereas Insensibles concerns subjects who are unable to feel pain, La herida centres on an individual who is unable to express her pain. In place of congenital analgesia we move to psychological anaesthesia. Whilst the film's title would seem to invite a reading that draws on Mark Seltzer's theoretical conceptualisations around wound cultures (1998), his approach is not the one I take here. La herida is based, according to the director, on careful and considered research into Borderline Personality Disorder and therefore warrants the kind of attention
that focuses on what a fictional narrative has to contribute to the making public of a condition that is for the most part kept under wraps, or considered taboo.

On the other hand, and albeit the filmmakers disavow a wider social meaning about crisis in Spain in *La herida*, I will go on to propose that the aesthetics and editing of *La herida* summon the protagonist’s body into being as a somatisation of a society in turmoil such that its convulsions are concealed and made to sediment in the body of a woman young enough to be representative of the generation of Spaniards most harshly affected by economic stagnation and societal collapse. These parallel interpretations align with the two texts that the filmmakers offer viewers on the DVD release of the film.

Alongside the film itself the DVD presentation includes a very unconventional director’s commentary. Franco’s interventions on the alternate soundtrack are much different from the usual self-congratulatory and meandering waffle that comprises the majority of such commentaries. His discursive directorial gloss, by contrast, is clearly read from a written text and explicates almost every scene in the film with reference to how shots and dialogue were constructed, and how the action the viewer sees connects with the underlying themes of psychological disorder and self-harming. The commentary track is less akin to the usual series of often disconnected anecdotes that directors provide and more like a guide to Borderline Personality Disorder, illustrated by the film as backdrop and exemplar. Franco refers throughout his remarks to the way that his film administers narrative information. It is a fictional account, then, but also one with the intention of achieving a strongly informative purpose.

The pedagogical tone of Franco’s director commentary recalls Angela Fauller’s exploration of visual narratives that illustrate self-harm (2008). These place the viewer, Fauller suggests, in the position of an analyst, with the same risk of absorbing displaced trauma; on the other hand, and as Fauller remarks, “outside of mediated representations, self-harm is generally hidden from public view” (2008: 12). Fictional works about individuals who self-harm can therefore play a role in “cultivating empathic understanding [...] for those who practice it [and for whom] self-harm serves as a means of survival in the wake of psychological trauma” (Fauller 2008: 12). The detailed guided view Franco provides us with could be held to be part of what E. Ann Kaplan has termed responsible witnessing (2005: 123). With the right frame around the film, the possibility of it being exploitative of a disabled subject is foreclosed. Also, seen in this light, *La herida* traverses terrain that interrogates the inclusive perimeters of disability and of disability studies: someone with Borderline Personality Disorder, and who self-harms, experiences the world differently, but do we want to include this way of interacting with the world within the notion of functional diversity? By asking
whether or not self-inflicted harm merits empathy, *La herida* also questions the extent to which recognition of a subject as disabled is itself contingent upon recognition of him or her as deserving either of empathy or advocacy.

In his commentary, Franco name checks the Lumière brothers and *La sortie de l’usine*, the film often cited as being the first ever celluloid moving picture. He mentions this element of film history when we see Ana and her co-workers arriving at the ambulance depot at the beginning of a shift. This is a part of her routine and the film very deliberately builds a picture of her day to day experience as one that recycles the repeated behaviours that she uses to regulate her interaction with the world around her, and her pain emotions. Her digital watch sounds an alarm when her mother is due to return home; an indication that she should retreat to her bedroom. Use of the telephone and of her computer repeatedly lead to stifled conversations followed by episodes of self-harm. These include cutting of the skin with razors, in areas of the body concealed from public view; burning herself with cigarette ends, and hitting objects and surfaces in her immediate surroundings.

The circularity of Ana’s routine effectively builds within the film’s ninety minutes an impression of the habitual aspects of her disorder and evokes the vicious cycle that Dolores Mosquera describes in her description of self-harming behaviours (2008): a sense of unresolved blameworthiness, or of low self-esteem, leads to physical injury, which then produces a sense of shame, which in turn consolidates and reproduces the low self-esteem that was an attribute of the beginning of the cycle. *La herida* illustrates how this cycle then determines Ana’s adaptive behaviour to her everyday activities. Although she regularly uses a gym, and the changing facilities at her workplace, she never undresses in public. She rebuffs physical contact when it means revealing scarred parts of her body. She reaches out to friends, but, says Franco, “utiliza las herramientas equivocadas y lo hace por una cierta inhabilidad social derivada, entre otras cosas, de todos estos mensajes negativos que debió recibir durante su infancia y que hacen que sea profundamente insegura”.

We also see that Ana repeatedly rebuffs those who make an effort to connect with her, most notably her boyfriend who eventually grows tired of Ana’s emotional intemperance and drops her. These behaviours are consistent with the notion of a second skin developed by Esther Bick (1968). In subjects whose own skin seems to them poorly to define the boundary between privacy and the exterior world (such as those subjected to strong feelings of insecurity during childhood), a second, protective, skin develops and “because of its defensive function, the second skin makes it hard to let others in or to allow feelings out” (Failler 2008: 15). The second skin is an imaginary concept for the person who
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develops one but, as Angela Failler suggests, the scar tissue and scabs that self-inflicted injuries produce can be understood as an attempt to reify the extra layer of defensiveness that someone like Ana builds around her: "conflict with respect to the psychic skin boundary manifests on material skin, the physical border between inside and outside" (Failler 2008. 15).

Routine behaviour, more usually associated with security, is carried to an extreme by Ana in her system of alarms, bolted doors, and injuries such that the structure of her days itself becomes a facet of her defensive second skin. Her episodes of self-injury, often located in bathrooms, and mediated by instruments stored in the cabinets that usually house pampering materials, are reminiscent of the beauty regimens glorified in advertising, but in Ana's case, concealment and make-up are applied not through beautification, but scarification. Her use for a lipstick, when she discovers one in the bathroom cabinet at a friend's flat, is as an object of her kleptomania. In her rigorously timed pattern of behaviours, there is no opening for spontaneity or change.

In one of the most clearly explicatory passages of his commentary, Franco glosses a scene in which we have just seen Ana reach a crisis point and turn to her repertoire of self-harming tools.

La situación en sí genera un bloqueo en Ana que acude a la autolesión como esa ayuda que le permite canalizar el llanto de una manera de sentir y expresar este sentimiento de congoja: eso es fundamentalmente lo que se genera de la autolesión. (Franco 2013)

Franco further explains that his directorial and scripted portrayal of Ana was informed by prolonged engagement with online forums where people who self-harm share their experiences and feelings. He recalls word for word one particular contribution to a forum that made a strong impression on him: "La sangre que brota en mis heridas es el llanto que en mí no me brota de una manera natural." The analytical tone in Franco's description of self-harm, and in the connections he makes between his anthropological research and what we see on screen, is matched by the use throughout the commentary of jargon recognisably drawn from analysis of subjects with Borderline Personality Disorder, and of their families. Franco describes Ana's decision to buy a car, in the belief that this will resolve all her problems, as an instance of magical thinking: he references ostrich syndrome with regard to the tendency of Ana's mother to turn a blind eye to evidence of her daughter's condition; and he explains that Ana works in the job that she does because this is representative of the high proportion of people with Borderline Personality Disorder who are drawn to careers in social care, nursing and NGOs in search of the valorisation and reinforcement of self-worth.
that was lacking in their formative years. Consequentially, La herida includes significant screen time for characters with other disabilities.

Ana’s work involves taking people with cerebral palsy and dementia to their appointments. One of the few times when she seems to be happy is when she interacts with the two women with cerebral palsy who figure in the film (and who are not played by actors simulating the disability). One of her closest relationships is with Martín, a service user who has dementia. Ana works with him on memory exercises during his trips in her ambulance and the lengthy passage of time covered in the film’s narrative (more than six months) is conveyed in the deterioration of Martín’s memory. In her last trip with him, Martín can no longer remember the months of the year. The inclusion of these other disabled people not only serves to illustrate Franco’s informative point about the relationship between Borderline Personality Disorder and particular types of work but also situates Ana’s experiences within a broader spectrum of disabilities, thus reiterating the question of whether or not her condition can and should be read as one more iteration of diversity in how subjects function. One aspect of her isolation, perhaps, is exclusion of the condition she has from the categories and taxonomies around which advocacy and support are structured.

In one of Ana’s attempts to break out of her isolation she attends a co-worker’s birthday party where she meets a man who seems interested in her. His interest is stoked by the fact that Ana plays dumb, answering his questions only with shrugs, smiles, movements of her head, and gesture. If this behaviour plays out another disability—physical aphonia, or neurological aphasia—it also dramatizes the convergence of theory around self-harm that says that self-inflicted injury is a form of attempting to give voice to otherwise inexpressible pain. If Scarry is right that “intense pain is language destroying” (1985: 35) then, by inversion, the destruction of language, or its foreclosure, would logically correlate with pain. Indeed, Karen Conterio and Wendy Lader (1998), and Janice McLane (1996) have all interpreted self-harming behaviours as being linked to the voicing of more deep seated psychic pain that individuals are either unable to put into words or find no opportunity to make heard. Mosquera also takes this view, remarking that in her practice she has found that someone who self-harms typically “no encuentra palabras que le permitan expresar la identidad de su sufrimiento y necesita comunicarlo — sacarlo fuera” (2008: 5). The connection between self-harm and the unsayable that Franco discursively theorises in his commentary finds a parallel in the narrative, both in the madita scene and in the fact that Ana’s injuries usually follow on directly from poor communication.
When she uses the telephone or the internet, she feels more, rather than less, isolated.\textsuperscript{7}

La herida pivots around an event that occurs two thirds of the way through the screen time. Against her mother's advice, Ana goes to the Basque country to attend the wedding ceremony at which her father is marrying a new wife.\textsuperscript{8} Not only is Ana removed from the exaggerated routines that she uses to shield herself from the outside world but she is thrown into an encounter with her father that seems to bring her emotional pain to a crescendo. As Franco observes in his commentary: "Hay algo en la ecuación padre y sexo que le baja a la tierra". Ana is dancing with her father after the wedding ceremony and her nose begins to bleed. She takes flight and engages in anonymous sex with a stranger before being consumed by overwhelming shockwaves of feeling. Importantly here, the outward physiological sign of her broken psyche is not an injury she has created deliberately but the spontaneous flow of blood, a circumstance that could reference the menarche (and her youth, in close proximity still to her father) or, less specifically, injury or damage at the hands of another. The nosebleed stands out because it seems to break the pattern established in the film where all evidence of psychosomatic damage is related to self-harm; here, instead, we seem to witness a psychosomatic event that is produced involuntarily. This is suggestive that the

\textsuperscript{7} It is noteworthy that Ana's anxiety attacks, and the self-harm she uses to quell them, often follow on from interaction with communications technology. Franco describes Ana's use of the phone as unhealthy and suggests that a disorderly relationship with telephony is a common presentation of Borderline Personality Disorder. Chat forums on the internet offer Ana alternately solace and frustration. The manner in which information technology further isolates her brings into view Neil Postman's extremely prescient reservations about the use of the term "community" to refer to virtual collectives (1992). He cautioned that community would come to refer not to a diverse group of people linked by a common municipal obligation that transcended their differences but would instead denominate clusters of people who already think alike and for whom the internet is more of an echo chamber than a forum (1992). The promise that Hester Parr saw in 2000 for the internet to provide people isolated by their experience of illness or disability with a sense of belonging, through bodying forth into virtual spaces, is not borne out in the interaction we see between Ana and her digital interlocutors in La herida. It is interesting to reflect that in the years since Parr's article came out, the main uses that have been found for wearable technology are surveillance of actual or presumed malefactors (electronic tags) and monitoring of individual deviance or proximity to standardised health parameters (smart watches).

\textsuperscript{8} Here, as in Insensibles, there is the potential for an interpretation centred on the banishment to the geographic periphery of the origin of trauma. However, this approach is not the one I take in this chapter.
damage Ana has suffered has embedded itself physiologically and that it is not entirely in her gift to overcome it by force of psychic will.

Having read *La herida* up to this point largely through the frame of the director’s own pedagogical glossary, I move now to propose that while the film was not written as a social commentary on crisis era Spain, there are ways in which it does appear to reflect the socio-political context in which it is set, some of them perhaps problematic in terms of gender and of disability, or disorder. Franco’s commentary continues to be instructive here, but more on account of what it implies, rather than for what it directly claims. The prologue to Ana’s flight from the wedding venue is her reconnection with her father for the first time in person. We do not see him approach her, but rather infer his approach from Ana’s reactions. Franco’s glossary is worth quoting at length here:

> El arranque de esta secuencia está planteado de una manera muy similar al arranque de la película. *Es casi como un espejo de ella*: la cámara sobre Ana y sin vez lo que ella ya ve aunque sabemos que le genera sensaciones muy fuertes. (Franco 2013, emphasis added)

As much as Ana is mirrored by her surroundings, she also acts as a mirror of them. In his comments quoted above, Franco compares the way this scene of reunification with her father works with the opening of the film, where we are introduced to the protagonist in *medias res*. We see her against an undefined background, looking at her mobile phone, becoming more and more agitated, before the camera pulls back to a wider shot and we observe that she has been leaning against an ambulance, outside the entrance to a hospital where we glimpse what Franco refers to as “una especie de manifestación o protesta sanitaria”. He qualifies the import that this fleeting inclusion of Ana’s socio-political context should have by adding: “Aunque la película no tiene una intención social me interesaba incluir elementos que hagan alusión, aunque sea tangencialmente, a lo que ocurre en España”.

It is my contention in my reading of the film that Ana is the tangent in which the surrounding context is reflected. The fact that Franco makes an equivalence between the opening scene, and its blurred registration of protest, and the later one, where Ana’s reactions are the reflecting surface of those around her, substantiates this interpretation, I would argue. The director’s defence of the decision in the editing process largely to dispense with counter shots also lends weight to my argument:

> En montaje nos dimos cuenta de que no era[n] necesarios [los contra planos]. Era más interesante asistir a todo el arsenal de reacciones que se producen en Ana y no cortarlas con otra imagen. Nos pareció más coherente así, más riguroso con el punto de vista sobre el que se construye la puesta en escena de la película. (Franco)
If Ana herself, and her expressions, fill the spaces in the film's montage for reaction shots and counter shots it seems reasonable to suggest that she, and her suffering, somatise the context of economic, institutional, and political crisis that Spain has been experiencing.

Allied to this is that just as the source or root cause of the economic crisis in Spain remains elusive, so the ontology and telos of Ana's trauma remains obscure. Where or what is the disorder that has caused Ana's Borderline Personality Disorder and her development of a regimen of self-harm? Neither the film nor Franco's commentary on it offers anything more than a hint by way of an answer to these questions. If Ana's disability is a disorder by proxy, I would argue that this is very political within the framework of disability studies when the disorder that has led to the daughter's suffering remains disavowed, still more taboo than self-harm. This structure is also politically problematic inasmuch as it makes the victim of injury not only responsible for self-repair but also for having caused her psychic deficit to herself. When, in turn, the body of a young woman is cast as the somatic foil to a society, polity, and economy in crisis, the structure has the further ramification of seeming to blame ordinary Spaniards for the misfortunes visited upon them by the monstrous misallocation of wealth overseen by successive governments, both national and regional. Ana herself is not struggling financially. However, her precarious emotional state comes to signify for the precariousness experienced by the millions of people who have suffered from austerity politics since 2008.

Anthropologists such as Kimberley Theidon have proposed that in developing countries shaken by national trauma, they are women's bodies in which recent historical memory sediments (2004); looking at La herida in the way that I propose here, what Theidon says of Peru could just as well be true of Spain, at least in this fictional representation of a woman whose self-inlicted wounds seem also to be the mortification of the flesh dispensed by a neo-liberal doctrine of "serve you right". Whereas in Spanish film from the 1960s (as I have argued elsewhere) filmmakers lost sight of disability in their eagerness to call it into the service of political cypher (Prout 2008), here, I would suggest, the opposite happens. La herida loses sight of the politics that is, albeit tangentially and disavowedly, being written into disabilities and individuated disorders. Instead of making an analysis of a dysfunctional state apparatus, a stark picture is drawn of a subjective state of disorder. In this sense, Ana embodies Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy (the underpinning of the conservative politics in Europe and America in the 2010s): whatever is wrong, is wrong with you yourself.

On the one hand, then, La herida represents a very serious and meaningful attempt to allow audiences to act as empathetic responsible witnesses to a
condition that is usually kept under wraps. In this much it is progressive within what we understand as the desired direction of travel in disability politics, that is, it moves towards acknowledgement and representation of the range of functionally diverse experiences (temporary, as well as durable) that non-normative subjects bring to the world. On the other hand, the film arguably aestheticizes a behavioural disability, while simultaneously landing a subject whose social skills are broken with the responsibility to narrate, if not to account for, a broken politics. Ana's politico-somatic function is well illustrated when Franco says of her: "Es como si fuera un cuerpo en carne viva sobre el que la pluma más mínima que cae produce un dolor inmenso". Her reactions register the gravity of the circumstances that surround her, even though we barely see them except in Ana's broken mirror.

Faller asks "What could come of staying with our feelings of discomfort in the midst of another's pain?" (2008: 18) and La herida engages with this question by allowing us not only to see Ana, but to follow her. She is almost never seen frontally. Instead she is depicted always in profile so that we constantly remain at her side. She does not come towards us: our viewpoint moves towards hers. The sound design in the film also invites this approximation to the world of the person with Borderline Personality Disorder who self-harms. Silence is followed by the volume of external sounds in the diegesis—of a busy street, of a wedding reception, of a protest—gradually being turned up or down as Ana shifts between self-absorption and awareness of the world around her. This feature of the soundtrack invites us to be with the protagonist and to share her perceptions. By the same token, the choice always to show Ana from the side is reminiscent of the portrayal of servants in fine art from previous centuries. While those considered worthy of portraiture as subjects in their own right were depicted front-on, their domestic attendants are usually depicted in the distance, and seen from the side. There is an element of subalternity, then, embedded in the form of Ana's portraiture.

Ana, as a woman with a behavioural disability is depicted differently than a normative protagonist. Other aesthetic choices have the effect of brutalising her condition, or of making it seem more aggressive than it otherwise would be. For example, there is a scene towards the beginning of the film where Franco wanted to demonstrate that Ana's disorder includes a ruptured relationship with food and nourishment. Instead of eating properly when she returns home from work, she grazes. The filmmakers have her eat an apple because this allowed for a sound effect—the knife cutting the flesh of the fruit—considered more impactful than those that would have been associated with eating a yoghurt, which was the activity originally indicated in the script.
La herida ends as it began, in medias res. Ana sits in her new car, lost and alone. It has failed to bring her a solution to her problems and her ex-boyfriend is no more persuaded to reconnect with her when she has a car than when she did not. She had planned to drive them both to the countryside outside Madrid and instead goes there alone, before pulling over and crying in despair. For the first time she seems able to express emotions without first having to injure herself. In the diegesis, six months have passed between this scene and the one where she was reunited with her father and the enigmatic source of her disorder. The suggestion is that she may be on the road to recovery. When read as a film about disability, however, this ending to La herida has the hallmark of cinematic narratives of overcoming adversity and raises the question again of how to enfold a state of being that sits across disorder, functional diversity, and psychiatric illness within an identity politics that aims to reclaim representations from the ablest fantasies of heroic repair, recovery, and restitution of the unblemished or undamaged body, mind or psyche. Leaving aside these larger political questions, however, La herida arguably succeeds in representing Borderline Personality Disorder in such a way that the spectator need not rush to judgement or feel burdened by traumatic transference. While Ana as a person disabled by disorder is given a heavy (albeit disavowed) symbolic burden, as I have argued above, there are also elements of La herida that can be viewed as relatively neutral portraiture of a way of being in the world that is still wrapped in taboos and prejudice, and, in this much, Franco’s film contributes to a more inclusive view of psychiatric disorder and does so in a way that also confronts ableist prejudice.

4 Conclusions

The juxtaposition of La herida and Insensibles demonstrates, most obviously, the presence of pain, and of its intersections with disability and disorder, as a thematic concern in Spanish genre and art house cinema of the 2010s.

In my reading of Insensibles we see that while Medina’s film has some crossover with currents that privilege the aestheticisation of torture and pain in other national cinemas, the narrative distinctively complicates the torture scene by imbricating in it a back-story about a congenital disability. The film’s engagement with the wounds uncovered by peeling away the occlusive skin layers that have concealed aspects of historical memory is itself informed by a history in Spanish film of presenting social and political ills in terms of disability and deviation from functional conformity. As I have argued in this chapter, one effect of this is that another history—that of the confinement of mentally and physically disabled people—is referenced and represented in the film but made subordinate
to the metaphorical function that equates disabled subjects with Spain's troubled political past. The conventions of the horror genre may also play a part in the film's rendering of the site of repressed historical testimony as coterminous with the bodies and psyches of those disabled physically and neurologically. On the other hand, as I have argued above, the unusual explicitation of a discourse of disability within this genre film also raises questions about the ablest premises that have undergirded influential discussions of the rhetoric of torture and pain.

In this chapter I have contrasted the focus in Insensibles on subjects who cannot feel physical pain with the portrait in La herida of a woman who cannot express her psychic pain. La herida escapes some of the clichés of narratives that engage with disability and disorder by seeking to inform the viewer about the condition being described, rather than to elicit his or her admiration or sympathy. I have used this facet of the film to engage with this volume's enquiry into the taxonomies and epistemologies of disability and with the political ramifications of shifting parameters away from the binary of ability and disability to a spectrum of functionality. I have wanted to extrapolate from my reading of La herida the issues that arise in inscribing disorder and self-harm within such a definitional paradigm shift.

As in my reading of Insensibles, with reference to La herida I have also related the representation of disconformity from conventional functionality to the legacy of heavily burdened metaphors of disability in Spanish film history. I suggested in this chapter that whereas filmmakers in the past lost sight of disability under the weight of this metaphorical burden, by contrast La herida makes its protagonist a mirror of her social and political context to the point where an interrogative dialogue with the ramifications of crisis era economics is almost foreclosed by somatisation. Just as Ana translates her inner pain to lesions on her body, so the film, arguably, transposes the collective suffering of Spaniards hit hard by austerity to an over-burdened female corpus. With reference to the medical and literary critical literature on self-harm, I have also sought to illustrate that La herida has significance as a document about Borderline Personality Disorder that allows its audience to confront a difficult condition that queries and makes complex the relationship between mind and body, and between disorder and disability. Rather than inviting us to feel empathy, La herida, in its choice of subject matter, proposes a kind of engagement with a narrative about functional nonconformity that instead challenges us not to feel empathy.

To recapitulate my starting point, disability does not always have to entail pain; but pain, whether physical or psychic, almost always impacts on how we interact with the world. My purpose in this chapter, and in my critical reading of Insensibles and La herida, has been to emphasise the importance of including
within reconfigurations of the lexicon and epistemology of disability an attention
to pain, and to functional nonconformity that stems from unseen injury and the
psyche as well as from the physically diverse ways in which able and disabled
bodies can interact with their environments.

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